

Summary Handout

The Sermon on the Mount: “A More Excellent way”

Lesson

8

Summary

Matthew 5; Jesus preaches the Sermon on the Mount—Its teachings replace and transcend some aspects of the Law of Moses – men are commanded to be perfect like their Father in heaven.

Supplemental Holy Land and Jewish insights: **Beatitudes, Inward or Upward Attitudes?** Most discussions of the “Beatitudes” concentrate on our “attitudes,” looking inward. Let’s examine the Sermon in the light of the Savior saying, “No matter who you are, rich or poor, mournful or happy, popular or persecuted, come unto me and I will give you the Holy Ghost.”

A Peaceful Place: On the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, on a higher elevation overlooking the sea, a higher law was given on the Mount of Beatitudes. Even ancient travelers have written in their journals of the peaceful feeling of this Mount. They have used the expression, “What a place of sweet spirit.” A church designed by the Italian architect Barlucci marks the traditional location. Considering the proximity of this place to other communities nearby where Jesus taught and lived (Capernaum, Chorazim, and Bethsaida), the breathtaking view that inspires, and the feelings travelers have reported throughout the centuries, this is likely the place where Jesus shared His mission with the twelve Apostles.

Leading the Sheep Today: Today, a farm house is there with more than a hundred sheep nearby. The boy shepherd leads them out every morning and returns in the late afternoon. Leading sheep is typical in this country. Usually there are about a dozen lead sheep, older ones from last year’s flock. The shepherd often has them marked with bells around their necks. It is common to hear the boy talk to his sheep. He calls them when it’s time to move on, and that’s when the lead sheep immediately respond, ringing their bells as they run toward their shepherd. The ringing alerts the other sheep, and, like a wave, they follow the others.

Ancient Temple Practice: The shepherd’s model is similar to an ancient biblical temple practice. For example, in the inner courtyard of the temple, the chief priest would light a fire and burn incense to signal his readiness for a sacrifice. That would alert the twelve priests in the next courtyard to wash and ready themselves. Their signal to the congregation was the ringing of bells. The multitudes would then follow the priests to participate in the ritual. In a possible shepherd’s model, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, gives the Sermon on the Mount, apparently to the twelve disciples. In turn, their mission was to teach the multitudes.

A Christian Guideline: The Beatitudes are often interpreted as Christian guidelines. “Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . mournful . . . meek . . . hunger and thirst after righteousness . . . merciful . . . pure in heart . . . peacemakers . . . persecuted for righteousness’ sake.” (*Matthew 5:3-11*) However, there may be more to his intention, for another rendition of this same sermon is recorded as, “Blessed are the poor in spirit who come unto me.” (*3 Nephi 12:3*) In that sense, the Sermon on the Mount is inviting all people, whether rich or poor in spirit, happy or mourning, popular or persecuted, to come unto him. He promised, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” (*Matthew 5:6*) More insight can be gained through the Sermon given in the other Holy Land. Those hungering and thirsting after righteousness would be filled, “. . . with the Holy Ghost.” (*3 Nephi 12:6*)

Law of Moses Fulfilled: Jesus indicated that the Law of Moses was fulfilled in Him. He was restoring a higher law, one that was governed and dictated more by the spirit and intent than by the letter of the law (which was given at Mount Sinai). A better understanding of the Sermon on the Mount comes when comparing it to the sermon and the commandments given on Mount Sinai. “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother . . . shall be in danger of the judgment.” (*Matthew 5:20-22*)

Additional Commandments: A closer look at the Beatitudes reveals that Jesus gave additional commandments. They were based on the original Law of Moses but had deeper spiritual meaning implying that the reason behind keeping the commandments was more the spiritual guideline than the letter of the law. “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old

time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh . . . to lust . . . hath committed adultery . . . already in his heart.” (*Matthew 5:27-28*) Even clearer is the counsel, “. . . Behold, I give unto you a commandment, that ye suffer [allow] none of these things to enter into your Heart.” (*3 Nephi 12:29*)

The old and new laws are again like a chiasmus, with the Savior's ministry and subsequent atonement as the center, the turning point, linking the lesser and higher laws. The following poem came to my mind, illustrating the two principles.

SERMONS ON THE MOUNTS

The law was given, the standard set. But, best was not accepted yet.

We compromised with Heaven's voice, Just ten commandments was our choice.

Tooth for tooth and eye for eye, retribution was the cry.

LESSER LAW

1. No other God -
2. Or image graven -
3. Not in vain, the name of Heaven -
4. Remember Sabbath,
5. Father, Mother -
6. Thou shalt not kill -
7. Nor defile another -
8. Do not steal -
9. Or false word belabor -
10. Do not covet the wealth of neighbor -

But then was promised a covenant new; inwardly, God would speak to you.
With sins forgiven and God revealed, a higher law on us was sealed.

HIGHER LAW

10. Bless your neighbor -
9. Share a kindly word -
8. Give to others -
7. And clean thoughts preferred -
6. No need for anger to hide your smile -
5. Parents, children, walk the second mile -
4. Use the Sabbath, blessings to bestow -
3. The name of God in your good deeds show -
2. Your life will God's true image mirror,
1. As you and He become much nearer.

The secret of God's law is known—when action by intent is shown.

In Heaven's highest throne to stay, Use thought and reason to guide the way.

The highest law is now defined—in thought, in spirit and in the mind.

Chiasmus of the Law, Moses and Pentacost: The Mosaic Law and Jesus' law form a chiasmus around his ministry and atonement. The lesser law that would lead to Him and the higher law to live like Him. Fifty days after Jesus' crucifixion at Passover, the Holy Ghost came upon the congregation in Jerusalem. The Jewish holiday commemorating the giving of the lesser law at Mount Sinai is also celebrated fifty days after Passover. The same day was also used in giving the gift of the Holy Ghost, the higher law—a day called Pentecost. “. . . and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost . . .” (*Acts 2:1-4*)

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