

Matthew

The Sermon on the Mount is undoubtedly the world's most popular, time-enduring, and influential monologue ever to be uttered by the lips of man. It is our privilege to have access to it so readily in the synoptic Gospels (Small portions of the sermon are contained in Mark's Gospel.). In this overview, it is to the Gospel of Matthew that attention will be applied. Matthew is an excellent choice in pondering the Sermon on the Mount, for it is the most thorough of the ancient accounts concerning the sermon. The text, stretching from the fifth chapter through the seventh, will be divided into 3 segments: 1) man's relationship to man, 2) man's relationship to God, and 3) discernment and wisdom.

Before beginning on the first segment, man's relationship to man, a note concerning the Beatitudes is warranted. Because the content of the Beatitudes encompass all three of the segments to be covered, it will not receive individual consideration. Of course, this is not meant to diminish their importance; they are among the most meaningful and eloquent words ever spoken. They would also deserve great attention in the area of homiletics, for they are the introduction to the world's greatest sermon delivered by the world's greatest sermonizer. Now then, the first segment (5: 13 to 6: 15) begins the body of the sermon. Topics discussed include influence upon the world, conflict resolution, divorce, non-aggression, charities, and forgiveness. One primary theme that runs through the entire segment is selflessness. It pervades each and every fiber, and every syllable spoken resonates with its humble beauty. Truly, the life that is lived for others before self is key to the Christian life. One cannot accurately call himself a disciple of Christ unless this heavenly virtue is his own, and forever increasing. The principles preached in segment one are powerful yet palatable. They are from heaven but tailored for earth. They are from the Son of God but directed to the sons of men.

Segment two (6: 16 to 6: 34) covers man's relationship with God. These scriptures direct those who would see God's face to practice fasting, stewardship, and faith from a pure motive. Only then does God reward the doer of such deeds. This focus on God himself, that God himself is the end to our means, marks a distinctive break from other religions. They do that they may get. They meditate, pray, fast, trek, and beat their bodies—all to become more holy in the eyes of men. But Matthew dispels these petty ways. We do, not that we may get but, rather, we do because it is in line with God's character. We do what we do for God alone, expecting to be rewarded by God alone. This main principle in Christian living translates perfectly into a daily trusting faith (6: 25-34). For Jesus promises, "...seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Matthew 6: 33). God is our all in all. Such should be the dependent relationship of man to God.

Discernment and wisdom find their emphasis in segment three (7: 1 to 7: 27). Judging and judgment, perseverance in prayer, the narrowness of eternal life, the broadness of eternal death, good works and good foundations are all brought to the homiletic surface. These pillars of Christian living are among the most widely known. Excerpts such as, "Judge not, that you be not judged" and "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you shall find; knock and it will be opened to you" (7: 1 & 7: 7) can be found in the memory banks of nearly every garden-variety pagan and Bible scoffer. Of course, the full benefit of these verses is not known to such rebels, but only to the child of God. They become our maxims and mottos and core curriculum in times of hardship. We learn them at a young age yet they never get old or dusty. They challenge us to live according to their immutable instruction. They are the wisdom and discernment of our Christ!

The Sermon on the Mount is a fitting name for such a powerful discourse, for it is the pinnacle of Christian principles. It captures the gaze of carnal eyes and thrusts it upward for a glimpse of God's will. Jesus' words were revolutionary 2,000 years ago and they are revolutionary today. Their selflessness, faith and wisdom are so contrary to human nature that one must die to follow its admonitions. And this is the will of God: that we die to ourselves and live anew in the power of Christ. Truly, the Sermon on the Mount is not just a collection of children's bedtime morals but, rather, the highest of peaks daunting even to the most skilled climbers. Very well then, by the grace of God, let us climb.