

How to Hear the Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount has been at the heart of the church ever since it was preached, ever since its inception, ever since the really the earliest epistle of James. You can see the themes of the Sermon on the Mount showing up in that letter. New Testament writers return to these themes preached here again and again and again all through the early church life and the early church fathers. The Sermon on the Mount, it really is the life source of the church.

And it shapes the character of all Christians, even non-Christians, whether they're religious leaders, thinkers, philosophers, influential people, cultural icons, political leaders, it seems that even non-Christians are keen to identify themselves with the Sermon on the Mount. There is one author, A.M. Hunter, he attested to the fact when he wrote, "After 1,900 years, the Sermon on the Mount still haunts men. They may praise it as Mahatma Gandhi did, or like Nietzsche, they may curse it. They can't ignore it." It's very true.

One author, Charles Quarles, noted this, he said, quote, "A recent Gallup poll indicated that only one third of adult Americans are familiar enough with the Sermon on the Mount to identify Jesus as its source. Many Americans think that the sermon was a message preached by the evangelist Billy Graham. The sermon is best known in America today as the source of what is one of the most frequently quoted Bible verses, 'Do not judge so that you will not be judged' (Matthew 7:1), a verse that is normally stripped from its context and used to support an exaggerated form of tolerance." End Quote. I have to tell you I have encountered that level of ignorance time and time and time again. And it's not just among unbelievers. Tragically, I find it in the church, as well.

Beloved, this is, this is our birthright as a church. This is our privilege and our joy to know and understand our Lord's teaching. This is our exceedingly deep, profound, ever-increasing joy to read and hear from Jesus Christ himself, the very head of this church, and every true church, to hear his voice so crystal clearly and to learn directly from his lips. John Stott, in his book on the Sermon on the Mount, he quoted

from a 1629 sermon preached by John Dunn to highlight the importance of what he called the “quintessence of the teaching of Jesus.”

The 17th Century poet, John Dunn, who is endowed with a gift for making use of elevated speech, and language, poetry. He had this to say about the Sermon on the Mount, quote, “All the articles of our religion, all the canons of our church, all the injunctions of our princes, all the homilies of our fathers, all the body of divinity is in this one Sermon on the Mount.” Very well said and not overstated at all.

With that in mind, I hope you’re in Luke 6:20 because we are going to read this sermon together in its entirety just to get the full impact. Luke 6:20, “And he,” that is Jesus, “lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: ‘Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and

leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To’ the ‘one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to the one who begs from you, and from the one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

“If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you?

For even sinners to the same. And if you lend to those from who you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

“Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”

“He also told them a parable: ‘Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, “Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,” when you yourself do not see the log that is your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your

own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.

“For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. But the good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

“Why do you call me “Lord, Lord,” and do not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built his house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.”

Life changing stuff, isn't it? I mean even at the superficial level, just reading it, if we actually live that way, what would our church look like? As vital as it is to understand the Sermon on the Mount, as essential as it is to the life and health of the church and every single Christian in it, it is very important we take some time this morning to introduce it properly. We want to be careful that we do not mishear this sermon, that we don't misunderstand it and therefore misapply it.

And for those who are already familiar with this sermon to some degree, we want to make sure that familiarity hasn't bred contempt within our hearts, that we've become dull in our hearing. Jesus said in verse 27, he said, "I say to" whom? "you who hear." "I say to you who hear." So we want to make sure that we are hearing what Jesus is actually saying by listening carefully with eager, informed, open, educated ears. So to ensure we are as careful as we can be about how we listen, we're going to talk about how to hear the Sermon on the Mount. This is going to sort of introduce the whole study, and we're going to start with the purpose.

There are three groups of people who are present on the occasion of the preaching of the Sermon on the Mount. There in verse 17 it says, that "Jesus came down with them," that is, his Apostles that he just appointed. That is the first group, one level of interest in Jesus.

Then it says, "He stood on a level place with a great crowd of his disciples," that's a second group. Some of those disciples are to remain true, but many of them would depart at Jesus' harder sayings. So it's a mixed group, but they're very interested. They're united in their interest of Jesus Christ. But all of them, the Apostles, the disciples, they're among this, as it says there in verse 17, "great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon," and that's the third group. So you see there are believers here mixed with unbelievers. There are people who are curious, but relatively ignorant alongside people who are more informed, interested in Christ on the one hand, perhaps skeptical about Christ on the other hand.

But you see this huge, massive crowd, mixed company, mixed interest, mixed levels of knowledge and understanding and mixed spiritual conditions, as well. But when Jesus lifted up his eyes in verse 20, turning from the immediate physical, temporal needs of the people, healing them, casting out demons, he's giving his attention now to the more profound, spiritual, and eternal needs of the people. When he turned to give his attention and energy, in that regard, to whom did he turn? Who did he teach? It says in verse 20 that his eyes rested on whom? His disciples.

In verse 27, we just acknowledged he was speaking directly to "those who hear." At the same time, though, we recognize, we realize that Jesus chose to teach these disciples of his not in private, but in public. He didn't address them away from the crowds where others couldn't hear. He talked to them and taught them in the midst of the crowds. So he obviously intended all these people to hear his teaching, and yet the text makes very clear he focuses his attention on his disciples. He directed the teaching at them.

In the parallel account in Matthew, which is really an expanded version of this same sermon aimed more at the Jewish

nation, Matthew tells us, there, the very same thing. Matthew 5:1 to 3, Jesus spoke to his disciples in the presence of massive throngs of people. It says there in Matthew 5 that, "Seeing the crowds," Jesus, "went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in Spirit,'" and so on. The fact that Jesus taught his disciples, who were standing in the midst of multitudes, a mixed multitude.

There must have been a handful, a dozen commentators I've read who have been confused about the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount. The fact that there are two accounts, the one here in Luke, the fuller account in Matthew, that's also confused commentators about the purpose of this sermon. So I want to take those questions one at a time and talk about the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount the reasons, really, for the differences between Matthew and Luke.

We're going to start with the second question first, why are there two accounts of the Sermon on the Mount and why do they differ in length and to some degree in flavor, character, content? There are differences, most immediately apparent is the

difference in length. Matthew's account has 107 verses. Luke's account has only 30 verses. Matthew's account emphasizes the mountain, and Luke emphasizes the flat terrain upon which Jesus stood at the base of the mountain. In fact, we call this "The Sermon on the Mount" because of Matthew's longer account. It says, "He went up on the mountain." Matthew is portraying Jesus as being kind of a second Moses. Luke doesn't draw attention to that.

But these two accounts are really the same sermon, preached on the same occasion. Both sermons begin and end in the same way, beginning with the beatitudes and ending with the parable of housebuilding. The subunits of both sermons follow the same order. There is one exception. We've got in Luke's account, here, what is not in Matthew: the woes in contrast to the blessings. But all the rest of Luke's content, content is found in Matthew's account, as well. Also, both sermons are followed closely by the healing of the centurion's servant.

So by many evidences, the two accounts are records of the same sermon. So why the differences in the two accounts? Why wouldn't they just parallel one another exactly? The differences

between Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount and Luke's account of the same sermon, the differences are due to the different purposes that each author had in writing. It's clear even from a once-over superficial reading of Matthew's Gospel that Matthew is writing to his fellow Jews. He's got Jewish vocabulary. He talks about Jewish interests. He's dealing with Jewish sensitivities.

There's an emphasis all throughout Matthew on the fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture. "As it is written," "so it was fulfilled," all the rest. Matthew is keen on pointing all that out to his fellow Jews. All those elements and many more besides reveal clearly that Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience. He wanted his people to know that Jesus was the Messiah in spite the nation's rejection. In spite of the rejection of Israel's key popular, important, respected leadership, Matthew wants his people to understand that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Son of David, the prophesied and promised Messiah of Israel, that Jesus has fulfilled every prophecy written about him in the Law and the Prophets.

Luke understands all that, as well, but his audience is predominantly Gentile. At the very beginning, Luke writes in his prologue, he writes to a man known as “the most excellent Theophilus.” He’s written an orderly account for that man in order that Theophilus may have certainty concerning the things he had been taught. Different purpose. There is a growing resentment and hostility to Jesus by his own people Israel. And that’s partly what signaled Jesus that it was time to appoint the foundation stones of the New Testament church, the Twelve Apostles.

I want you to turn ahead, though, to Luke 7:1. Luke 7:1. Take a look at how that chapter begins. This is right after the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, and Luke records this: “After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. Now a centurion had a servant.” Centurions, you understand, are Roman leaders, Leaders in the Roman army, Roman soldiers. “Centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, and was valued highly by him. When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews asking him to come and heal his servant.”

So Luke has bookended the Sermon on the Mount, bracketing it in by showing Gentile interest before and after in Jesus' ministry. In fact, this account of the healing of the Roman centurion's servant becomes an opportunity to comment on Gentile faith. Jesus said to the crowd following him, look at verse 9 there in Chapter 7, He says, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." Gentile interest in Jesus, you understand, biblically, it's both a rebuke to Israel, because Israel has rejected their own Messiah, but it's also a provocation, a merciful provocation to Israel, that they might repent and embrace Jesus as their Messiah. And Luke here has the same interest as the apostle Paul; makes sense because the two were traveling companions, close friends.

But here is how Paul stated that same concern in Romans 11:13 to 14. Paul said, "Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry." Why Paul? Because you're proud? Because you want to show off? No. "I magnify my ministry," to the Gentiles, "in order that somehow I might make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them." He's trying to get under their skin. Why? Because he's an irritant? It's a merciful gracious irritant that

they might be provoked to salvation. That's Luke's interest as well; drives and directs his purpose here in writing this Gospel. We need to understand that. We need to read the Sermon on the Mount through those eyes.

So Matthew is writing to the Jews predominantly. Obviously, lots of Gentiles pick up the Gospel of Matthew and it makes sense to us, but we need to do a little digging and understanding to get the Jewish history. We go into our Old Testament and understand what was going on, and we read other sources that help inform us of Jewish sensitivities and Jewish interests. So Matthew's Gospel make sense to us, too, as Gentiles. But Luke is writing first and foremost and primarily to Gentiles.

Not to belabor the point, but let me, let me illustrate this for you in another way. Turn back to Matthew's Gospel and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel. There in, in Matthew, it starts in Matthew Chapter 5, occupies three chapters, those 107 verses. We'll come back to Luke's Gospel in a moment and show you some of the Gentile characteristics, but I

want to start with Matthew, Matthew 5:17. We see a Jewish interest in their relation to the Old Testament law.

Look at Matthew 5:17-20, "Jesus says, 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 'For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'"

Interesting word to us Gentiles, isn't it? Don't forsake teaching the commandments of the Old Testament. Don't say, That's the God of the Old Testament and his law; we like the Jesus of the New Testament and his love. His love, which is defined as letting me do whatever I want to do as long as I name his name. No. Go back to the Old Testament, and Jesus will make sense to you. Not only does that section we just read in Matthew

5, not only does it answer a false charge against Jesus, but it allows Jesus to testify about himself to the Jewish nation. He had been accused by the Jewish leadership of utter disregard to the law of Moses.

And in this manifesto-like sermon, Matthew helps to set the record straight by showing who Jesus is, what his sympathies are, what his interests are. That's not as necessary for the Gentile readers. They didn't grow up with the law of Moses. It wasn't in their culture, but absolutely essential to Jewish readers, who had been told all their life, Don't listen to that Jesus. He's an iconoclast who just wants to destroy the law.

Look ahead to the next section, verses 21 through 48, and you notice throughout that section a repetition of a pair of sayings that again show Matthew is writing with a Jewish concern in mind. There are two sayings paired together, and he repeats them over and over. He says, "You have heard it said," "but I say to you." You see that all through this section, verses 21 to 48. Just scan the verses. You can see a set of those sayings in verse 21 to 22 regarding murder and anger. "You have heard it said, or taught to you by your leadership, but I say to you."

Jesus is elevating himself above all the teachers of Israel. It's incredible. We talked about Jesus as being the most humble of all the prophets in the Bible. We're right about that. But notice how that humble man focused all the attention on himself. He did so rightly. That's true humility in him. "You have heard it said," "but I say to you," he said it regarding murder and anger. There's another set in verses 27 and 28 regarding adultery and lust. There's another set in verses 31-32 regarding divorce and adultery. You see another set in verses 33-34 regarding taking elaborate oaths and keeping your word, another set in verses 38-39 on retaliation versus having a heart of generous meekness. The final set there verses 43-44 correcting the hatred for enemies; commanding, instead, love for enemies, just as God demonstrates love toward his enemies.

All those sayings, "You have heard it said," from whom had the Jews heard all of that said? Oh, from their scribes, from their elders, from the religious and political leaders of their nation. Jesus is directly contradicting that teaching, setting it in contrast to God's actual teaching and the heart of his law by saying, "But I say to you." You think you can practice a law

of external observance according to your preferences? No, no, no, I say to you. This goes right to the heart. It goes right to your thoughts, right to your affections, right to your desires, right to your imaginations. I'm meddling with the deepest part of you, Jesus is saying.

Luke Chapter 6. When Jesus preached the sermon originally on this occasion, you have to understand that it included both what's in Matthew and what's in Luke. Those two accounts can be very well harmonized, brought together. When you read them actually in a harmonized way, you can see how incredibly dynamic Jesus' teaching was. As he directed some things to the Jews in the audience and turned and directed other things to the Gentiles in the audience. Brilliant in his teaching!

You can see right off the bat in Luke's presentation of the Beatitudes there in Luke 6:20 to 26. Unlike Matthew's account, Matthew's account excludes promises that refer to the Millennial Kingdom. In Luke's account, he doesn't include all of that, but he does include a series of contrasting woes. Interesting that Matthew doesn't have those. Luke's Beatitudes here confront the Gentiles at the basic level of their affections and the whole

drive and purpose of their life. Poverty versus riches. Hunger versus fullness. Weeping versus laughing. A maligned reputation before others and a celebrated reputation before others.

Then he adds this for the Gentiles who have no background in the blessing and cursings of the Mosaic Law, Luke recounts Jesus' words to them that for every blessing, there is an opposite and corresponding woe, a curse. And that is a warning that they cannot, must not, may not be indifferent to his teaching. You can't just listen and walk away. Jesus will not be ignored by any.

Again, other features as well showing the Gentile elements here. It's not just the fact that Luke doesn't include certain Jewish elements, but he adds elements that pertain to Gentiles and it's distinctly Gentile in that way and that fashion. We'll try to point that out as we go along. I won't cover it all right now.

First of all, you need to know that most of the missing content from Luke's account is found in other places in Luke's

Gospel. I counted 13 separate passages from Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, which are found in other places in Luke. Jesus obviously said similar things in different occasions and different circumstances.

Now, let's talk a little bit about the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount, whether in Matthew or Luke. What is the point? Why did Jesus preach this sermon? Some people see this sermon as evangelistic, that Jesus is preaching the Gospel to the unbelieving crowds. He comes in, he sets the bar impossibly high, and in fact the standard is so high that it's humanly unattainable, and they say that's precisely the point. So they truly guffaw at anybody in our culture who says, Oh, I try to live by the Sermon on the Mount. Yeah, it shows you really don't understand it because the standards are impossibly high.

And they say, that's exactly the point. They want to point out that the law is meant to do that, to put people in despair of their own self-righteousness and religious efforts to reach God. And so they need to be confronted with the high, impossibly high, divinely high standards of the Sermon on the Mount, be crushed that they cannot reach it, humble themselves, throw

themselves upon the mercy of Jesus the preacher, who did attain to this standard and lived it and preached it.

Certainly, that's not entirely wrong to say that that is one thing going on with the Sermon on the Mount. But I'd say it's not really the primary purpose of the sermon maybe a purpose, but it's not the purpose, if that makes sense to you. As we said, Jesus is addressing his disciples, so he was speaking, verse 27, "to those who hear." So this has to do with them primarily and not unbelievers, primarily, even though unbelievers are hit by all of this.

Others see the Sermon on the Mount as addressing a corporate group, corporate interests, not addressing individuals per se, but the corporate group of God's people. Some more radical dispensationalists try to relegate the entire Sermon on the Mount to the Jews and the Jews only, and it's actually to be fulfilled and practiced in the Millennial Kingdom, the thousand-year, the literal thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth. Jesus is the second Moses. He's laying down the ethic for the Kingdom of God, which will not arrive until Jesus returns.

They say while we can grab some points of application, interest from the sermon, some flavor, it's really not for us at this time in the Church Age; it's for later. And I say that is a tragic view to take this away from the church. After all, didn't Jesus just appoint the twelve foundations stones for the church and then teach this?

There are others who also see the sermon in corporate terms, and rather than reviewing this sermon as pertaining only to the Jews, they broaden it out to talk about the people of God and how the church is the new Israel, so they have sort of a blended replacement theology. That, that is to say they believe the church today has replaced Israel, there's no more future for Israel, no more literal future for Israel.

And some have blended that theology, which is amillennial theology, they blend it with a more liberal, even a post-millennial theology that believes that by our work and by our efforts, we are continuing to usher in the kingdom of heaven on earth right now. So that means, in their view, as they read this

sermon, they see Jesus as a social reformer. And his Sermon on the Mount is a manifesto on social justice. They start with, “Blessed are the poor,” and they run away around the world to eradicate the world of hunger. They expand that to eliminating disease, homelessness, joblessness, poverty.

We’re loving our enemies, aiming toward a conflict-free utopia. So we’re running around doing that. We’re showing mercy. We’re showing mercy, judging no one; man’s attempt to bring down the kingdom of heaven to earth by following the morals and ethics of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. All that kind of liberal realized, eschatology, replacement theology, post-millennialism, trying to usher in the kingdom of God on our own, all of that sounded really, really good in like the 18th century, 19th century. Things were going along swimmingly well heading toward the utopic kingdom on earth until two devastating World Wars took all the wind out of the liberal sails. The liberalized view of the Sermon on the Mount just came crashing down even though it does truly live on in many of the social agencies and programs of today’s missions’ agencies. But that’s another sermon for another time. All right?

The best way to see the Sermon on the Mount and its purpose is to see that Jesus is speaking to his disciples. He is speaking to those who hear. This has to do with individuals, and it has to do with the corporate group of individuals like that. He's laying down the heart, the character, the ethical behavior of those who are truly his disciples. This is an ethical treatise that describes those who according to verse 27 "have ears to hear." Why do they have ears to hear? Because the Holy Spirit has regenerated them to new life and to saving faith. They're able to hear, they're able to see, their hearts can respond because the Holy Spirit has done his work.

So does this confront unbelievers? Oh, yeah, it does. Absolutely, it does. Does this set a standard for the believing community as well? Absolutely. It's humanly impossible to attain apart from the power of God's Spirit, it's humanly impossible to attain to this teaching. No doubt about it. Primarily here, Jesus is making a distinction between those who hear and those who do not, those who belong to him and his kingdom and those who do not.

This is what the king of the kingdom wants to tell his subjects according to the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Those words of Jesus are in this Sermon on the Mount. These are the marching orders for the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed.

That is to say this: Unless you see yourself as poor and captive and blind and oppressed and not in your own psychological terms, but in Jesus' terms with the meaning Jesus assigned to poor and captive and blind and oppressed. Unless you see yourself that way, you're going to find that Jesus has nothing for you but warnings of woe. But those who humble themselves, those who acknowledge that they are as Jesus said and according to his meaning that they are poor, imprisoned, blind and under oppression, those are the people who hear their master's voice. Those are the people who follow him, reflecting his heart, manifesting his character and following the ethics of

his behavior. This sermon is for you and blessed are you. So that's the purpose.

Let me say a word about the context. We heard the error from President Carter as he was reluctant to answer the straightforward question, Hey, Jimmy Carter, I deny the Bible. Am I a Christian? Why couldn't he answer that question? It's because his mouth was stopped because he took Jesus' words, Judge not, completely out of context.

There are a lot of statements like that which can be interpreted in contradiction from what Jesus actually intended. Why does that happen? Because we divorce the sayings from their actual context. We read them according to our own heart, our own mind, our own desires, rather than what Jesus actually said. What do you want, your own intent as you read the sermon, or do you want his? For example, "Blessed are the poor," "Woe to you who are rich." Those two sayings have become aphorisms of the modern liberalized version of social justice; that say there's virtue in all poverty and vice in all wealth. That's simply not true. Was Abraham wealthy? Absolutely he was.

Before you throw stones at me as a prosperity preacher, I am not; I'm just saying that wealth in and of itself is not a sin. The proverbs are filled with truisms that point to the general fact of prosperity, even financial prosperity and even physical health for those who are diligent in working hard, in living wisely. By contrast, poverty, bad health, all of that is a common condition of the fool in Proverbs. That's not prosperity preaching. That's the difference between wisdom and folly. The Bible is full of that.

Another example: When we take the sayings like, "Love your enemies," and "Turn the other cheek," we take those sayings out of context, they become support for a biblically unjustified pacificism. There is no warrant for letting the bad guys win, okay? There's no warrant for allowing sinners to set the agenda and letting the violent oppress the weak. That is the most profound form of injustice. 1 Peter, Romans 13, both of those talk about the blessing of God in law enforcement and military. That is a grace of God. But those sentiments, like that of pacificism, divorce completely, from the true spirit Jesus talks about here of loving concern for people.

Back to the most famously misunderstood saying, “Judge not.” That doesn’t mean make no judgments whatsoever, or don’t ever confront somebody’s sin, especially mine. Don’t ever call someone’s lifestyle into question. That’s just judging and hate mongering. You Christians! If that’s the case, if we’re to read it that way, we get a confusing mess on our hands when Jesus commands at the very end of that paragraph, “First take the log out of your eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother’s eye.” Removing specks from eyes is the very spirit and heart of showing mercy, as our father in heaven shows mercy and loving us, as our father, loving others, as our father has loved us by removing logs, specks and impalements from our bodies.

Listen, in biblical interpretation, as with the interpretation of any text, context is king. You have to interpret the text in its context. As they say, to interpret the text apart from its context, that’s a pretext for a subtext. That is to say, you’ve got an agenda, don’t you, and you want to find a Bible verse to push it forward. The only agenda we care about is the one Christ has. So we’re going to consider the

context around what he said to understand his words, get his meaning and discover his intent. That's the only intent I care about.

Here's another point about how to hear the Sermon on the Mount. Remember the themes of the sermon, remember the themes of the sermon. This sermon here is about calling believers to walk according to the pattern set by Jesus Christ, to follow the pattern of his heart, his character, his ethical behavior. And along the way, we're going to hear and interpret his words accurately if we're mindful of all these themes.

First of all, notice the blessings he pronounces on the poor and the hungry and the sorrowful and the hated in this world, why are they all that? Because of their allegiance to the Son of Man. Because they belong to the Son of Man. The heart and the character and the ethical ideals Jesus describes here, they are infinitely high, and we cannot attain them on our own. But set in the context of his pronouncement of blessing upon us, any failures on our part to live perfectly like this, loving our enemies, showing mercy as Jesus did, you know what? We're not

overcome by our failures. Do you know why? All our failures become an opportunity for us to give thanks.

We praise him because he's forgiven us of all our failures to attain to this. Only people who attain to this perfection enter heaven. Does this include you and me? Yes, it does because we belong to the Son of Man, because we're found in him, because we're united to him.

So our failures in this regard are opportunities for us to give thanks for the Son of Man who has forgiven us. We're grateful to God for showing love and mercy to us. We magnify the glory of Jesus Christ because he lived perfectly according to the ideals he laid forth in this sermon. In other words, I could say without qualification that Jesus is the only preacher I know who practiced perfectly every single word that he preached. And because he did, I am forever saved, forever secure. He will hold me fast, indeed. Being mindful of that theme of the Sermon on the Mount will lead us, rather than to despair and hopelessness, it will lead us to blessing, happiness, joy. That's what Jesus intended to promote in his people, those who hear his words.

Two other prominent themes, I'll just mention briefly. And they really do occupy the bulk of the text in the Sermon on the Mount in Luke's Gospel. The theme of love on the one hand and mercy on the other. They're both tied together, love and mercy. And as we see, Jesus is going to introduce to us a radical, extremely countercultural application of these divine attributes of love and mercy in our lives.

I mean, I don't know if you've felt it when we read through it, but "lend to people expecting nothing in return"? Umm, isn't that what we call a gift? Uh-huh. It doesn't exclude all lending and borrowing. Just want to be clear. But look, by radical, by radical I don't mean foolish. There is a foolish and stupid way to apply what Jesus says here. But that would be based on a superficial reading of the text, and I'm telling you, we're not going to do that together. We're not going to do that. We're not going to distort what Jesus actually meant by what he said. We're going to learn to engage in the radical application of the love and mercy of God though, which is a love and mercy that's never divorced from his truth and his wisdom. We're going to bring those things together and understand them together.

Okay, there's a final theme, and this theme has to do with our obedience. Our Obedience: It's a major theme in the Sermon on the Mount. Those who hear, those who obey, those who put into practice. And let me use that theme to segue into our final point. You're going to hear the Sermon on the Mount well; you're going to hear it accurately, you're going to hear it truly if you're mindful always to apply the teaching of the sermon. Apply the teaching of the sermon. If you set about in this study to just be intellectually stimulated, well you've heard your fill; you might as well just depart, because Jesus does not want just people who hear. He wants people who hear and obey. It doesn't do any good to just hear this sermon, if it doesn't change your life.

Beloved, you'll know you belong to him if the words of Jesus Christ cause good fruit to grow in your life. No good fruit, no life. But there's fruit though, there's life, and where there's life and fruit, there's assurance of salvation. If you have no fruit, if your life looks exactly like the world around you, don't be assured, be afraid. Look at the woes.

But I want you to look, for right now, at applying this. Look at verses 43 to 45. Jesus said, "For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good; the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."

Again, the presence of fruit in our lives, genuine, Holy Spirit-generated fruit, that is the clear indication that we belong to Jesus Christ. But if our lives are producing nothing but brambles and thorns with not even a solitary, shriveled-up grape to be found on our vine, listen, there is only one way to apply the teaching of the sermon, repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, and you will join the rest of us in a learning. Jesus ends the sermon with a warning to heed the teaching, which is meant to warn the unbeliever and provoke the believer to obedience.

Look at verse 46. "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and you do not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my

words and does them, I will show you what he is like: He's like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears, ' my words, 'and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.'"

Listen, if you have a tendency, just looking at your life honestly, if you have a tendency to sit back, relax, rest on your laurels, my friend, do not do that. Don't do that. This warning is for you. Whatever you think you may have done in your past, good or bad, but especially whatever credit you think is in your ledger in your past, however much you think you've given or done or practiced or taught or whatever, however self-assured you may feel, what counts is the current condition of your obedience to Jesus Christ.

What does that look like? Are you hearing and walking away? Or are you hearing and obeying? Make no mistake, do not underestimate the severity, verse 49, of the ruin of that house.

PILLAR OF —TRUTH—



Jesus said it will be great, and if anything, that is an understatement. That word, great ruin, is unpacked in other places in Luke, we'll get to.

But for those who are the blessed ones, those whose ears are open to hear, blessed are you, indeed. You're known by Christ because he sees your obedience. You're striving to share his heart, to conform to his character, to walk in obedience to his ethical behavior, and your Master's words are words of comfort. When the floods of judgment rise, when the stream of God's judgment breaks forth, breaks out, you know what? Your house is going to stand firm. Why? Because it's built on the rock of faith and obedience, anchored into the character of God himself.

Folks, I hope you sense the gravity of this study that we're embarking on. Our church, make no mistake, it's going to change as a result of hearing this teaching from Jesus. We're going to change. And those who are in our midst and refuse to change, they may stick around for their entire lifetime, who knows? But if they never change, they're going to be swept away

in the judgment Jesus talks about here. There's nothing we can do about that.

For ourselves, though, we need to be wary, we need to be wary of the enemy's intent to distract us from this powerful, penetrating teaching of Jesus Christ. If you're a sensitive person, put on a helmet, wear some body armor; you'll be okay. We'll get through it together, make sure you're prayed up, make sure you've repented of your sins, you've reconciled any offense you've had with a brother or sister. Be ready to listen, to concentrate, to learn. Beloved, this has nothing to do with me. It has everything to do with what our Lord and Savior wants us to hear. We dare not stand in his way. Amen!