

## Blessed Now and Forever

*Sermon on the Mount, Vol. 1*

HBC 6/7/20

Matthew 5:1-2

The Sermon on the Mount is a well-known portion of Scripture which has been the center of a surprising amount of controversy. Some of the views of this passage:

1. Modern liberal theology teaches that salvation depends upon keeping this sermon.
2. Some regard the Sermon on the Mount as **law** rather than as **gospel**. There's an element of truth in that, but it leaves out a lot.
3. Some consider the Sermon on the Mount to be the constitution intended only for the subjects of the Kingdom during the millennial age to come. They say it has no application to Christians today.
4. Others recognize the spiritual truth in the Sermon on the Mount but believe that what it teaches cannot be attained in the present age. They don't understand the meaning of the Sermon on the Mount in its biblical context.

Jesus' own identification of the intended hearers of this sermon is **true disciples**. That's you, if you are truly trusting in Christ.

### I. **The Setting of the Sermon**

#### **The context of the Sermon on the Mount**

1. **In the life of Jesus**, this is near the end of the second year of His ministry—roughly a year and a half before the crucifixion.
2. **In the context in the book of Matthew**. The logical flow of this book helps us interpret the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew set up his book, to show us a theme:

Matthew 3:1–2: *Now in those days John the Baptist \*came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

*Matthew 4:17: From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

***This sermon is Jesus' detailed explanation of "Repent."*** It describes the life of the one who is transformed by the grace of God through faith as part of the act of repenting, turning to Christ and becoming a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. See Colossians 1:13.

3. **The political context of the Sermon on the Mount.** The Jews were looking for a messiah, but their definition of this deliverer to come was a political ruler.

4. **The religious context of the Sermon on the Mount** is also important. There were **four main groups** within Judaism at the time of Jesus.

**The Pharisees** believed happiness was found in keeping legalistic traditions. They were the best-known group of religious conservatives, very open in their public displays of spirituality, and plenty proud of it. The Pharisees dominated the teaching in the synagogues. The apostle Paul was raised as a Pharisee and became a prominent leader of this group before Jesus humbled him and saved him.

**The Sadducees** believed happiness was found in more modern and liberal views of things. They readily updated anything they considered outmoded (like belief in angels or resurrection). This group held a controlling influence on the temple functions.

**The Essenes** believed happiness was found in separation from the world. They literally moved out of town and set up their own communities out in the wilderness where they were the first-century precursors of separationist monks.<sup>1</sup>

**The Zealots** believed happiness was found in political revolution. This was the group that tried to make Jesus their King at the height of His public popularity. One of the 12 disciples was a man called Simon, a former Zealot so well known that the Bible simply refers to him as "Simon the Zealot."

## II. The Hearers of the Sermon (1-2)

*Matthew 5:1–2: 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, . . .*

**Crowds** came to Jesus that day, during the height of His popularity.

**The mountain** is interesting. We don't know for sure which mountain.

Luke explains that **there was a large crowd of His disciples and great throng of people** from all around. Matthew makes it clear that the ones Jesus addressed in this message to follow are the ones who **came most eagerly** to hear Him—**His disciples**. That included the 12 just chosen to be apostles, and all the others who yearned for His words.

The root of the word **disciple** means *learner*. It refers to anyone of any age and any amount of learning. Those who know the Lord never tire of learning from Him.

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<sup>1</sup>It was a community of Essenes during the life of Jesus who lived in a community named Qumran near the Dead Sea. They copied and preserved many religious documents (including copies of OLD TESTAMENT books). When the Romans came through as they conquered Israel around A.D. 70, that group of Essenes hid their most precious scrolls in caves. In 1948, 1878 years later, those scrolls were found—The Dead Sea Scrolls.

Jesus kept the crowd riveted on every word with the majesty and power of what He said.

*Matthew 7:28–29: 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.*

What was so captivating? He simply (5:2) "*opened His mouth and was teaching them.*" He taught them as they had never before been taught. The character of true repentance is such that it profoundly affects your life.

George Lawlor, in his excellent book *The Beatitudes Are For Today* noted how the disciples came to Jesus to hear this sermon. Lawlor wrote:

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 the 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). 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.<sup>2</sup>