



Ministry of the Word

Wednesday - 2020

by Vincent Gannon

Scripture: Matthew 5:1&2

Subject: Part 14 – The King Begins His Sermon – Sermon on the Mount Introduction

We begin tonight by putting into context Matthew chapter 5, 6, and 7, which we all know is called the Sermon on the Mount. This sermon's importance lies in the fact that it is the first recorded sermon of Jesus. It is arguably the least understood. There are many mistakes people make when reading this sermon, for example –

1. Some will apply it to nations when it was meant for individuals.
2. Some will apply it to the unsaved when it was meant for believers.
3. Some will make it a Christian law to be obeyed; rather than a description of the Christian life lived in the power and working of the Holy Spirit (see Romans 8:1-4).

While maybe least understood, it is most certainly the least obeyed. Here we find what Jesus wanted His followers to be and to do. Nothing goes against the human grain and all that is held dear by the world as the contents of this sermon.

Turn to Leviticus 18:1-4 and when we read something like these verses, it often poses the question, why did the handpicked chosen people of God not listen to Him, let's just read those verses which say:

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, ² Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, I am the Lord your God. ³ After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt,



shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. ⁴ Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the Lord your God.

You may be thinking how could they not listen, but just note how God appealed to His people with the words that He was their Lord and God. He was their covenant God and they were His special people. They, not the world around them, but they alone were to be different from everyone else. They were to follow His commandments and not to take their lead from the standards of those around them.

For centuries the people who God had chosen, had to be continually reminded of their uniqueness as His people. Balaam made a pointed observation that we read of in Numbers 23:9: *⁹ For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.*

Yet in practice they kept becoming assimilated to the people around them. It came to a crucial point in 1 Samuel 8:6 when they asked for a king. Samuel pleaded with them that God is greater than any human king but look at their reply in verses 19-20 of 1 Samuel 8:

¹⁹ Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; ²⁰ That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.

God, time and time again, pleaded with His people. Their hearts and minds got to the point where they no longer wanted to listen or hear the Word of God, they had deafened themselves to His voice. They and they alone were responsible for bringing about the Judgment of God upon themselves. I wonder do we see any similarities between what God required of His people then and what He requires of us now? Let's turn to look at verse 1 and 2 and then begin to put the Sermon on the Mount into context.

Chapter 5 verses 1 and 2

*And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. **2** Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:*

Up to this point in Matthew's Gospel, we know Jesus went about Galilee, preaching the Gospel on the kingdom (Matthew 4:23). It is clear from the verse (1) that Jesus had attracted a large following, especially when the people saw the great and amazing miracles. (Matthew 4:25). This huge crowd, the multitudes, was made up of all sorts, and from all classes, from

the Pharisees to the publicans and everyone in between. They would have been mostly from the different regions where he had preached, and they seemed to follow Him (Matthew 4:25). Jesus was the attracter of everyone, good and bad. He brought to them the message of the gospel of the kingdom 'Repent', the good news that God had a kingdom and they could enter into that kingdom. So the crowd was gathered.

Here in verse 1 we see a clear distinction between two sets of people, even in the array of people who were going to witness Jesus preach this sermon. There was the multitude and Jesus' disciples. And the closest ones to Jesus was the disciples, *why did they sit next to Him?* Because what He had to say was specifically for their ears. He wanted to make sure they heard every word that He spoke, after all, these blessings in the following verse which He spoke about and even offered, only belong to those who belong to God. These blessings that He was speaking about were for the citizens of the Kingdom which He was proclaiming about from the very first day of His public ministry.

However, He did not order the multitudes to go away. The multitude only heard the sermon in a secondary way. Probably the further away they were from Jesus, this massive amount of people, the less they heard at all because Jesus was sitting. And of those who heard it, how many actually understood it? Jesus went up on the mountain and while we are not too sure exactly where that mountain was, many speculate that it was more of one of the sloping Hills in Galilee. Really, the mountain isn't too important, what is important is what Jesus said on it! But just note, Christ's teachings were very public most of the time. It was never a secret society. He came to establish a "church" to which all are invited to come.

Another thing verse 1 notes is that Jesus sat down -, *"After He sat down,"* Sitting down was the official Jewish teaching posture the rabbis always took. When a rabbi was just talking, and standing, and walking around, it was unofficial. But when he sat down then that was it - it was official. We still see this with certain offices such as a professor who when given an assignment in a university, they say he was given the chair, and from there he teaches. So when Jesus sat down, not only was it official it was also authoritative. But let's also get one thing straight, It didn't matter whether Jesus was sitting or standing, Jesus is God and That's authoritative. Full Stop. Then in verse 2 it goes on to say, *"And when he was seated he opened his mouth and taught them saying"*

Jesus' saying was not some random thought. It was the official manifesto of the King of Kings. A manifesto of the king. In the Greek "*He opened his mouth*" is used of solemn, grave, dignified, serious, weighty statements. This is not just off the cuff. This is dignified, solid, grave teaching. And also this phrase, "*He opened his mouth,*" is used in some extra-biblical references to speak of somebody who really shares his heart intimately. So it was official. It was solemn. It was serious. It was dignified. And it was his heart.

Jesus began to teach "*them*" the disciples specially, the foundation principles concerning the Kingdom, which were inward and spiritual. Foundations as you are aware are very important, they need to be established firmly and securely on solid rock. Later on Jesus would use this analogy in Matthew 7:24-27. Foundations here are for the believers, disciples, followers of Jesus. They are not abstract ideas, another philosophically view, among the millions that existed then, for instance the Greeks were forever reasoning and arguing about everything.(1) In fact, many in the multitude would have had a big problem with what Jesus was teaching in this sermon as the Jews were looking for a material and political Kingdom but yet they were attracted to Him when He created food, healed the sick, cast out demons, and all the other earthly conditions He helped them with. But when Jesus began to drill into their hearts and lives... well that was another story, they didn't like that. Does anyone? let's be honest! We see throughout Jesus' great sermon that runs from chapter 5 through the end of chapter 7, the stress is on being, not on doing, this is an attitude, from the heart matter, not what everyone else can see you do, or hear what you tell them. The stress of the Sermon on the Mount is what a man is, and not what a man does or what a man has or what a man achieves, and that's true all throughout the bible. They were all wanting to hear about what a man can have and what he can become and what he can possess, and Jesus only wanted to talk about what he is. That's why He said, "*My Kingdom is not of this world.*"

The message we find in this sermon is not new by any means but is reaffirming the Old Testament. God does not change, nor does His standards. However: the emphasis was and is on the "*good news*" which is different to what we find in the Old Testament, because now it is personally possible through Grace, by Faith (Ephesians 2). Writers such as Moses, David and the prophets who were inspired by God, as well as the other writers, did not have this clarity. Christ's message itself struck hard against the Jewish tradition of His day. The

comparison between the Old and the New is often misunderstood. Many see God in the Old Testament as a vengeful and legalist, law and order, which is wrong. The Old ends with the words we find in Malachi 4:6.

“And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”

Yet, we come to the New, it commences with a series of blessings. The Old Testament demonstrated very well the need of man to be saved, and in the New the message offers the promised Saviour in person of the Lord Jesus Christ as the answer. But the message was still the same; remember, Jesus began His sermon with the clarification of the reason for the curse. He preached REPENT! showing that man has no righteousness that can or will bear up to the examination of a Holy God. But here comes the most amazing news which we will see in the preceding chapters, and it's this: salvation is not based on self-effort or even self-righteousness, but on a new nature that is God given.

The wonder and blessings of this miracle of Salvation, is that both Jew and Gentile, by faith in God's Son can come to share, *what?* God's very nature!!! That of course does not make us little gods, or any such rubbish, not at all. It makes us children of God, the adopted, sought and bought by Jesus, children of God which is attested in the Bible in the New Testament. (Matthew 3:9. 5:9,45. 13:38. John 11:52. 12:36. Romans 8:16-17, 21. 9:26. But it is here that it gets very interesting, Gal 3:26. 4:31. Ephesians 1:5. 1 Thessalonians 5:5. And of course it is a recurring refrain in 1 John.) In Christ alone we are the partakers of the very bliss (happiness) of God, that's what God wants His children to have. His peace and joy in our hearts.

And this is what you will notice as we start to look at verses 3 right down through to verse 11, the word 'blessed'. These pronouncements of blessing are the key to a believers peace and joy, real gladness and even genuine divine rewards. There are in fact 9 blessed which make up the Beatitudes. Now we know that this word is often translated happy but that is a narrow way of defining it as found here. Happy here isn't the sort of happiness that only makes you smile, but it is the contented condition of the soul, inner joy, satisfaction even, which is not the result of external circumstance or outside influence which we know, both are subject to change. Most people in the world are in search of happiness so to have a positive internal emotion, but that is whimsical. But what Jesus is offering to us here in these chapters is a constant continual state of fulfillment, supreme blessedness, supreme happiness, a

permanent state of divine joy. But this word also is very indicative of character. The character which is connected to believers, but also it goes even beyond that, it is a characteristic of God. Remember what Psalm 68:35 says 'Blessed be God', Psalm 72:18, says the same and even Psalm 119:12 'Blessed art thou, O Lord'. This also describes God in the new Testament as Paul in 1 Timothy 1:11 and 6:15 when he talks about the glorious gospel of the blessed God, and calls God the blessed and only sovereign, the King of Kings and Lord of lords. God is by nature blessed, fulfilled, content, satisfied, imagine, He is even Happy! Those who belong to God can share this same joy. 2 Peter 1v4 tells us that as partakers of the divine nature, we can say that we are blessed also. We are blessed because we possess the life of God by His grace granted to us in Christ.

How can anyone who is not a partaker in Christ know true happiness? This is for everyone who has come to God through faith in Christ. It is the gift of God, imputed to all who believe.

You know in the context of when Jesus gave this sermon, For The Pharisees, happiness was found in legalism and tradition, they found it by going back, being nostalgic. For the Sadducees, happiness meant going ahead, being liberal, free from old traditional laws and philosophies, modernization, getting away from the past. For the Essenes, happiness was in personal self-denial and isolation from the world around them, go out, let's isolate, they would have done well in this Covid crises! For the Zealots, their happiness was rooted in overthrowing Rome, going against authority, let's revolt, let's kill. Go back, go ahead, go out, go against - every direction, they were going, trying to find true happiness. And we see people today, following close suit of this, trying to find happiness. The Pharisees, in going back to the law and back to tradition, rejected the present and sacrificed spiritual reality to hold onto the past. They killed their Messiah to hold onto the past. The Sadducees, in rejecting the past and going only with the present and their future, ignored the Messiah who was the fulfillment of all the past prophecies and types. The Essenes, in their desire for holy living, made an issue out of geography and for them, holiness was all about where you live and the style of life you live, not the heart. And the Zealots were caught up in violence and rejected the message of Jesus Christ as well.



All these religious factions were looking for happiness in some way but couldn't find what was never there. Happiness is not in tradition or looking back. It's not in philosophy and modern thought or even being liberal. It's not in self-denial and isolation from the culture. It's not in political overthrow. It never was and never will be and Jesus gave us the right direction for the answer to our heart's longing.

You see, in this sermon, Jesus is talking about the inward character, not about momentary emotion or external events subject to change affecting how we feel, no, he is talking about characteristics of the people who belong to God, these are there: 'To Be Attitudes'. All of this was given at a very crucial time as Jesus initiated the dawning of the new covenant age, as the Messiah was always prophesied to bring in the new covenant and provide the new covenant sacrifice in His death and resurrection. How truly blessed are we with this provision.

The world's idea of happiness is very different from Jesus's definition. The world thinks the amount of happiness you have is related to the amount of things you have acquired, be it wealth, the amount people love you, getting what you want, when you want. Jesus doesn't say blessed are the rich and famous, the noble and successful, loved and admired by all. No, we will see in the next few verses, Jesus says the complete opposite. The kind of happiness that grows in this cursed world is nothing like the happiness that God gives. Remember the world offers temporary things, but God offers us eternal and lasting good gifts.

God is clearly speaking to us through the very words of Jesus, We need to take serious and sober heed to what He is saying to us, especially in these days we live when there are so many distractions and many inviting offers on the table, and it's this, you cannot find real happiness in the ways of the world, in what you possess or in the philosophy of the world. You will not find life among the dead. Jesus is saying blessed people are people who have the right attitudes. It's attitude, it's not what you possess, it's poverty of spirit, mourning, gentleness, hunger and thirst for righteousness, mercy, purity, peace. It's attitudes that produce happiness. It's attitudes that are God-like attitudes, that literally come to us by virtue of us sharing His divine nature. Jesus was saying happiness, joy, inner peace, these blessings, start from the inside and work its way out. And even where there is suffering and sorrow, happiness

is not cancelled out; it is, in fact, generally aided and increased. Circumstances do not affect your state of wellbeing in which God desires his children to live.

Once again, I'm going to have to repeat myself and say that this is really a heart issue. Proverbs 4 verse 23 says 'keep your heart for out of it are the issues of life'.. Many take care of their physical heart, but imagine if you took care of your spiritual heart? Did you know that the Hebrew thinking was that the seed of all your knowledge of God, was the mind. If we did as much to protect our spiritual heart as we do to protect our physical heart, we'd be in great shape spiritually. But sometimes we just ignore that area and that's what Jesus is after.

Jesus was saying something different than what those people were used to hearing and even what the disciples were expecting to hear. In fact these words are still difficult for many to understand, never mind obey.

There are a few reasons why as believers it's really important to look at this sermon on the Mount.

1. It will show you the absolute necessity of the new birth. It shows you that you can never please God on your own, in your flesh. The only ones who can know these true blessings are those who belong to God. We need God.
2. It clearly points to Jesus Christ and gives us perhaps the single greatest insight into the mind of Christ. You want to know His mind, how He thinks? Study His sermon. You want to know where His heart is? Study His sermon. You want to know what He really thinks and feels about the standards for life? Study His sermon.
3. It is the only way to true joy, inner peace and happiness for Christians. You don't have to seek any mystical experience or chase a great speaker.. Here is the master preacher, telling you exactly what you need to put into practice.
4. It's a great way to evangelise! Imagine you lived this out, to live this kind of life, you may not even need to speak for too long.
5. Lastly, we should study the Sermon on the Mount but also practise it, live it out. why? Because if please God. Very simply said, an amazing thought, but in a realm of its own to life out.

I trust and pray as we study the Sermon on the Mount, you will be challenged to live it out.

Amen.

FootNotes

(A) Philosophy is concerned with three basic questions: "What is there?," "How do I know about it?," and "What do I do about it?" The three questions correspond to the fields of metaphysics*1, epistemology*2, and ethics*3 mainly.

*1 .Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that examines the fundamental nature of reality, including the relationship between mind and matter, between substance and attribute, and between potentiality and actuality. The word "metaphysics" comes from two Greek words that, together, literally mean "after or behind or among the natural". It has been suggested that the term might have been coined by a first century AD editor who assembled various small selections of Aristotle's works.

*2 Epistemology definition is - the study or a theory of the nature and grounds of knowledge especially with reference to its limits and validity. the study or a theory of the nature and grounds of knowledge especially with reference to its limits and validity.

*3 Ethics or moral philosophy is a branch of philosophy that involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct. The field of ethics, along with aesthetics, concerns matters of value, and thus comprises the branch of philosophy called axiology. Ethics seeks to resolve questions of human morality by defining concepts such as good and evil, right and wrong, virtue and vice, justice and crime. As a field of intellectual inquiry, moral philosophy also is related to the fields of moral psychology, descriptive ethics, and value theory.

Three major areas of study within ethics recognized today are:

1. Meta-ethics, concerning the theoretical meaning and reference of moral propositions, and how their truth values (if any) can be determined
2. Normative ethics, concerning the practical means of determining a moral course of action
3. Applied ethics, concerning what a person is obligated (or permitted) to do in a specific situation or a particular domain of action.