

Sermon on the Mount Background

- ◆ It has been a few weeks since the lesson focused on Matthew. Today, we return to Matthew for the Sermon on the Mount.
- ◆ What happened in Matthew chapter 4?
 - a) The temptation of Christ in the wilderness (Matt 4:1-11).
 - b) The calling of Peter, Andrew, James and John (Matt 4:12-18).
 - c) The beginning of Jesus public ministry in Galilee (Matt 4:23-25). He preaches in the synagogues, heals the sick, and His fame spread throughout all of Syria.
- ◆ The Sermon on the Mount is the first of five discourses in the gospel of Matthew: Matt 5-7, 10, 13, 18, and 23-25.
- ◆ Apparently, Augustine was the first one to call (or at least has the first surviving reference of calling) the discourse from Matthew 5-7 the Sermon on the Mount.¹

The Structure of Matthew

- ◆ Let's take a closer look at the structure of Matthew, and how the discourses (including the Sermon on the Mount) are linked together. I think the following table is helpful:

The Structure of the Gospel of Matthew²

Chapter	Type	Summary
1-4	Narrative	Jesus is introduced
5-7	Discourse	SM: Jesus' demands on Israel
8-9	Narrative	Jesus' deeds within and for Israel
10	Discourse	Extension of ministry through words and deeds of others
11-12	Narrative	Negative response
13	Discourse	Explanation of the negative response
14-17	Narrative	Founding of the new community
18	Discourse	Instructions to the new community
19-22	Narrative	Commencement of the atonement narrative
23-25	Discourse	The future: judgment and salvation
26-28	Narrative	Conclusion: The atonement, crucifixion, and resurrection

¹Metzger, Bruce M. (Editor) and Michael David Coogan (Editor), 1993, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, Oxford University Press, 678-689.

²The is table is adapted from, Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 847.

- ◆ This, of course, is not even necessarily the best way to represent the structure of the gospel of Matthew. However, I do think it is a useful way to think about the structure. It allows us to see pretty clearly the importance of extended discourses like the Sermon on the Mount in the gospel of the Matthew. It also nicely brings to our attention the alternating patten between narrative and discourse, and how each leads, follows, and reinforces each other.

The Structure of the Sermon

- ◆ The Sermon on the Mount covers all of chapters 5 to 7. Thus, today we are only covering the first part of the sermon. Next, week we will finish the sermon.
- ◆ Luke 6:17-38 contains a sermon (often called the Sermon on the Plain) with a significant amount of overlap with the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Plain is much shorter.
- ◆ The sermon is symmetrical (it's doesn't seem like a chiasmus to me, but it does have some symmetry):

A Introduction (4:23-5:1)

B Blessings (5:2-12)

M The better way (5:17-48)

M The better way and almsgiving, prayer, and fasting (6:1-18)

M The better way and the treatment of possessions and enemies (6:19-7:12)

B' Warnings (7:13-27).

A' Conclusion (7:28-8:1).

- ◆ Actually, there seems to be a lot of symmetry in the sermon on the mount.

Ascending the Mountain

- ◆ Read Matthew 4:23-5:1:

(23) And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. (24) And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. (25) And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan. (1) And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

- ◆ Note: Jesus sits down to actually teach. This is the typical Jewish position for teaching. In fact, we saw this very thing in Luke 4:16-21 when Jesus teaches in the synagogue and declares He is the Messiah. He stands to read the scripture and then sits to teach.

- ◆ *Why does Jesus go up to the mountain? Is he leaving or trying to escape from the crowds to give a private sermon to his disciples or something else?*
- ◆ I don't think we can really tell from the introduction alone, but the conclusion is very clear that the crowd definitely heard the sermon.
- ◆ Let's read the conclusion of the sermon. Read 7:28-8:1:

(28) And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: (29) For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. (1) When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.
- ◆ *The crowd clearly heard the sermon. If it wasn't to withdraw, then why did he go up into a mountain?*
- ◆ *Why does Matthew single out the disciples? Why not just mention that Jesus was speaking to a great multitude? Does this tell us something about the purpose of the sermon?*
- ◆ I think Matthew is trying to make clear that the community of believers or the followers of Christ are the real audience for this discourse. The crowd is important; I think the crowds' reaction is particularly important, but the address really seems to be focused on the fledgling Christian community. I also think this points to the fact that the sermon is more than just good advice. It has an important Christological message.
- ◆ *Does this situation remind you of any other situations in scripture?*
 - The Moses imagery is pretty strong here. Moses gets the law on a mountain and Jesus delivers the law on the mountain. Remember, this is an important theme for Matthew. He consistently uses imagery that reminds us that Jesus is a new Moses.
 - To some degree it reminds me a little of King Benjamin's sermon in the first few chapters of Mosiah. Both had to scale heights to deliver a sermon to a great multitude. Both times the crowds were amazed by the teachings.

The Beatitudes

- ◆ Read Matthew 5:2-12:

(2) And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

(3) Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

(4) Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

(5) Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

(6) Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

(7) Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

(8) Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

(9) Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

(10) Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

(11) Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. (12) Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

◆ **Blessed**

- Blessed is a translation of the Greek word, *makarios*. It can also mean happy. “In Greek literature, it was used to describe the happy state in which the gods lived.”³

◆ **The Purpose of the Beatitudes?**

- *What do you think is the purpose of the Beatitudes?*
 - a) *Are beatitudes a list of characteristics of people or members of the covenant? Is it a list of the current hardships of many in the community and a promise of future blessings and deliverance (eschatological blessings)? Are they imposed characteristics as opposed to desired characteristics?*
 - b) *Do they represent qualities or attributes that we as disciples or followers of Christ should seek after? Are they the ideal characteristics of the Christian community?*
 - c) *Something else entirely?*
- *How do you see the blessings? Are the promised blessings the same in each case? Are the promised blessings different?*

◆ **Isaiah 61:1-4, Again**

- Let's just read the first two verses: Read 61:1-2:
 - (1) The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me;
because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek;
he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;
 - (2) To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all that mourn;
- *Do you see a parallel between these verses in Isaiah and the beatitudes?*
- Well it certainly seems like there is an overlap with the first few beatitudes. Here are the ones that occur to me:
 - a) Poor in spirit vs probably meek (The LXX has “poor” I think)
 - b) Mourn and comforted vs brokenhearted and mourn and comforted
 - c) meek and inherit the earth vs meek and good tidings

³Jim Faulconer, 2007, <http://feastuponthewordblog.org/2007/02/20/103/>.

- *Given these parallels, is Jesus proclaiming more than blessings to the downtrodden or to those who follow and come unto Him?*
 - He is also proclaiming His Messiah-ship; He is doing the things that Isaiah says the “Anointed one” (Messiah) should/will do.
- ◆ **Structure or Themes**
- *Is there an obvious structure to the sermon on the Mount? do you see groupings or themes?*
 - Often a 3x3 grouping is suggested. Groupings of three are used throughout the Sermon on the Mount so it does make some sense. A grouping of two is also sometimes suggested.
- ◆ **Beatitude 1: Poor in Spirit**
- *What does it mean to be poor in spirit? What are the possibilities? How would you describe the relationship with or the understanding of God in each one?*
 - *Does humility come to mind (notice the footnote in the LDS edition of the scriptures for this verse)? If “poor in spirit” is related to humility, then how is it related to third beatitude, meekness?*
 - *Could poor in spirit refer to forced or compelled humility?*
 - *How about the recognition or need for divine help or grace?*
- ◆ **Beatitude 2: Mourn**
- *What is meant by those who mourn? Might it have more than one group in mind?*
 - It is hard for me not to think of Revelation 21:3-4:

(3) And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. (4) And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.
 - It seems like a eschatological blessing for sure, but I also wonder if there is more to it than that.
 - Read Joel 2:12:

(12) Therefore also now, saith the LORD,
turn ye even to me with all your heart,
and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning:
(13) And rend your heart, and not your garments,
and turn unto the LORD your God:
for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness,
and repenteth him of the evil.
 - Read Isaiah 57:17-18

(17) For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth,
and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth,
and he went on forwardly in the way of his heart.

(18) I have seen his ways, and will heal him:

I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners.

- The NRSV is a little bit clearer here:

(17) Because of their wicked covetousness I was angry;

I struck them, I hid and was angry;

but they kept turning back to their own ways.

(18) I have seen their ways, but I will heal them;

I will lead them and repay them with comfort,

creating for their mourners the fruit of the lips.

- *Do these verses give us insight into the connotations of mourning to Matthew's original audience or first century Jews?*

◆ **Beatitude 3: Meek**

- The beatitude seems to be derived from Psalm 37:11.

(11) But the meek shall inherit the earth;

and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

- This Psalm describes a man (representing all men and woman) in a lot of detail. He gets called meek in verse 12, but we also get a lot of insight into his attributes. The entire Psalm is worth reading, but let's get some insight into the man described in by the Psalm. Read Psalm 37:39-40:

(39) But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD:

he is their strength in the time of trouble.

(40) And the LORD shall help them, and deliver them:

shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them,

because they trust in him.

- *Does this give us any insight into what it means to be meek? Or at least what characteristics being meek is correlated with?*
- The underlying Greek does not have the connotations of submissive or inconsequential, but it suggests an awareness "of one's proper position in the kingdom."⁴

◆ **A Progression?**

- *Do you see a connection between the beatitudes? Do you think they reflect a common theme or maybe even a progression? Particularly, among the first three or four beatitudes?*
- *Is there a progression between the first three or four or even more? Could it be that, poor in spirit → mourning → meek → hunger and thirst after righteousness?*
- *How would you describe one's relationship with God in each of these beatitudes?*

◆ **Beatitude 6: Pure in Heart**

⁴Coogan, Michael D. (Editor), 2001, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Oxford University Press, 13.

- *Think about what it means to be “pure in heart?” What concepts does it get associated with in LDS doctrine?*
- *Now try not to associate the phrase with LDS doctrine or theology? What does it mean? What kind of images does the phrase evoke?*