



# The Sermon on the Mount in a Nutshell

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by Edwin Crozier

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## Introduction:

**Matthew 4:23** says Jesus was traveling all over Galilee teaching the gospel of the kingdom. The sermon that followed is indeed the good news. But it is the good news in concentrate. Though the Sermon takes less than 15 minutes to read, it will take a lifetime to study and master. A thorough study of the Sermon leads us to nearly every major doctrinal teaching of the New Testament. It will certainly take us to every teaching on the character and life of the Christian. We're going to spend some time learning from the Sermon over the next couple of months. As we begin our study, it will be beneficial to take a bird's-eye look. In so doing, as we study more closely, we will more easily process what we are learning.

## Discussion:

- I. If we want stable lives, we must build them on the foundation of Jesus' words.
  - A. Jesus concluded the Sermon with a parable to explain its importance (**Matthew 7:24-27**). Two men built houses. Let's picture them next door to each other. The ground is level, but it is only sand. The first starts digging. It is hard work, but he wants to get down to bedrock. Shovelful by slow shovelful he removes the dirt and sand. The second thinks that is just too much work. He starts to build. About the time the second man is halfway finished, the first has dug out a spot on bedrock to anchor his house. He starts building his foundation so he can make his house level. The second man laughs at how long it is taking the first. About the time the second man is finished, the first finally completes his foundation and starts building. The second man relaxes. He watches every day with a smug grin as the first continues his hard work. Finally, both houses are complete. "It just wasn't worth it. You did all that extra work and look, my house looks just as good as yours," says the second man. For a time, everything proceeds smoothly for both men. For a time, observers wonder why all that extra work had been necessary for the first man. But then the rainy season comes. After a few storms, the sand that made the foundation of the second man's house starts to wash away. He tries to recover the sand but the storms come faster than he can replace the sand. As the foundation washes away, he notices cracks in the walls. As more dirt washes away and the wind blows on the house, the cracks grow larger. In time, the damage is so bad, the house is not recoverable. It collapses.
  - B. Jesus explained the people who listened to Him and did what He taught would be like the wise man. They would have a strong foundation for their lives. Those who listened but did not obey had no foundation. Keep in mind, both faced storms. Jesus is not saying if we obey Him, life will be easy. He is saying if we obey Him, we have a foundation holding us up in the time of temptation and trial. How many have we seen "remain faithful" until their parents, spouse, or children die? How many have we seen "remain faithful" until they leave home and face the onslaught of immorality and humanism found in colleges? What is happening in these cases? Most often, the problem is their faith was never founded on the bedrock of Jesus' Word. They took the easy route of following along in their parents' faith or their spouse's faith. For a time, their life looked just like every other Christian's. But when the storms hit, their foundation eroded out from under their spiritual house and it collapsed.
  - C. Jesus' words are the bedrock. There is a lot of dirt and sand in our world. It would be easy to build our spiritual house there. We could "come to church" a couple of times a week, do whatever our parents tell us, or follow the religious crowd. That would be easy. On the surface, we would look like everyone else. We might even chuckle at all the work we see others doing. Sooner or later the storm is going to hit. How we have dealt with Jesus' words will shine forth for everyone to see. As we study this Sermon, we must use it as the foundation for our lives. We must dig out the dirt and sand and find the bedrock. It will take hard work. Some will think we are silly for working so hard. Others will think we are fanatics for doing what we do. But when the storms come, our spiritual house will remain standing and theirs will fall.
- II. True blessedness and happiness come from walking in Jesus' way.
  - A. Jesus began His Sermon with nine statements regarding who is blessed. We generally refer to these as The Beatitudes (**Matthew 5:3-11**). This repetition of "blessed" is not just a part of these nine statements. Ra-

ther, it sets the stage for the entire Sermon. This Sermon is the “Gospel of the Kingdom.” It is the good news of the kingdom. It is good news because it is the vehicle of God’s blessing to us.

- B. The word translated “blessed” is “makarios.” Many suggest this word means “happiness.” Certainly, happiness can result from being blessed. However, I don’t think happiness covers what Jesus is talking about here. Happiness is an emotion that might come from any source. But blessedness is the joyous result of having received a blessing. Happiness may be the serendipitous by-product of good fortune. It comes and goes through happenstance. Blessedness, however, is a joy founded on the bedrock of God’s generous gifts. Its basis does not change because God, the source of our blessing, does not change.
- C. However, few people can imagine that the ones Jesus says are blessed really are. Jesus lists the poor in spirit, the mournful, the meek and gentle, the hungry for righteousness, and the persecuted as blessed. As the Sermon continues, we see people commanded to control their tempers, control their eyes and their desires, stay married to one spouse, be honest, love their enemies, and accept wrong without paying back in kind. These are the ones who are blessed by God. They receive God’s kingdom, His comfort, His mercy, and His forgiveness. Many times, neither we nor the people of the world can imagine that these kinds of people are blessed. Yet that is exactly what God says. Only those who submit to Jesus’ Sermon can have the true elation that comes from God’s favor because only those who submit to Jesus’ Sermon receive God’s blessings.
- D. In 1776, Thomas Jefferson wrote that all men are created equal and given certain inalienable rights by their Creator. Among those rights were “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Jefferson overstated the case. God has not granted us these rights. However, He does offer these blessings to those who will submit to Him. This Sermon tells us how we can have these blessings. Do you want blessing? Do you want the solid joy and happiness that rests in the favor of God? Then do not follow the American way. Follow the way of this Sermon (*cf.* **Matthew 7:13-14**). Some of its teachings may seem counter-intuitive. We may not understand how turning the other cheek or loving our enemies will make us happy. But they will. Only when we submit to the Sermon can we have the real joy that comes from the blessing of God. Everyone else may have a semblance of happiness. They may have good fortune here and there. But only those who submit to the Sermon are blessed.

III. If we want to enter the kingdom of heaven, our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees.

- A. **Matthew 5:20** provides Jesus’ theme for this entire Sermon. “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (ESV). Some of the most confusing aspects of this Sermon are cleared up by remembering this anchor. Jesus’ complaints are directed against the scribes and Pharisees and their semblance of righteousness. His directives are provided to grant us a righteousness that increases our spiritual development beyond that of the scribes and Pharisees.
- B. Within this Sermon, four keys to the surpassing righteousness are uncovered.
  - 1. *Recognize you can’t be righteous on your own.* Consider the first four groups that are blessed: 1) the poor in spirit, 2) the mourners, 3) the meek, and 4) those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (**Matthew 5:3-6**). As **Luke 18:9** explains, the Pharisees trusted in themselves that they were righteous, but the blessed followers of the Sermon start with poverty of spirit. That is, like the tax collector in **Luke 18:13**, they know they have no personal righteousness to trust in or offer God. They are sinners, therefore they mourn. Because they see where they have led their own lives, they are ready to present themselves with meekness to God, letting Him lead them because they hunger and thirst for the righteousness than can only come from God. Unless we exceed the scribes and Pharisees in this first step, we will never exceed them in righteousness.
  - 2. *Let your light shine so God may be glorified.* **Matthew 5:16** teaches this. The scribes and Pharisees allowed their works to show so men would honor and glorify them. In **Matthew 6:1**, Jesus said, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven” (ESV). Jesus gave three illustrations in **Matthew 6**. The scribes and Pharisees would sound a trumpet when they gave alms to the underprivileged (**vs. 2**). We must not let our left hand know what our right hand is doing. The scribes and Pharisees would stand on the street corners and in the synagogues and offer long prayers (**vs. 5**). We are to go into our private prayer closets and pray to our Father in secret. The scribes and Pharisees would make it painfully obvious they were fasting (**vs. 16**). When we fast, we are to look as we do on any other day. The Pharisees and scribes were concerned with their own glory before men. Our concern is God’s glory (**John 15:8**). As we read this Sermon, we must hang every part of it on this anchor—our duty is to glorify God. We do not follow this Sermon to look good before men. We follow it so God may be glorified among men.

3. *Start with the heart.* As we consider Jesus' statements in **Matthew 5:21-48**, we see the scribes and Pharisees were interested in outward actions. They were unconcerned with what occurred in the heart. As long as they didn't actually commit murder, it did not matter what anger or hatred was in their heart (**Matthew 5:21-22**). As long as they did not actually commit adultery, it did not matter what kind of lust or covetousness was in their heart (**Matthew 5:27-28**). Jesus highlighted this problem about the scribes and Pharisees in **Matthew 23:25-28**. They tried to clean the outside of the cup while leaving the inside dirty. They were whitewashed tombs, looking like magnificent memorials on the outside, but on the inside full of dead men's bones. This Sermon is about being righteous from the heart. It will begin with our hearts and then straighten out our lives.
4. *Obey the full intent of God's commands.* Each statement in which Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said..., but I say to you," addresses the issue of Pharisaic reductionism (**Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-37, 38-39, 43-44**). With one exception (**Matthew 5:43**—love your neighbor and hate your enemy), Jesus had no problem with the statements themselves. After all, we are not to commit murder or adultery. We are to keep our vows to the Lord. If we divorce, there must be some kind of legal proceeding and documentation. The civil government should enact appropriate punishments. The problem is that the Pharisees developed elaborate systems of loopholes to allow them to do what they wanted. They acted as though they could be angry and hateful with their neighbor since they hadn't killed them. If they did kill their neighbor, they would only be guilty before the human court. Jesus said they were not to be angry or call people names; if they did, they would not only be guilty before the human court but before God's court as well. The Pharisees didn't see a problem with anything that led up to immorality, as long as they didn't actually physically commit immorality. Jesus explained even the lust in their heart was condemned. The Pharisees believed everything was fine with a divorce as long as they did it legally with proper documentation. Jesus pointed out by putting their spouse away, they were causing people to commit adultery. The Pharisees believed they only had to keep vows if a specific formula of words was used making the vow to the Lord. Jesus pointed out that they were supposed to be honest and faithful no matter how they said it. The Pharisees believed that since they were commanded to love their neighbor, they were allowed to hate their enemies. But Jesus told them to love even their enemies. Sadly, this very same kind of reductionism is rampant today. How many times do we hear people say they can do everything involved in the process of getting drunk, so long as they don't get really drunk because, "The Bible just says don't get drunk"? Haven't we heard people say, "We can buy a lottery ticket or go to the boats and casinos because all the Bible condemns is covetousness"? Or we are told, "The Bible condemns lasciviousness, but there is no place that condemns the dancing that goes on at the high school dances, proms, or at the clubs." The Pharisees would have loved the reasoning used in all these cases and many others. It reduces God's commands down to their bare minimums and draws lines, finding loopholes to do the very things God condemns. If our righteousness will surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, we must obey the full intent of God's commands.
- C. Do not miss how important this is. If you want to enter the kingdom of heaven, your righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees. You must recognize you can't be righteous on your own, seek to glorify God and not self, start with the heart, and obey the full intent of God's commands.

IV. If we want to live this Sermon, we must treat others the way we want to be treated.

- A. As much as we love what has been dubbed the Golden Rule of **Matthew 7:12**, we have some difficulty understanding it in context. The text says, "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them..." (ESV). Our struggle is with the word "so" or "therefore" in other translations. We know that means this rule is the logical conclusion to something stated before it. However, as we look back in the text, we struggle to figure out what it is. Different authors have presented different reasons for how it connects to different parts of the Sermon. However, I believe the "so" is not merely a logical connection to what was most recently said. Rather, it is the logical extension of everything the Sermon has said.
- B. As Jesus wrapped up this teaching, He provided a general rule of thumb for how to accomplish all of it. We may struggle with exactly how to fulfill Jesus' teaching to turn the other cheek or go the extra mile. We may struggle with knowing how to follow the teaching about judging and casting our pearls before swine. No doubt, we should strive to understand the extent of these teachings on their own merits. However, the general rule of thumb is, treat the folks who have slapped and insulted you the way you want to be treated.
- C. Jesus said this principle "is the Law and the Prophets." This calls to mind **Matthew 22:37-40** in which Jesus pointed out that all the Law and the Prophets hung on the laws to love God and love our neighbor as our-

selves. Thus, treating others the way we want to be treated is the heart of loving them. Therefore, as we strive to figure out how to practically live Jesus' teaching to love our enemies, we know we must treat them the way we want to be treated.

- D. Therefore, as we read this entire Sermon, we should keep this principle in mind. How do we want others to treat us? How does that fit over what we are learning in the Sermon? As we consider from day-to-day how to live this Sermon practically, we need to hang our hats on this pivotal rule. How do I want to be treated? Let me treat others that way.

**Conclusion:**

Over the next few months, we'll take some very practical looks at how the Sermon applies to our lives in their various settings. As we do that, keep this starting place in mind. Jesus' words are our foundation for a stable life, no matter what the world thinks of us. Jesus' teaching is the vehicle to find the true joy founded in the blessing of God. If we desire to enter the kingdom of heaven, our righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees. If we desire to live this Sermon, then we must treat others the way we would want to be treated.