

# Sermon on the Mount - Introduction

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Date: 09 March 2017

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, tonight we are going to begin a new study for our midweek meeting. We won't necessarily do this every Thursday, but for most Thursdays for the next few weeks and probably months, because you know me in long series, we are going to look at the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew chapter 5 verse 1 and 2, seeing the clouds, Jesus went up on the mountain and when he sat down, his disciples came to him and he opened his mouth and taught them. These words here are the beginning, the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, which is what it makes up Matthew chapter 5, chapter 6 and chapter 7. It is a very, very well known part of the Bible. There are many things contained in these chapters that are familiar to us, in phrases that people who know nothing about the Bible use come from the Sermon. Things like salt of the earth or turn the other cheek or sufficient for the day is the trouble thereof. We hear people using these phrases all the time. They all come from this Sermon.

Likewise, key teaching comes from this Sermon, such as the Beatitudes, which is what comes immediately next, the Lord's Prayer, what we call the Golden Rule to do unto others as you have them do to you. They are all from the Sermon on the Mount. Key commandments, like seek first the kingdom of God, ask, seek, knock. Don't lay up pressure on earth, but lay up pressure in heaven. You can't serve God and money. All of these again are from the Sermon on the Mount. And key images that we often are familiar with, the broad and the narrow road, the speck in your own eye, the speck in someone else's eye and the plank in your own eye, having to, if your eye causes you to sin to gouge it out, to build your house on rock or on sand, all of these are in the Sermon on the Mount. So it's full of vital teaching for us as Christians. The Sermon on the Mount is really, really important and fascinating to look at. But we work to ask ourselves, what exactly is the Sermon on the Mount all about? How are we supposed to understand it and how are we supposed to apply it? These are the kind of questions that we have to grapple with. And these are the things that we want to learn while we study it. The Sermon on the Mount is something that should be at the forefront of all of our minds as Christians. But we need to really understand it properly in order to live, to apply it in their lives in the way that we should. So in order to help us, I'm sure you were probably going to guess that this was coming, we're going to have another diagram. I love my diagrams. This one's not as complicated as the last one's. It's just a very simple one. We're going to add to it later on. But the basic title of the diagram is this, Disciples Trained by King Jesus. And that's what I want to, that's the title I want for our study. That's the title really I want to apply to the Sermon on the Mount because, and I've chosen it because I hope that it will highlight two key things. First of all, that title is telling us what the Sermon is. The Sermon on the Mount is basically training for Jesus' disciples. It's the instruction and the teaching that Christians need. So that's what the Sermon is. It's all about disciples trained by Jesus.

But secondly, this title I hope also summarizes what we want to be as we study the Sermon on the Mount. That's our great goal, that we would be disciples who are trained by King Jesus. So tonight we're going to focus on the verses underneath there, Matthew 4, 23, 4, 23 to 5, 2, because these help us to introduce the Sermon. And that's really what we're going to do for a week while together tonight. So let's just read again these verses. Jesus went throughout all Galilee teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics and paralytics, and he healed them.

And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis and from Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan. Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain and when he sat down his disciples came to him and he opened his mouth and taught them. Now there are two key words I want us to focus on in terms of our introduction today. The first is this, Kingdom, and the second one is this, Disciples. Kingdom and Disciples are the two key words that we need to emphasise. So first of all, Kingdom. At the heart of Matthew's Gospel and also the heart of the people of Mark and Luke is the great message that the Kingdom of God has come. As we read in Matthew 4.17, from that time Jesus began to preach saying, repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Now in Mark and Luke you'll see the phrase Kingdom of God, in Matthew you'll see the phrase Kingdom of Heaven. It's referring to the same thing. It's a key theme, the Kingdom of God. What exactly is the Kingdom of God?

[ 5 : 54 ] It's a phrase that we hear a lot of, but what exactly do we mean by Kingdom of God? Well, it's best to think of things like that in a simple way because basically the Kingdom of God is simply the realm in which God is King. God is King and Jesus is talking about His Kingdom. Now this immediately fits us in with a big story of the Bible because from the very beginning, Genesis 3, the situation of history has been one of enmity and conflict between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Evil. And by our fall, we made ourselves citizens of the Kingdom of Evil. And in many ways, throughout the history of the Old Testament, the Kingdom of Evil has been dominant. Jesus himself calls Satan the ruler of this world.

And so the Kingdom of Evil has caused havoc, has spoiled the world from what it was meant to be and has in many ways had the ascendancy. But now in the coming of the Kingdom of God, God himself has come to put things right. So you've got Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Evil, Kingdom of Evil is an ascendancy. And now God is saying the King has come and the King is going to take back his rightful place. And of course, who is the King? Jesus Christ.

Now the Jews had been half-expected because they were waiting for the Messiah. But they were expecting the Messiah to be a political ruler and they expected the Messiah to restore the geographical, political state of Israel. But as some surely all know, God's plans were far greater. And Jesus has come not to establish the nation of Israel and Palestine, over here.

He has come to establish a new Israel. That's why he appoints 12 disciples just like the 12 tribes of Israel. And this is going to be the true Israel of God. And Jesus is not just going to reign over that small area at the east end of the Mediterranean. Jesus is going to reign over the whole universe. And that's why after the resurrection, we read in Ephesians, God raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, not on the throne in Jerusalem, but at the right hand of God in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him his head over all things to the church. That is why Jesus has come to take his place as king of the whole cosmos. The kingdom of God has arrived and is now being established. And to be part of the kingdom of God, which is what Jesus is preaching was all about is to, it simply means living with Jesus as your king. And it's a good quote from St. Clair Ferguson, who has an excellent book of the Sermon on the Mount. He says, to be in the kingdom is to belong to the people among whom the reign of God has already begun.

Basically means to be in the kingdom of God means that Jesus is your king. It's very, very simple. Really. God is your king. If you are in his kingdom. And so Jesus is teaching about the kingdom because he is the king, his kingdom. He is the one who has authority to teach how his kingdom is going to look. And this is reminding us of a really, really important doctrine, what we call the lordship of Jesus Christ. Now, that's a really important thing to think about because we use the word Lord all the time for Jesus. Don't we? We refer to him as the Lord. We talk about Lord Jesus, but we have to stop and think about the implications of that word Lord. Lord means that Jesus has authority. It means that we are subject to him. It means that we must listen to him and that we must obey him. Every time we use that word Lord in reference to Jesus, we should be thinking about this, the kingdom of God, because basically saying Lord Jesus is exactly the same as saying King Jesus. You are saying you rule. You are the one who has authority. So I hope all this is making sense.

[ 11 : 12 ] Kingdom of God has come. So we've got the kingdom of God has now come. So this moment in history has arrived. That means if we have a kingdom, it means we have a king, which is Jesus. Okay? King Jesus has come. If he is king, it means he has authority, doesn't it? A king has authority. That's exactly what we mean when we talk about Jesus as Lord.

Now if Jesus has authority, then he has the right to tell us how he wants us to live. And that is exactly what he does in the Sermon on the Mount. Look at it again. Verse 2, Jesus opened his mouth. The Sermon on the Mount is all about Jesus speaking, the king speaking.

He is giving us his message. He is telling us what he wants. And all of this is reminding us of the authority of God's word in our lives. As the second question in the short of Catechism says, the word of God is the rule to direct us. So at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount is the fact that Jesus is king and he is telling us how he wants us to live. Second keyword, I'll make it a different color, is this, disciples. Seeing the clouds, he went up on the mountain and when he sat down his disciples came to him and he opened his mouth and taught them.

Now we most of the time refer to ourselves as Christians, don't we? We will say we are Christians. People ask us, are you a church see? Yeah, I'm a Christian. How many times does the New Testament use the word Christian? Anyone know? Three times. How many times does it use the word disciples? Over 200. By a mile, the word disciple is the most common way to describe Christians. And that's not just in reference to the 12. If you go to Acts when it's talking about the church, when it's talking about people who come to faith, they are described as disciples. And in Matthew 28, Jesus didn't say go and make Christians, he said go and make disciples. So what's a disciple? What do we mean by disciple? Well, there's two key things emphasized by the word disciple. The first is that a disciple is a learner. That's basically what the word means. Discipleship conveys the relationship between a pupil and a teacher, somebody who learns from someone else. And it's exactly what we have here because it says, his disciples came to him, he opened his mouth and he taught them. This is all about teaching pupils learning from a teacher. And that's why I've got the word trained in our, in our title, disciples trained by King Jesus. Because one of the main purposes of the sermon on the Mount is to teach us how to live. In other words, it's like the training course for the Christian life. It's like a college course for being a Christian. It is the curriculum that we need to learn in order to live as God's people.

In the sermon, Jesus is teaching his disciples how he wants them to live. And this is how people who have a relationship to Jesus are going to conduct themselves. Now this emphasizes a vital, vital point in terms of understanding the sermon on the Mount. The sermon on the Mount is not, not about how to become a disciple. It is not about how to become a Christian.

[ 15 : 44 ] A lot of people think that they think of you, if you're a good person, you do that kind of thing that's in the sermon on the Mount, that makes you a Christian. It is not about how to become a disciple. Look again at verse one, they are already disciples. And so it's not about how to be saved. It's about how to live once we are saved. It's about how to go through life as a disciple, as a follower of Jesus. As disciples, we are meant to learn from our master. He's our teacher. He's giving us the training that we need. And in particular, he's doing that in the sermon on the Mount. Now all of that means, right, I want you to picture this scene. So you've got the crowds coming, huge crowds have come. Jesus has gone up on the mountain. You can picture him. He sits down. His disciples come to him. He opened his mouth and taught them. What do the disciples have to do in that situation? Yes, they have to listen. Now, what is the last part of the sermon on the Mount? I said this, I'm not trying to catch you out. I shouldn't say it. Can you remember? It's a famous parable, the end of chapter seven. I'm not trying to catch you out, but I want you to see the connection.

Yes. House in the sand. How does that parable begin? Everyone then who hears these words of mine. And so the sermon on the Mount ends with a parable about listening, because as disciples, we need to listen to what our teacher is teaching us. A disciple is a learner.

Secondly, a disciple is a follower. I should write these words down actually. Learner and a follower. A disciple is a follower. That's exactly what the 12 disciples did. They followed Jesus around and they listened and learned from him. And when we were reading earlier on, what did Jesus say to Peter and Andrew? Follow me. A disciple is a follower. But that goes beyond just simply physically walking behind Jesus. It emphasizes the fact that what we learn and what we listen must be put into practice in our lives. That's what Jesus highlights again in the parable of the rock on the sand. Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

And this brings us back to a thing that I hope is ingrained in your hearts because I try to say it again. Knowledge and doing, knowing and doing, doctrine and application are at the heart of the Christian life. What we know, we must learn. We must learn theology and we must live that out. What we know and what we do belong together. That's the heart of living as a Christian. And so I hope that we can see that the Sermon on the Mount is immensely relevant and incredibly practical. We are to learn from Jesus and what we learn must shape how we live. Now that makes it very exciting to study the Sermon on the Mount because this is what Jesus wants us to do. People ask the question, what's God's will for your life? Well, very high on the list is what we're going to be studying in the next three chapters. This is how God wants us to be. Whatever our job is, whatever our circumstances are, these are actually of secondary importance to the priorities that Jesus is going to emphasize for us. What we learn must shape how we live. But it's also challenging and I look at myself and I believe me, I will be teaching myself more than I'm teaching any of you as we study the Sermon on the Mount together. But we are to strive to live according to what we are being taught. And if you think about it, it all makes perfect sense. Jesus is king. That means we are to listen to him and we are to do what he asks us to do. These two things belong together. When we listen to our king and when we do what he asks us to do, that is what it means to be a disciple. So that's the great principle behind the Sermon on the Mount. This is how Jesus wants his disciples to live. Another quote from St.

St. Joseph Ferguson, he says that the Sermon on the Mount is a vision of what the Lord intends our lives to be. A vision of what the Lord intends my life to be and what he intends your life to be. So that's why I'm describing it as training. This is the training that we need as disciples because this is how God wants us to live. So that's what Jesus is doing. His teaching his disciples. His training them. And that's what we want to happen to us, that we would be disciples who are trained by King Jesus. So that's basically what it's about. And then throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus highlights various areas that he prioritizes. And these are what we're going to look at and I've got a diagram that I hope would help me summarise them. Now, the headings here I have to confess I'm trying to make it as helpful as possible. There's always a bit of over generalisation and in many ways these things are only scratching the surface. But I hope it'll help us navigate through the Sermon on the Mount. These are the things that Jesus wants us to prioritise.

[ 22 : 16 ] These are the things that really, really matter in terms of how you and I live as Christians. First of all, our character. That's what Jesus is talking about in the Beatitudes. Those famous worships, blessed are the poor, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek.

What are the kind of people that Jesus wants in his kingdom? What kind of people is Jesus looking for? That's what the Beatitudes are describing, our character. Secondly, our witness.

As Christians, we are all to witness. How do we do that? How are we supposed to be witnessing in our daily lives? What is Jesus going to teach us about that? What does he want us to do in terms of witness? Well, Matthew 5.30 to 16 teaches us about that. And Jesus talks about salt and he talks about light. Next section, obedience. What place does God's law have in our life as Christians? Is God's law relevant? Do we still need the Ten Commandments?

What is the place of God's law in the life of the Christian? Jesus answers that question for us in chapter 5, verses 17 to 20. Next section talks about relationships. How are we to relate to other people? Are we to be isolated? Does it matter how we conduct ourselves to other people? How should a Christian relate to the world around them?

Next section talks about integrity. We are to speak the truth and we are to live in faithfulness to that truth. How do we do that? How do we live as those who are characterised by integrity?

[ 24 : 12 ] Temperament. Does your temperament matter as a Christian? Jesus says it does. That's when he talks about turning the other cheek and things like that. So that's a really interesting topic to look at. Next section, motivation. Jesus wants us to be careful about who we try to please. Who are we motivated by? Who do we want to please?

Next section, our prayer life. That's immensely important as Christians. As a disciple, what should our prayer life look like? How does Jesus want us to pray? Tied into that is our devotional life. In general, what should our devotional life look like as Christians?

Jesus has got some training for us in terms of our devotional life as well. Next section, the middle of chapter 6, our priorities. What should our priorities be as Christians? What are the most important things for us? What are the things that really matter? Well, Jesus tells us in Matthew 6, 19 to 34. Next section, perspective. How should we look at the world around us? How should we look at ourselves? How should we look at others? Jesus wants to teach us an important lesson in perspective in Matthew chapter 7.

Next one, confidence. Who's got not much confidence? All of us, I think. Well, Jesus has got lessons for us about confidence. We should be confident as disciples, but how can we be like that? What does that look like? Where does our confidence come from? So, that great section on confidence there. Second, last one, orthodoxy. What is the truth? And what truths do we need to hold on? Orthodoxy, like a straight line of truth and certain things that we must hold on to. Jesus is telling us that we must hold on to certain things.

And then the sermon on the Mount ends with a parable that is all about listening, as we've said. The parable of the rock and the sand, are we listening as we should? So, that's what I want us to do over the next few weeks. As I said, we won't do it every week, but we'll do it bit by bit, because all of these are really, really important areas. Now, isn't it interesting? Because how often as Christians do we worry about what our job is? We worry about what we're doing? We worry about maybe how we might appear to others? We worry if we've done this, that, and the next thing? We worry about all sorts of stuff? And yet, Jesus is saying, these are the things that really matter to me. These are the things that I want you to prioritize. Your character, your witness, your obedience, your relationship, your integrity, your temperament, your motivation, your prayer life, your devotion, your priorities, your perspective, your confidence, your orthodoxy, your listening. Now, I'm sure every one of you like me, look at that, and you think, well, I'm failing in every single one of them.

[ 27 : 42 ] But the whole point is, is that this is training. It's training to help us. It's training to teach us. And our teacher is a patient, loving teacher who loves you and who wants to shape you into the person that he wants you to be. It's not about hammering you. It's not about criticizing you. It's nothing like that. It's about helping you and helping me to be the disciples that our King wants us to be. And the key point that all of these will emphasize, as I hope we will see, is that Jesus is highlighting the fact that as disciples, we are to be different from the world. And this is the vital truth that we must grasp in terms of the same one in the Mount. As disciples in God's kingdom, we are to live in a new way. A new lifestyle is expected of us. And if you think about it theologically, that makes perfect sense.

Jesus wants us to live in a new way. Now, remember what I'm going to say, the Sermon on the Mount is not the way into the kingdom of God. It's not. But what is, what is the way into the kingdom of God? What did Jesus say? What was his command to people as he went and preached? He said, yes, repent. And what does repent mean? It means turn around.

It means go in a different direction. And it means think in a different way. And so all of these things are telling us to be different from the world because you have repented and you have turned. And if the world is going that way, you and I are going that way. We are going to live in a new way. We are going to live in Jesus's way, which means at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount is the fact that we are to be unworldly. We are to be different, beautifully different from the world around us. There's two things that I want to highlight here that I think help highlight this.

St. Clair Ferguson's book on the Sermon on the Mount, he calls it the Sermon on the Mount Kingdom Life in a Fallen World. That's a really helpful summary because that's exactly what it's like living as God's people in a fallen world. So we're different, aren't we? Because it's Kingdom Life in a Fallen World. John Stomp in his, he also has a fantastic book on the Sermon on the Mount. He calls the Sermon on the Mount a Christian counter culture. And that again is very, very helpful because he is saying the culture of the world is doing this and going that way. And he's saying the Christian is doing this way. And the Christian stands out. The Christian is different. We are establishing a new family and a new people who live in a different way to the world. The Sermon on the Mount is that teaching us that if everyone else is going away from God, we are going to follow him. Now this is the really important point. That's every day of life for you and for me.

Because you go to work, you go to college, or you go to school. Culture and the world are not going in God's way. Our community, our colleagues, maybe even our family are living according to the ways of the world. And the Sermon on the Mount is telling us how we are to live in that context. In that situation, we are to be different. And that's what Jesus wants. He wants us to stand out as his disciples. Remember, in the Old Testament, Israel was unique among the nations. It was to be a light to the world. And in so many ways you know they failed. But that principle still applies to the new Israel, to the Church of Christ. We are to be unique in this world. We are to stand out as Jesus's disciples, which is why Jesus says, let your light shine before others so they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. We are to be different. But being different is hard. Therefore, we need training. And that's why we are studying the Sermon on the Mount.

[ 32 : 51 ] So that by his grace, every day you and I will live as disciples trained by King Jesus.

Amen. Let us pray.