

# “THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

## The Sermon on the Mount

By Keith Sharp

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7) is the most famous, profound, and admired but least practiced sermon ever preached. The authority of the preacher is absolute (Matt. 7:28-29; cf. 28:18). The moral goal of this discourse soars to the heavens to God-like perfection (Matt. 5:48). Yet the lessons are eminently practical, meant to be obeyed (Matt. 7:24-27). The reward for obedience is entrance into the kingdom of heaven, both here (Matt. 5:19-20) and hereafter (Matt. 7:21-23).

The time was during Jesus' first preaching tour of Galilee about a year into His ministry on earth. The theme of his message was the good news of the approaching kingdom of God (Matt. 4:23; cf. Mark 1:14-15). His fame had spread throughout the region in and around Palestine as the result of His preaching and miracles, and huge crowds thronged Him from throughout this large area (Matt. 4:23-25). It seems He first preached a shorter, similar lesson to His disciples in the hearing of the throng (Luke 6:17-49) and then withdrew to the mountain with His disciples alone to speak more fully and plainly (Matt. 5:1).

He then took two steps to insure the perpetuation of His work in the then soon to come kingdom of heaven. After spending all night in prayer to God, He selected twelve messengers who would first take the announcement of the eminent kingdom to all Israel and later take the message of salvation through Christ to the whole world (Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16; Matthew chapter 10; 28:18-20; Mark 16:14-20; Luke 24:46-49). Then He delivered to His disciples the laws which would govern citizenship in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:3, 10, 19, 20; 6:10, 13, 33; 7:21). Those principles constitute the Sermon on the Mount.

Thus, the Sermon on the Mount is the announcement ahead of time of the rules governing citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. In the words of Foy E. Wallace, Jr., they are “Pentecost Pointers.” Though, because the sermon was preached while the Law was still in force, many of its illustrations pertain to the Mosaic covenant (e.g., Matt. 5:23), its principles apply to the New Testament age. In fact, in much of the sermon the Lord specifically replaces Mosaic legislation with His own (Matt. 5:21-48). As the kingdom of heaven Jesus promised is the rule of God through His Son in the hearts of His people, the church (Luke 17:20-21; Heb. 1:1-2; Matt. 16:18-19) and is spiritual in nature (John 18:36; Rom. 14:17), these laws pertain to the character of kingdom citizens. To enter the kingdom, one must be righteous (Matt. 5:20). The precepts of the kingdom lead its citizens to perfect character (Matthew 5:48). Seeking that kingdom first (Matt. 6:33) and obeying its precepts lead one to the final kingdom of heaven, the blissful abode with God (Matt. 7:21-23).

Even Matthew's introduction (Matt. 5:1-2) portrayed to his Jewish readers the gravity of the discourse. According to William Barclay, a rabbi would sit to deliver a formal, official announcement of His teaching. Barclay also observes that the clause, “*Then He opened His mouth,*” was used in Greek to describe a solemn declaration that revealed that which was closest to one's heart.

In the discourse, the Master first revealed the righteous character of citizens of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:3-12). Then He showed the relationship which kingdom citizens sustain to the unrighteous world (Matt. 5:13-16). Next He presented an overview of the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven, thus setting the theme of the discourse, by contrasting it with both that of the law of Moses and that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:17-20). Afterward He gave a more detailed contrast in six points of difference (Matt. 5:21-48). Next He contrasted the righteousness of the kingdom with hypocrisy (Matt. 6:1-18), then with materialism (Matt. 6:19-34). Finally the Lord revealed how to obtain the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 7:7-27).

The Master was not simply giving a correct interpretation of the Law of Moses in Matthew 5:21-48. The most critical point in which this is true is Matthew 5:31-32. Matthew 5:31 is a reference to Deuteronomy 24:1-4, the Mosaic regulation of divorce. A man could divorce his wife for any **“uncleanness”** (**“indecentcy”** - NASB, ESV), and the put away woman could then remarry. But Christ teaches that anyone who marries a woman who has been put away is committing adultery (verse 32).

Thus, while the Law of Moses contained the strictest moral code the world had known before Christ, the Lord Jesus raised the bar, instituting an even stricter moral standard, the standard of the kingdom of heaven. Moses had made allowances for the hardness of Israel’s hearts; Christ makes none (Matt. 19:3-9). Thus, those who followed this higher standard during the earthly ministry of the Lord would certainly not violate the standard of Moses.

The authority with which the Master spoke amazed the people (Matt. 7:28-29). The scribes who taught the people would preface their teaching with Rabbi so and so has said (cf. Matt. 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). Their authority was based on a combination of the written Law and oral tradition from the fathers. The prophets of old demanded a hearing by announcing, **“Thus says the Lord”** (a phrase found in 431 Old Testament verses). Jesus simply announced, **“I say to you”** (Matt. 5:18, 20, 22, 26, 28, 32, 34, 44; 6:2, 5, 16, 25, 29). He could do this because, as the Son of God, He was God’s authorized spokesman (Heb. 1:1-2), the Prophet (Acts 3:22-26) and Apostle (Heb. 3:1) of God, and has been given all authority to speak for God (Matt. 11:27; 28:18).

In the Sermon on the Mount the Son of God revealed the principles of righteousness we must possess and live by to enter His kingdom now and to inherit it in the hereafter. These principles were not a correct explanation of Moses but an entirely new, much higher standard of righteousness, one which reflects the very moral nature of God. The wise will hear and obey; the foolish will not (Matt. 7:24-27). Is your life built on the unshakeable Rock or on shifting sand? ■

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## What About Church Sponsored Activities For Young People?

By Keith Sharp

I do not question the fact that young people – and older folks, too – need some innocent recreation. When our children were young, I helped coach ball teams; worked as a scout leader; and took them fishing, hunting, camping, etc. My wife and I had parties, picnics, and outings for them. We did this, as parents, in meeting the needs of growing children (Luke 2:52; Eph.6:4). But parents cannot shove their parental responsibilities off on the church, nor can the church assume these obligations. We have individual, family obligations that are not the business of the local congregation (1 Tim.5:16).

A couple I once studied with complained that the church had nothing for their young people. I named the Bible classes that were available to them. Then they ‘let the cat out of the bag’ – there were no recreational activities provided by the church. When I asked what they were doing to provide recreation for their own children, they became angry.

We live in a selfish, “me first” society in which parents want to push their responsibilities to their children off on the government, the schools, and the church. It is time we refused to encourage this sinful behavior and taught parents to provide for their own (1 Tim. 5:8). At issue is the nature, mission and work of the church. It is clear that God has not designed, planned or authorized the local church to provide social and recreational activities. ■

Service Times — Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM — Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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