

Sermon on the Mount

The **Sermon on the Mount** (anglicized from the Matthean Vulgate Latin section title: *Sermo in monte*) is a collection of sayings and teachings attributed to Jesus Christ, which emphasizes his moral teaching found in the Gospel of Matthew (chapters 5, 6, and 7).^{[1][2]}

It is the first of the Five Discourses of Matthew and takes place relatively early in the Ministry of Jesus, after he has been baptized by John the Baptist, finished his fasting and spiritual retreat in the desert, and begun to preach in Galilee. The name and location of the mountain is unstated; the Mount of Beatitudes, a hill on the shore of Lake Galilee, is the traditional interpretation.

The Sermon is the longest continuous discourse of Jesus found in the New Testament, and has been one of the most widely quoted elements of the Canonical Gospels.^[3]

It includes some of the best-known teachings of Jesus, such as the Beatitudes, and the widely recited Lord's Prayer. The Sermon on the Mount is generally considered to contain the central tenets of Christian discipleship.^[3]



Sermon on the Mount by Carl Bloch (1877)

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Background and setting

The Sermon on the Mount occupies chapters 5, 6 and 7 of the Gospel of Matthew. The Sermon has been one of the most widely quoted elements of the Canonical Gospels.^[3]

This is the first of the Five Discourses of Matthew, the other four being Matthew 10, Matthew 13 (1–53), Matthew 18 and the Olivet discourse in Matthew 24.^{[4][5][6]}

The Sermon is set early in the Ministry of Jesus after he has been baptized by John the Baptist in chapter 3 of Matthew's Gospel, gathered his first disciples in chapter 4, and had returned from a long fast and contemplation in the Judaeian Desert where he had been tempted by Satan to renounce his spiritual mission and gain worldly riches.

Before this episode, Jesus had been "all about Galilee" preaching, as in Matthew 4:23, and "great crowds followed him" from all around the area. The setting for the sermon is given in Matthew 5:1–2. Jesus sees the multitudes, goes up into the mountain, is followed by his disciples, and begins to preach. The Sermon is brought to its close by Matthew 8:1 (<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+8:1&version=nkjv>), which reports that Jesus "came down from the mountain followed by great multitudes".

Components

While the issue of the exact theological structure and composition of the Sermon on the Mount is subject to debate among scholars, specific components within it, each associated with particular teachings, can be identified.^{[7][8]}

Matthew 5:3–12 discusses the Beatitudes. These describe the character of the people of the Kingdom of Heaven, expressed as "blessings".^[9] The Greek word most versions of the Gospel render as "blessed," can also be translated "happy" (Matthew 5:3–12 of Young's Literal Translation for an example). In Matthew, there are eight (or nine) blessings, while in Luke there are four, followed by four woes.^[9]

In almost all cases the phrases used in the Beatitudes are familiar from an Old Testament context, but in the sermon Jesus gives them new meaning.^[10] Together, the Beatitudes present a new set of ideals that focus on love and humility rather than force and mastery; they echo the highest ideals of Jesus' teachings on spirituality and compassion.^[10]

In Christian teachings, the Works of Mercy, which have corporal and spiritual components, have resonated with the theme of the Beatitude for mercy.^[11] These teachings emphasize that these acts of mercy provide both temporal and spiritual benefits.^[12]

Matthew 5:13–16 presents the metaphors of salt and light. This completes the profile of God's people presented in the beatitudes and acts as the introduction to the next section.

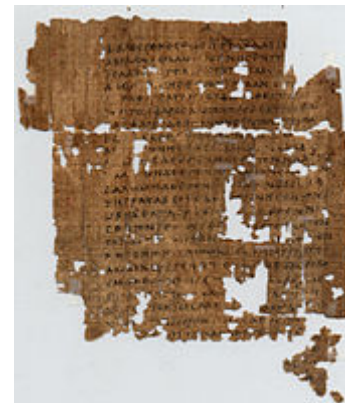
There are two parts in this section, using the terms "salt of the earth" and Light of the World to refer to the disciples – implying their value. Elsewhere, in John 8:12, Jesus applies *Light of the World* to himself.^[13]

Jesus preaches about hell and what hell is like: "But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother "Raca (fool)" shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." (Matthew 5:22 KJV^[14]) However, the original translation of this verse refers to the real life location of Gehenna, a burial ground for the wicked, and not a place of spiritual torment.



The Lord's Prayer, in Matthew 6:9, 1500, Vienna

The longest discourse in the Sermon is Matthew 5:17–48, traditionally referred to as *the Antitheses* or *Matthew's Antitheses*. In the discourse, Jesus fulfills and reinterprets the Old Covenant and in particular its Ten Commandments, contrasting with what "you have heard" from others.^[15] For example, he advises turning the other cheek, and to love your enemies, in contrast to taking an eye for an eye. According to most interpretations of Matthew 5:17, 18, 19, and 20, and most Christian views of the Old Covenant, these new interpretations of the Law and Prophets are not opposed to the Old Testament, which was the position of Marcion, but form Jesus' new teachings which bring about salvation, and hence must be adhered to, as emphasized in Matthew 7:24–27 towards the end of the sermon.^[16]



A page from Matthew, from Papyrus 1, c. 250 AD

In Matthew 6 Jesus condemns doing what would normally be "good works" simply for recognition and not from the heart, such as those of alms (6:1–4), prayer (6:5–15), and fasting (6:16–18). The discourse goes on to condemn the superficiality of materialism and calls the disciples not to worry about material needs, but to "seek" God's kingdom first. Within the discourse on ostentation, Matthew presents an example of correct prayer. Luke places this in a different context. The Lord's prayer (6:9–13) contains parallels to 1 Chronicles 29:10–18 (<https://bible.orem.us.org/?passage=1%20Chronicles%2029:10-18&version=nrsv>).^{[17][18]}

The first part of Matthew 7, i.e. Matthew 7:1–6 deals with judging. Jesus condemns those who judge others before first judging themselves: "Judge not, that ye be not judged."

In the last part in Matthew 7:17–29 Jesus concludes the sermon by warning against false prophets.

Teachings and theology

The teachings of the Sermon on the Mount have been a key element of Christian ethics, and for centuries the sermon has acted as a fundamental recipe for the conduct of the followers of Jesus.^[19] Various religious and moral thinkers (e.g. Leo Tolstoy and Mahatma Gandhi) have admired its message, and it has been one of the main sources of Christian pacifism.^{[1][20]}

In the 5th century, Saint Augustine began his book Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount by stating:

If anyone will piously and soberly consider the sermon which our Lord Jesus Christ spoke on the mount, as we read it in the Gospel according to Matthew, I think that he will find in it, so far as regards the highest morals, a perfect standard of the Christian life.



Plaque of the 8 Beatitudes, St. Cajetan Church, Lindavista, Mexico

The last verse of chapter 5 of Matthew (5:48) is a focal point of the sermon that summarizes its teachings by advising the disciples to seek perfection.^[21] The Greek word *telios* used to refer to perfection also implies an end, or destination, advising the disciples to seek the path towards perfection and the Kingdom of God.^[21] It teaches that God's children are those who act like God.^[22] [this sentence, "It teaches that God's children are those who act like God(...)"] Is up for debate, as the indicated source's claim is ambiguous at

best. Though some of the commentaries written on this event, notably by Eckhart Tolle, and others, indicate that the ultimate humility and initiatory act is to act like God in order receive God's ultimate grace, this particular source should be replaced with one that merits this claim]

The teachings of the sermon are often referred to as the *Ethics of the Kingdom*: they place a high level of emphasis on "purity of the heart" and embody the basic standard of Christian righteousness.^[23]

Theological structure

The issue of the theological structure and composition of the Sermon on the Mount remains unresolved.^{[7][8][24]} One group of theologians ranging from Saint Augustine in the 5th century to Michael Goulder in the 20th century, see the Beatitudes as the central element of the Sermon.^[7] Others such as Bornkamm see the Sermon arranged around the Lord's prayer, while Daniel Patte, closely followed by Ulrich Luz, see a chiastic structure in the sermon.^{[7][8]} Dale Allison and Glen Stassen have proposed a structure based on triads.^{[8][24][25]} Jack Kingsbury and Hans Dieter Betz see the sermon as composed of theological themes, e.g. righteousness or way of life.^[7]

Analysis and interpretation

Interpretations

The high ethical standards of the Sermon have been interpreted in a wide variety of ways by different Christian groups. Craig S. Keener states that at least 36 different interpretations regarding the message of the Sermon exist, which he divides into 8 categories of views:^[26]

1. The predominant medieval view, "reserving a higher ethic for clergy, especially in monastic orders"^[27]
2. A view associated with Martin Luther that it represents an impossible demand, but serves to educate Christians on the ideals of their faith^[28]
3. The Anabaptist a literal view which directly applies the teachings^[29]
4. The Social Gospel view
5. The Christian existentialism view
6. Schweitzer's view of an imminent eschatology referring to an interim ethic
7. Dispensational eschatology which refers to the future Kingdom of God
8. Inaugurated eschatology in which the Sermon's ethics remain a goal to be approached, yet realized later



The Sermon of the Mount as depicted by Louis Comfort Tiffany in a stained glass window at Arlington Street Church in Boston

Comparison with the Sermon on the Plain

While Matthew groups Jesus' teachings into sets of similar material, the same material is scattered when found in Luke.^[1] The Sermon on the Mount may be compared with the similar but shorter Sermon on the Plain as recounted by the Gospel of Luke (6:17–49), which occurs at the same moment in Luke's narrative,

and also features Jesus heading up a mountain, but giving the sermon on the way down at a level spot. Some scholars believe that they are the same sermon, while others hold that Jesus frequently preached similar themes in different places.^[30]

Modern parallels with Buddhist teachings

Although modern parallels between the teachings of Jesus and Buddhist philosophy have been drawn (by the 14th Dalai Lama^[31] for example), modern comparisons emerged after missionary contacts in the 19th century, there is no historically reliable evidence of contacts between Buddhism and Jesus during his life.^[32] Modern scholarship has almost unanimously agreed that claims of the travels of Jesus to Tibet, Kashmir or India (see Unknown years of Jesus) and the influence of Buddhism on his teachings are without historical basis.^{[33][34]} The similarities between the teachings of Buddha and Jesus have been noted.^[35]

According to the Perennial Philosophy

According to perennialist author Frithjof Schuon, the message of the Sermon is a perfect synthesis of the whole Christian tradition. The text has the largest number of perennial and universal doctrines and spiritual advice of all Scripture. Much of what Bible readers remember from Scripture derives from the Sermon. Source of spiritual and moral instructions, the Sermon on the Mount is regarded by the Perennial Philosophy "as the quintessence itself of religion".^[36] Perennialism considers the injunctions of the Sermon on the Mount as belonging to the esoteric dimension of Christianity.

See also

- Gospel harmony
- Jesus in Christianity
- Life of Jesus in the New Testament
- *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, 1894 Leo Tolstoy book

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27. Mahoney, Jack (February 2012). "Catholicism Pure and Simple" (<http://catholicismpure.wordpress.com/2012/02/07/living-the-sermon-of-the-mount/>). 2nd, 3rd, and 4th paragraphs. "The most widespread and notorious of these strategies was the double standard approach which developed by the time of the Middle Ages, requiring the sermon to be taken seriously by only some members of the Church."

28. Cahill, Lisa Sowle (April 1987). "The Ethical Implications of the Sermon on the Mount". *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*. **41** (2): 144–156. doi:10.1177/002096438704100204 (<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F002096438704100204>). S2CID 170623512 (<https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:170623512>). "The notion that the Sermon is impossible of fulfillment, but has a pedagogical function, is usually associated with Martin Luther or, as Jeremias puts it, with "Lutheran orthodoxy." However, Luther himself maintained that faith is active in works of love and that it is precisely faith which loving service presupposes and of which it is a sign. For this reason, Jeremias' own hermeneutic of the Sermon carries through Luther's most central insights. The Sermon indicates a way of life which presupposes conversion; the Sermon's portrayals of discipleship, while not literal prescriptions, create ideals and set burdens of proof for all concrete embodiments."
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External links

- [Augustine: On the Sermon on the Mount \(http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/16011.htm\)](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/16011.htm)
 - [Sermon on the Mount as heart of Gospel's Law according to the \(https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P6W.HTM\)](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P6W.HTM)Catechism of the Catholic Church.
 - [The Sermon on the Mount Site: Extensive range of Sermon on the Mount related resource \(http://www.sermononthemount.org.uk\)](http://www.sermononthemount.org.uk)
 - [Read The Sermon on The Mount \(https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/other-books/the-sermon-on-the-mount\)](https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/other-books/the-sermon-on-the-mount) on [Gandhi Heritage Portal](#)
 - [Listen "Blessed are those who mourn" commentary \(https://www.unitedfaithchurch.org/bleed-are-those-who-mourn-ep38/\)](https://www.unitedfaithchurch.org/bleed-are-those-who-mourn-ep38/)
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