

Sermon Title: Blessed Now and Forever

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Matt. 5:1-2 (Sermon on the Mount #1)

Date: 6-7-20

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Well, you certainly noticed that we finished First Corinthians last week, and I have not spread far and wide what we're going to do next, but it's going to be the Sermon on the Mount; it is Matthew, Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

It is a well-known portion of Scripture—not often well-understood, but well-known. Even my father, who was not in *any* way religious, talked as if the Sermon on the Mount was precious to him. When I was a kid, he would talk about "Living by the Sermon on the Mount, and that's what I believe!" He said that many times, and I bought it; I had no idea what the Sermon on the Mount was, and he was my dad, and he was bigger and smarter than me, so I figured he understood what he meant. Well, the fact is, my dad never *quoted* any of the Sermon to me, except his own version of the "Golden Rule," which is from Matthew Chapter 7, Verse 12, but he rather significantly left off a very important part of that. I never saw him with an open Bible in the 33 years that I knew him, but when I became a believer, right at the end my high school career, I remember my surprise when I started reading through the Bible, and somebody said, "You might want to start with the New Testament," so I found the New Testament and I started reading Matthew; it didn't take me very long to get to Chapter 5—and I *found* the Sermon on the Mount, and, *WOW*—it just blew my socks off, what Jesus was saying in the record of this astounding sermon!

I was especially pleased in my seminary years that my professor/mentor, Dr. Robert Thomas, offered a class that included the exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount, so I got to study it in Greek. Then there was another pass-through when a very good friend, of mine, Paul Guay—whose wife is with us now; Paul couldn't be here because he's with the Lord—he began studying the Sermon on the Mount. It was my privilege to hire him in the ministry that I was overseeing, and I was doing two things at once—still finishing up seminary, and I'd be gone most of the day and come back—and Paul was working next to Marsha, my wife, and they were talking about all kinds of theological things, and they would often be just sort of in a Jesus-loves-you combative sort of way, talking about these things; and then I would come home, and I'd have to break the icicles off between the two of them, and we'd talk about these things. So I talked it through again, and then *Paul* began teaching the Sermon on the Mount, and he would ask me all these questions. I grew to love this passage before I ever taught it! Then, I taught it in a couple of Bible study formats, and it was a long time until I actually preached through it. And I was thinking about that—just how *precious* that was to me. I remember it so very vividly, and I was rather shocked to find out that it's been *almost* 30 years since I preached through the Sermon on the Mount! So now that I've practiced, I'm going get it right on you—I'm going to do my very best, anyway.

This three-chapter section—the "Sermon on the Mount," as we call it; and you'll see why it's called that this morning—it's been the center of a surprising amount of controversy. You can actually find several different, rather disparate views about this passage. Modern liberal theology teaches that salvation depends upon keeping everything in this Sermon. Those theologians make the Sermon on the Mount to be the essence of the gospel. Well, there's an *element* of truth in that, and you'll see it as we go through, but the fact is: they also water down and severely corrupt its meaning so that what they *say* it means, they

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can actually keep—and so therefore, you know that's not in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, where you have to "be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48; NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted).

There are others who regard the Sermon on the Mount as "law" rather than "gospel," and they say that Jesus's purpose in this sermon was to expound the true sense of the Law, as opposed to the distorted interpretations of the scribes and rabbis of the day. Now, *that's true*—Jesus *did* show the true meaning of things, as opposed to what was being taught in His day, so there's an element of truth in that, but it leaves out a lot. Yes, this is *before* the Cross—therefore, it was still under the dispensation of the Law, before the era in which we live (see Matt. 21:43; Jn. 14:17)—but *this* is the Savior spelling out the true purpose of the Law, which *we know* is not just to correct false things, it's to lead us to the Savior that we need (see Gal. 3:24; cf. Rom. 3:19-20).

I might as well mention: there's also a branch among Evangelical Christians that considers the Sermon on the Mount to be the constitution for the coming Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:4-6), and so they say it is intended *only* for the subjects of the Kingdom *after* Jesus returns; and they say this has *no* application for Christians today.

Early in my preaching career, I happened to have quoted something from the Sermon on the Mount—I just picked a supporting cross-reference from the Sermon on the Mount—and we had a lady who was visiting the church that day, and she heard that, and she wrote me a rather lengthy and not particularly loving letter explaining why she would never be back again if I was going to be so *stupid* as to quote something that's not for Christians, as if it means something to us! Well, the people in that camp don't seem to realize that, not only is this from the lips of Jesus, but also, what it teaches—*every single thing in this sermon*—is repeated, reinforced, expanded, or paraphrased elsewhere in the New Testament; this is *not* disconnected! And the same Jesus who is *going to be* the "King of kings and Lord of lords" in the Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 19:16) is the One who spoke this message, and He spoke it to the people *that* day, telling them it's for "His disciples" (Matt. 5:1; cf. 5:19; 7:24-27; 24:35)—and we'll see what that means, even beginning this morning.

And then another group that kind of gets it wrong is: people who recognize the spiritual truth of the Sermon on the Mount, but they hold that, what it teaches cannot possibly be attained in this present age—so, a little bit like the ones who say that it's for the Kingdom. The problem is, they don't recognize that what this sermon is teaching, *based on its original context*, leads you—as I said before—to understand that, yes, you can't fulfill it...you're going to need a righteousness that is not your own (2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). And so they miss the point. Again: you *can't* keep what's in this sermon, but Christ did (Matt. 3:15; Heb. 7:26; 1 Pet. 2:22) and He does (Gal. 2:20).

From time to time along the way, we might touch on some of those ideas as we work our way through this, but understand: This is a truly life-changing portion of the Word of God, and it is *intended* for consumption and application by *every single disciple* of the Lord Jesus Christ—for *every* Christian (Matt. 7:24-27; cf. Lk. 6:27, 47-49; 1 Tim. 6:3).

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That's why this is recorded in so much detail. This is the longest single passage that records a *discourse* of Jesus. I think He said a whole lot more than what is recorded here, but this is Matthew's inspired record—and, if you will, summary—of what Jesus taught on that day. And it is *for* the true disciples—and that's *you*, if you're trusting in Christ.

I want to give us a running start on this great sermon by the Master teacher, and so today, we'll just kind of sneak up on it; we'll unlock the front door. I will not be offended if you want to read through this sermon *every single day* until we finish it—which may not be in this calendar year, I don't know; we'll see how it goes; we're not going to hurry through this, because it is such a rich, rich goldmine of God's truth. So today, I want to show you the Setting of the Sermon, and then introduce you to the Hearers of the Sermon—so just the first 2 verses; we're not going to try to reach too far today.

The most common and damaging abuse of the Bible is to read it and interpret a passage, and then try to apply the passage without first understanding the proper context. We have to pay attention to the *historical* context—nothing is ever spoken or written in a vacuum. We have to pay attention to the *Biblical* context—how does this fit in with the whole teaching of the Bible. And we have to pay attention to the *grammatical* context—what do the words actually mean, how do the sentences fit together, how does the logic flow within this?

So, what is the Context of the Sermon on the Mount? And I want to take about four different views—not four *differing* views, but four different senses of the context of the Sermon on the Mount.

First of all: How does it fit into the life of Jesus? In the life of Jesus, this sermon comes near the end of the second year of His public ministry, so it was about a year and a half before the Crucifixion. This was at the height of Jesus's popularity. If you remember our recent studies in Mark, remember I'd mention so often: "The Great Galilean Ministry"—the time that He spent over year primarily in Galilee. Most of the miracles you know about, most of the discourses you know about, took place during that time; that's where this fits in. More specifically: this sermon was given just after Jesus publicly appointed and declared the Twelve Apostles. As a matter of fact, it took place on that same day. At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus called the "disciples," as we know them, or the "Apostles." They were with Him for a while, they went back to their regular occupations for short while, and then Jesus summoned them to be with Him full-time, and they followed Him throughout almost all of the three and half years of His public ministry. But it wasn't until the end of the second year that He appointed these 12 as the ones who would be His Apostles, who would take the gospel to wherever the Lord would send them; they would be the first generation to spread the gospel (Acts 1:8, 21-22). So it's at a crucial time at the height of the popularity of Jesus, and there was a *big* crowd present for this sermon.

Secondly: We need to know how this fits into the context of the Book of Matthew. Understand: the Book of Matthew is not in chronological order. It *does* have a beginning and an end—it starts with the genealogy of Jesus, it ends with the Resurrection of Jesus,

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and it moves from the beginning to the end—but Matthew didn't put his book together as if it was the "diary" of Jesus, and he had not attached a GPS tracker to Him and told you exactly where He went all those times. Matthew wrote this book in a *logical* order as an extended gospel tract to Jews; he wanted to convince them of the fact that "Jesus" is "the Messiah" (Matt. 1:1) that they were waiting for. Matthew, therefore, arranged some of his material in a non-chronological way. If you want to get the chronological order, put together Mark and Luke—they keep it in chronological order. Neither Matthew nor John are strictly chronological.

The way Matthew set up his book, he unfolds a theme. After the genealogy of Jesus, the birth of Jesus, the visit of the Magi, and all of that, we come to this in Matthew Chapter 3, Verses 1 and 2. There's a pretty big jump in time from the Magi to this—like, almost 30 years. Matthew 3:1 and 2 says: "Now in those days John the Baptist came"—his public ministry began about six months before Jesus—"preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' " And then, Matthew summarizes John's ministry. He introduces us to Jesus by telling us when He came on the scene, and the Gospel of John inserts that John the Baptist introduced Jesus to the public by saying, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn. 1:29). And then, Matthew skips ahead to the Temptation of Jesus at the hand of the Devil. Then, he skips from the *beginning* of Jesus's ministry to His time in Galilee. Well, there was actually *some time* before He went and began ministering in Galilee. But because he was writing for the Jews, Matthew wanted to show the *direct continuity* from the "forerunner" of the Messiah—John the Baptist (Lk. 1:17)—to the Messiah Himself; so in Chapter 3, he begins with: "John the Baptist came...saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,' " and then you jump down to Matthew 4:17—"From that time *Jesus* began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' "

So what I'm trying to say to you is that, in the way that Matthew arranged his Gospel, the Biblical context of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel is: This is Jesus's detailed explanation of "Repent." Repent from what? Well, you'll find out as you unfold this. The Sermon on the Mount describes the life of one who repents, the life of one who is transformed by the grace of God through faith (see Matt. 3:8; Acts 26:20). Part of the fact of repenting is turning *away* from everything else and turning to Christ (Is. 55:7; Ezek. 33:11; Mk. 1:15; 1 Thess. 1:9). It is becoming a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, just as Paul wrote in Colossians Chapter 1, Verse 13, where we have been delivered "from the domain of darkness, and transferred...to the kingdom of His beloved Son." This is the King talking about what kind of people belong to His kingdom (e.g., Ps. 15:1-5; 24:3-4).

Here's another sense of the context of the Sermon on the Mount: You should understand the *political* context of the Sermon on the Mount. The Jews of Jesus's day *were* looking for a Messiah—but their definition of this Deliverer who was to come was that He was going to be a political ruler. They *wanted* deliverance, but they don't want a deliverance from the domain of darkness—they didn't think that's where they were—they just wanted a deliverer who would give them political liberation from the Romans. They weren't looking for a Deliverer from sin—they wanted independence. They wanted revolution—some of them more drastically than others, and I'll show you that in a moment (Jn. 6:15).

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The Messiah *they* wanted was going to be a *radical*; He was going to be a revolutionary; He was going to be a man who would be swept to power by His incredible political popularity. But the kingdom they wanted was going to be political and earthly; it wasn't going to be spiritual and heavenly. They didn't want a humble servant; they wanted a political and military general they could get behind, to lead them to victory. And in that arena, there was a mean group called the Zealots—I'll mention them again in a minute.

As the Jews read the Prophets, they looked forward to this glorious kingdom to come (Dan. 7:13-14; Amos 9:11-12; Zech. 14:9)—they believed every word of *that*; but as they would read of the One who was meek and "lowly" (Zech. 9:9, NKJV), the One who was a "sufferings servant" (see Is. 52:13-14; 53:3-4, 7), the One who would be "wounded for our transgressions" and "bruised for our iniquities" (Is. 53:5, NKJV)—well, they just slid right by *those* passages; *that's* not what they wanted. So when Jesus came along, He looked really good. "Oh, this guy has a *tremendous* amount of charisma! People *love* this guy! Oh, and look at those miracles!" But to some of them, it was a *massive* disappointment that Jesus never brought up politics. He was *challenged* on political things many times, but He never fought "the system" (see Matt. 22:21). Despite the oppression of Israel by Rome, Jesus completely shunned the zeal of the ones who wanted to make Him the leader of a political revolution (Jn. 6:15; 18:36). Jesus was not, and Jesus is not now, *nearly* as concerned about changing the structure of society as He is about working on the *inside* of individuals (Lk. 17:20-21; cf. Jn. 3:3, 5; Rom. 14:17b).

It is therefore said that the stress in this great sermon is on *being* what God wants you to be, not ruling or possessing things. It's as if He doesn't care what you *do* until He has changed what you *are*, because what you *are* on the inside determines what you will be doing, eventually (see Ezek. 36:25-27; Lk. 6:45; Jn. 14:21; 1 Jn. 2:5). The most exalted people in the Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus talks about in this sermon—they are the *antithesis* of human ideas about greatness and governments and kingdoms and political power. The most exalted people in Christ kingdom are the *lowest* in the world's eyes (Matt. 20:25-27). Who *is* "greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Matt. 18:1). Well, it's the ones that are "poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3); those who "mourn" over their sin (vs. 4; cf. Ezek. 6:9; Rom. 7:15-16, 21-24); those who are full of "mercy" (vs. 7; cf. Eph. 4:32); those who are "pure in heart" (vs. 8) because their heart has been purified (Acts 15:9); those who are willing to stand for the Gospel, even if they are reviled and "persecuted" (vs. 10) and they have "all kinds of evil" spoken "falsely" against them (vs. 11). That's where Jesus *starts*. That's the kind of person that is a citizen of His kingdom. The Gospel is about changing individual lives—it's not about overthrowing governments. The Gospel applies to *any* person, *anywhere*, under *any* kind of government, in *any* generation. It's *completely* transferable, and totally apolitical—it's not about politics (see Ps. 118:9).

That brings me to the *religious* context of the Sermon on the Mount. This is also important: The society in which Jesus preached this sermon was very different from ours. Many of the things that He said here, and many of the things that He said elsewhere in His ministry, are seriously misunderstood unless you're willing to take a little bit of time and understand the beliefs and the streams of ideas of the various groups that influenced the people to whom Jesus spoke.

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There were four main groups embedded within the religion of Judaism at the time of Jesus. The one you know the best—the one you've heard the most about—is the Pharisees. The Pharisees believed that happiness was found in keeping legalistic traditions; that's what they were all about. "You have to learn all the do's and don'ts, and you have to keep them, and you have to do it just like us—and, by the way, do you want an example of righteousness? Just look at us! Look how holy we are!" That was the attitude of the Pharisees. The Scribes—they were the ones who served as the keepers and interpreters of the Scriptures, and the regulations that went along with them, in the eyes of the Pharisees (Lk. 5:30). They worked hand-in-hand to put great burdens of incredible guilt on the daily duties of the people (Matt. 23:4; cf. Acts 15:10).

They were the best-known group of religious conservatives. They loved to put on public displays of spirituality; they loved to be proud of that (Matt. 23:5). It was the Pharisees who probably had the most influence on the daily lives of Jews in their day because they dominated the teaching of the rabbis that was done in the synagogues; that was out where the real people lived. We know the Apostle Paul was raised as a Pharisee (Acts 23:6); he became a prominent leader in that group. He says that he excelled beyond all of his peers (Gal. 1:14)—and then he turns around and says, "And you know what? I count that all as rubbish, compared to knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection." (see Phil. 3:7-11).

Then, there is the group called the Sadducees. Sadducees believed happiness was found in more modern, liberal, tolerant views of things. They readily updated anything that they considered outmoded. The Sadducees didn't believe in the existence of angels, and they didn't believe in the resurrection (Acts 23:8). Now, we just dealt with First Corinthians Chapter 15—it's kind of important, the "resurrection" thing! So the Sadducees were the equivalent of the modern liberal theologians of our day. But *that* group held the controlling interest, not of the synagogues—that was the Pharisees' domain—the Sadducees controlled the priesthood and the things that went on in the temple (Acts 5:17), like which vendors got the license to rip off the people for exchanging their money, which vendors got the license to rip off the people by selling the animals, who controlled the temple police, and all of that.

The third group that I'm going to mention is one you'll never read about as you read the Bible: the Essenes. You won't read about it because they are not mentioned anywhere in the New Testament, and there's good reason for that—but they *did* have an influence. Because of their beliefs, they did not encounter Jesus, or have very much to do with the people who did, so that's why they don't show up in the Gospels. The Essenes believed happiness was found in separation—separation from the world. They literally, in the name of spirituality, moved out of town; they set up their own communities out in the wilderness, where they were the First-Century precursors of what you and I would think of as the most separatist of monks—those who have *nothing* to do with society. "To be spiritual, we are going to lock ourselves inside these walls, and we're going to read and study and pray and sing, and *that* is how to be spiritual. That's how to honor God." They weren't very good in evangelism.

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Now, there is a little footnote to that: One of the groups of the Essenes was in a little place called Qumran, out in the desert. They are the ones who hid all those documents in those caves near the Dead Sea so that the Romans would not destroy them when they came through and killed them all in 68 A.D., before they took out Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and those things remained hidden until 1946 to '48. We know them as the Dead Sea Scrolls—a *tremendous* wealth of resources that validate for us the accuracy of the Scriptures that we have. So we owe a debt to the Essenes. But theirs was one of the other mindsets that Jesus had to deal with.

The fourth group I mentioned in passing before: the Zealots. They believed happiness was to be found in a political revolution. The Sadducees ignored the traditions of their religion. The Pharisees prided themselves in their masks of hypocritical religious activity. The Essenes moved out of town. The Zealots were the rabble rousers; they were the ones who wanted to get everybody to rebel against Rome. This was the group that led the charge to try to make Jesus their king at the height of His public popularity (Jn. 6:15), and Jesus just slipped away. But notice: one of the Twelve Apostles was a man named "Simon the Zealot" (Matt. 10:4)—he came from that background. There were probably people from all of these backgrounds that Jesus called to Himself.

In the Sermon on the Mount, you are going to see how Jesus demonstrated that all of them—all four of those groups—though they may have had an element of truth, they were wrong. All the wrinkles of religion that man has *ever* come up with, be it under the umbrella of Judaism or some other world religion with a totally different definition of God, they all fail to change anyone in the way that can make a person suited for Heaven (see Col. 2:23; cf. Jer. 13:23; Gal. 3:21).

To the Pharisees—very specifically addressed in the Sermon on the Mount because they had the most influence—Jesus says that spirituality is *not* the external obedience to a list of do's and don'ts. To the Sadducees, Jesus says that religion is *not* a matter of human philosophy invented to accommodate daily life, and it's *not* a matter of achieving an aristocracy. To the Essenes, Jesus says that religion is *not* to be found in separation from the world *physically* (see 1 Cor. 5:9-11); you are to be spiritually separated, but you're to *penetrate* the world with the gospel (Acts 1:8). And to the Zealots, Jesus says that religion is *not* social activism—it's a matter of you and your heart before God.

The Pharisees were on the right track in their zeal to maintain correct doctrine, but *they completely missed the boat* by believing entrance into heaven could be gained by obeying rules on the outside. They had actually created a works-righteousness system, which they *said* was what the Old Testament Law taught (contra Gen. 15:6). Remember, they "trusted in themselves that they were righteous" (Luke 18:9).

The Sadducees were on the right track in the sense that they *did* have a legitimate desire to be relevant; they *did* want to address contemporary issues; they *did* want to elevate the lifestyle, if you will, of all of the Jews—but *they completely missed the boat* because they sacrificed *truth* to their idol of "relevance" (see 1 Cor. 2:4-5).

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The Essenes were *kind of* on the right track in their desire to avoid the sins of the flesh. Well, that's a good thing. They wanted to avoid the corruption that is in the world—that's a good thing. But they *completely missed the boat* by thinking that you *become* spiritual primarily by denying yourself and staying away from people—staying away from anybody that might pollute you.

The Zealots had the right zeal for the kingdom—that wasn't wrong. They were looking for the Messiah to come. They wanted deliverance from oppression. But they *completely missed the boat* by failing to deal with the most basic issue of their sins.

We need to be socially involved—that's true. We need to be set apart for God—that's true. We need to communicate our faith in the world in which we live; we need to understand and communicate with people in a way that they will understand. But those things are external and incomplete in themselves. God is after what is on the inside (see Ps. 28:7; 36:10; 51:6; Prov. 23:26; Lk. 11:41; 2 Cor. 1:12; 8:5; Eph. 6:6; 2 Thess. 3:5; 1 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:22), and the Sermon on the Mount addresses the heart.

So, let's go all the way into Verses 1 and 2 of Chapter 5, and look at The Hearers of The Sermon. Matthew 5:1 and 2—"When Jesus saw the crowds..." Now, I want to point out to you right away, something skillful that Matthew did. "*When* Jesus saw the crowds"—he does not say, "After these things," or "On the next day" or anything like that, because remember: he is taking this sermon that was recorded months and months later, from where he was in the life of Jesus, and he's moving it there because this is Jesus's exposition on what it means to repent, so he just jumps into it. "When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying"—come back next week and we'll start at Verse 3.

I want you to notice what's here: The "crowds" came to Jesus that day. This is during the height of His popularity. There were lots of true believers who followed Him—and *literally* followed Him from place to place—and so did countless people among the curious, the thrill-seekers, the ones who wanted to just see another miracle. I'm sure there were ones somewhere in various stages of spiritual gestation, where they hadn't yet made up their minds, but they couldn't resist this incredible Man who spoke in a way they were not accustomed to hearing (Jn. 7:46).

Now then, notice it says: "He went up on the mountain." We don't know for sure which mountain it was. I've been to the site that is traditionally believed to be the place—very pretty setting there—but we really don't know for sure. Nowadays, it has a sign on it that says: "Mount of Beatitudes," and so, if that sign was there, than that's how Jesus knew to go there. If you come from Idaho and you go there, and they say, "This is the mountain," you're going to go, [scoffingly] "You've got to be kidding! They call that a *mountain*? That's a bump! I mean, I ran up something like that in cross-country! It's not exactly 'mountain climbing' to get up there!" Well, okay—"mountains" are relative to anything else. This place rises up above the Sea of Galilee, so hence it's called the Sermon on the "Mount."

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It's in an absolutely beautiful setting. It overlooks that huge lake that we know as the "Sea of Galilee," or the "Sea of Tiberias," and from that flows the Jordan River down south to the Dead Sea; it's fed by springs up in the mountains all the way up near Mount Hermon, north of there. If you're sitting on that "mountain," as you look off to the right, you'll see some hills that rise a little bit higher; that would be the hill country of Galilee, in which sits the village called Nazareth, the home of Jesus. Below the hill where you're sitting, down to the left, is the town of Capernaum, right on the edge of the Sea of Galilee; that's the town from which Peter, James, and John seem to have operated their fishing enterprises. We know that Andrew and his extended family were from there. If you're sitting there and you look way off to the right, you see the hill country of Galilee; in front of you is the Sea of Galilee, and down below you is Capernaum; and if you look way off to your left, you would see the Golan Heights, as we know it—the site of the largest tank battle in history, during the Six Day War in 1967. It's a spectacular setting.

Jesus must have had a marvelous voice, to preach to this huge throng of people packed onto this hillside. It was kind of a natural amphitheater, but just imagine how compelling a presence He must have been, to speak to hundreds and hundreds and hundreds—*maybe* well over a thousand people heard this sermon. Nobody counted heads to know for sure.

Again, thinking back to the setting of this, we learn from Luke that Jesus went up on "the mountain to pray" (Lk. 6:12)—that was the night before this. He spent the entire night in prayer. In the morning, He came down below, he named the 12 disciples as the Apostles, then He performed countless miracles—we're not even told, just miracle after miracle after miracle. And Luke explains that "there was a large crowd of His disciples"—those are the ones that are *truly* following Him (see Lk. 14:27)—and in addition to the disciples, "a great throng of people" from all around (vs. 17). I'm not sure of the exact Hebrew numerical equivalent of "great throng," but it was a bunch.

Matthew makes it clear who Jesus was addressing: He spoke, *targeting* those who were most eager to hear Him. Look at it there: He "saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him" (Matt. 5:1). There were the Twelve for sure, and then the others who had probably been with Him for some time: "We want to hear what Jesus has to say." The word "disciple" means "learner." It refers to anyone of any age and any amount of learning—just the desire to learn; you are a learner, you are a disciple. Those who know the Lord *never* tire of learning from Him.

I think it's probable that Jesus had announced in advance that this was going to be a special day; He had probably been saying that for a day or two or three, or I don't know how long. There was that special preparation of all night in prayer. There was a bit of a ceremony: We honored our graduates; Jesus pulled fourth and identified in public: "These are the Twelve Apostles who are going to carry the Gospel to the world." Then, during the day, there was that free flow of miracles, and there was this quick gathering of a *huge* crowd. That all makes me think that Jesus had orchestrated this day to be special; He had made sure that they were at that place where you could seat a bunch of people on the hillside, and be able to talk to them all at once.

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There's yet another hint in this passage that Jesus meant this to be a special time of teaching. Remember: context is important. Notice, it says: "When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain"—and obviously, He said, "Come up here"—"and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him" (Matt. 5:1). What is significant about "after He sat down"? Well, that's how a rabbi teaches: he *sits down* and teaches—the exact opposite of our culture. Here, when the preacher preaches, he stands up. The rabbis sat down. So Jesus was following the normal pattern of His culture by assuming the posture and the role of the one who is in authority and who is going to do the teaching (e.g., Jn. 8:2).

In Jesus's case, His teaching was done like the rabbis did, and yet it was done so differently from how the rabbis did it. Jesus deferred to no one. Typically, the rabbis—we can read about this in the record of the teachings of the rabbis—they would quote from each other, and quote rabbi so-and-so, defer to one another, and carry on these long back-and-forth discussions. Jesus didn't do that, and Jesus quoted no one in this sermon except God Himself. He kept the crowd *riveted* on His *every word*! The majesty and the power of what He said stood out by such *huge contrast* to the rabbis that they were accustomed to—and, wow, did it have an impact! I'll give you a spoiler alert. Go to the end of the Sermon on the Mount: Matthew Chapter 7, Verses 28 and 29—"When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." In other words, the scribes didn't teach as if *they* had any authority; Jesus said things like, "You have heard that it was said...but *I say to you*," and He just spoke.

What was it that was so captivating? Well, it says, "He opened His mouth and began to teach them." That's what produces spiritual maturity (Jn. 17:17; cf. Jer. 23:22; 1 Thess. 2:13): Open your mouth and teach the truth. Speak "the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15); "Reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (2 Tim. 4:2). Keep doing it (2 Pet. 1:12-13). Teach the Word. Preach the Word, day and night, house to house, in public, in private. Jesus taught them as they had never before been taught.

Now, here's what you can expect to learn in the coming weeks: The character of true repentance is *not just words*; it drastically, profoundly affects your life! You cannot *dabble* at Christianity! If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, you belong to Him (1 Cor. 3:23); you are redeemed (1 Cor. 6:19-20). He is the Master (Jude 4); you are the slave (Eph. 6:6; cf. Matt. 28:20). You're going to learn that life does not fit into compartments labeled "Sacred" and "Secular"—you don't switch back and forth; you live your *whole life* as a redeemed one, as representative of Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:15; Titus 2:5, 10).

You're going to see, when Jesus finishes this sermon of sermons, He explains that there is *only one way* to Heaven, and He says: "The gate is small and the way is narrow"—and "hard" (Mk. 10:24)—"that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7:14). He is going to warn rather strongly against the false teachers who lead many people down the "broad" way instead of the "narrow way." I used to kid a pastor friend of mine who was called to be a pastor of a church named "Broadway." I know it was named after a street—but, for goodness sake, read your Bible before you decide what street to name your church after! *At least* pick "Denton Street" or "Emerald Street" or something like that!

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Jesus even warns that not only is there the broad way and the narrow way, there are the "many" and the "few." "Many" go down the broad way (Matt. 7:13). And by the way, the sign over the broad way does not say: "Destruction This Way! Everybody Come!" No, it says "Heaven This Way! Come As You Are!" (cf. Prov. 9:4, 16) No, you can't come as you are—you have to come as you're transformed by the Savior (Col. 1:12; 1 Jn. 1:7). He warns that there will be people who will go down that broad path and discover, only way too late, that they never knew Him, when He says, "I never knew you; depart from Me" (Matt. 7:23; cf. Prov. 14:12; 16:25).

So the Master Teacher closes the master sermon, and He is going to lead you to understand, there are two options: You can build your life on His words, and you'll be able to withstand *anything* (Ps. 125:1; Rom. 8:37-39). Or you can build your life on *anything else*, and you will be ruined (Acts 4:12); everything you've built will be washed away in judgment (Matt. 7:24-27; cf. Prov. 10:25; Matt. 15:13; Lk. 8:18; Rev. 20:15).

The same choice is ours today. As we study this sermon, we're going to learn the *crucial need* of regeneration (Jn. 3:3, 5; 6:44-45). You're going to learn: you *can't* improve yourself enough to get there (Prov. 20:9). You're going to learn your *total* need for a Savior (Jn. 14:6). And you're going to learn to rejoice in that Savior! Oh, how rich this is! As we study this sermon, we're going to be pointed to Jesus Christ. We're going to understand His mind, probably better than ever.

And as you study this sermon, you are going to come to know what happiness is for a Christian! The first word of Verse 3 is the word "Blessed," which essentially means: "Happy." You're going to learn what it means to be "blessed." And if you want to be happy, you have to get it on God's terms! You come to Him *every day*. Happiness is not some mystical experience, it's not just some emotional state, it's not some elusive dream—it's as simple as understanding what this sermon teaches, and putting it into practice (Jn. 13:17). *Then* you will know the wonders of God's grace! *Then* you will know that He enables you to serve Him to the fullest of your potential (1 Cor. 15:10; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 2:13; Heb. 13:21). *Then* you will know the truest, fullest sense of being blessed.

As we study this sermon and apply it, I think you're going to be more motivated and more effective than ever in evangelism, because as you live by the kind of life that Jesus calls you to in this sermon, you *will* have an impact! You *will* have a life from which it is *credible* to speak the gospel, "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

There is a brother in Christ—now *with* Christ—his name is George Lawlor. He was a Bible Professor at Cedarville University, back when it was Cedarville College. He had obviously been confronted—maybe that same lady visited *his* church and chided him for quoting something that was irrelevant to Christians—so he wrote a book called, subtly: "The Beatitudes Are For Today," and he noted how the disciples *came to Jesus* to hear this sermon, and his point is: this is for those who want to follow Jesus. I'm going to close with a quote from George Lawlor. He says this:

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"Amid the extraordinary pressures, tensions, and frustrations of our time, it is Christ alone who has the proper words for our hearts, and it is the Lord alone whose message is all-sufficient for the troubled minds of those who are seeking answers for pressing and perplexing problems. In all the universe, there is no one else in whom there is rest for the weary soul and life for the perishing sinner. Peter said: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? *Thou* hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68, KJV). It is to *Him* that men and women of our day, as in Peter's day, may come definitely and expectantly, for the purpose of hearing—not what they want to hear, but what they need to hear, without becoming victims of deception and seduction, and not being turned away in a state of confused desperation." (Lawlor, George L. *The Beatitudes Are For Today*. Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 1974, pg. 19).

Next Lord's Day, Lord willing: "Blessed are the poor in spirit"—you'll find out what that means, and you're going to want to be poor like you never have.

Let's pray:

*Father, thank You for this wonderful grace in which we stand. Thank You for this portion of Your Word. May You nourish our hearts through it. May You strengthen us for the tasks that You have for us, as we open this famous portion from the words of Your Son. Have Your way with us today, we pray. May we be the kind of people who truly are the disciples—the ones who want to learn at the feet of the Savior. So, teach us as You would have it to be. Convict us, as we need it to be, that we might glorify You. In Jesus' name. Amen.*