

The Structure of the Sermon

- ◆ The Sermon on the Mount covers all of chapters 5 to 7. Last week we covered chapter 5 and this week we will cover chapters 6 and 7.
- ◆ The sermon is symmetrical (it's doesn't seem like a chiasmus to me, but it does have a lot 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).

- ◆ The sermon is very orderly, and when we do not see order the likely cause is that we are missing it.¹

How do You Feel?

- ◆ The Sermon on the Mount is wonderful in many ways. I think it is definitely worth reflecting on how the sermon has affected your life at different times. For example,
 - *What role has it played in your spiritual life?*
 - *How has it shaped or affected your understanding of the gospel?*
- ◆ I think we could devote a whole lesson to the preceding questions, but today I want to come at it from the opposite direction.
 - *Are there parts of the sermon that seem foreign to you?*
 - *Are there parts that you just don't feel like you understand or parts that seem obscure?*
 - *Do parts of the sermon not seem to fit together?*
 - *Are there any parts of the sermon that trouble you?*
- ◆ Maybe we can figure a few of these puzzles out.

How I Have Felt

¹Stassen, Glen H., 2003, The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 267-308.

- ◆ First, let me just mention that I think the Sermon on the Mount is wonderful.
- ◆ However, like virtually all passages in the scriptures, there are many things that I don't feel like I understand now and even more things that I have misunderstood previously.
- ◆ Let me mention a few things that have troubled me or I have not understood very well:
 - So much of sermon seems to focus on hard discipleship, negative prohibitions, or ideals that I can't possibly live up to.
 - There seems to be tension between the wonderful theme of deliverance and grace in the Beatitudes and the hard discipleship and high ideals of the later part of the sermon.
 - What does Matthew 7:6 mean?
 - (6) Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.
 - ◆ What is the context for this verse? Is it supposed to stand by itself?
 - ◆ Is it connected to the first five verses of the chapter? It seems like an odd contrast to the first five verses after we are commanded not to judge?
 - ◆ Is it connected to verses 7-12 and the golden rule?
- ◆ All of my concerns above are/where real, but I also think they are/were misguided. The first two concerns listed above are based I think on a misreading or a misunderstanding of the text.
- ◆ To understand why they are based on a misunderstanding of text we need to take a closer look at the structure of the individual pericopes.

The Triads of the Sermon on the Mount²

- ◆ A structure that shows up a lot in Matthew is a triad. I think it is useful to notice that the parts of the sermon are comprised of an underlying triadic structure. I think it allows us to see some important themes and the links and symmetry of the overall sermon. This doesn't mean this structure describes everything perfectly, but I have found it quite useful.
- ◆ Let's read the first triad: Matthew 5:21-26
 - (21) 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: (22) But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. (23) Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; (24) Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. (25) Agree with

²Stassen, Glen H., 2003, The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 267-308. I really like Stassen's article; it really helped me see some important themes that I was missing when I read the Sermon on the Mount: grace and deliverance.

thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. (26) Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

◆ Note: Raca is basically an untranslated Greek word. Strong's Greek lexicon has the following for the Greek word, Rhaka:

- empty, i.e. a senseless, empty headed man
- a term of reproach used among the Jews in the time of Christ

◆ **Imperatives**

● *Looking through these verses what kind of imperative statements (gives and command or makes a request) does Jesus make? I am looking for the explicit imperatives (in a grammatical sense).*

- ◆ The first sentence contains the imperative that “thou shalt not kill.” Of course, Jesus is quoting or summarizing the traditional teaching on murder from Exodus 20:13.
- ◆ Verses 23 through 26 are loaded with imperatives:
 1. Leave your gift,
 2. go thy way,
 3. be reconciled to thy brother,
 4. and agree with thine adversary.

Stassen points that there are 5 imperatives in the Greek.³

- *Which of the statements are actually just declarative?*
- Strangely, this includes the statements involving becoming angry and the use of insults. There is no explicit imperative to not get angry. In other words, Jesus does not make it a command not to get angry. There are also no imperatives in the underlying Greek;⁴ So I don't think we can chock this up to a translation problem.
- *What can we learn from the use or placement of the imperative? What does the structure of the imperative and declarative sentences tell us about the focus of the passage?*
- *Why is there no command to not get angry? What is the role of angry and insults here?*
- *Why are there so many commands or imperatives in verse 23-26? What does this tells us about the Savior's point here? What is He trying to emphasize?*
- *Let's think of these verses as three sections: verse 21, verse 22, and verses 23-26. How would you summarize each section? How are the sections related to each other?*

◆ **The Triadic Structure⁵**

1. **Traditional teaching** on murder

- a) You have heard of old that it was said,

³Stassen, Glen H., 2003, The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 267-308.

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⁵Stassen, Glen H., 2003, The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 267-308.

- b) you shall not kill;
 - c) and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.
2. Jesus' teaching on the *vicious cycle* that leads to murder/judgment
 - a) being angry → you shall be liable to judgment
 - b) uttering insults → you shall be liable to the council
 - c) uttering you fool → you shall be liable to hell
 3. Jesus' teaching on *transforming initiatives* that deliver us from the vicious cycle
 - a) If you remember someone has something against you, go be reconciled
 - b) Make peace with your accuser if going to court.
 - c) Explanation: otherwise you shall be liable for judgment.
- ◆ I really like seeing the sermon this way. Maybe this was already obvious to most people, but for me it changes the focus to that of deliverance and grace. The focus of sermon is not on high ideals and difficult discipleship, but about transforming grace that allows us to come closer to these high ideals.
 - ◆ This triadic structure continues throughout the sermon and I think can give us some insight into other maybe more perplexing parts.
 - ◆ We can summarize the structure of the pericopes or individual units in the main body of the sermon (Matthew 5:21-7:12) as the following:
 1. *Traditional teaching*
 2. *Vicious cycle*
 3. *Transforming initiatives*

Dogs and Pigs

- ◆ Read Matthew 7:6-12:

(6) Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you. (7) Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: (8) For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. (9) Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? (10) Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? (11) If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? (12) Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.
- ◆ If verse 6 is connected with verses 7-12, then it must be the beginning of a new triad.
 - *Do you see a grouping of imperatives or something you could call a transforming initiative?*

- *How about deliverance? Do you see a deliverance theme?*
- Ask, seek, and knock. *Are asking, seeking, and knocking, what are we supposed to give to the Lord (as opposed to the the giving them to the dogs and pigs)?*
- The point seems to be that we need to seek the Lord. We need to put our trust in him. Give him your prayers, your trust, and your loyalty because,
 - what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?
 - (10)** Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? **(11)** If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?
- *Can you see a vicious cycle?*
- It seems like the vicious cycle is expressed metaphorically; there is a cycle of having holy things trampled by dogs and pigs.
- Note the phrase “trampled under foot” is used earlier in the Sermon on the Mount. Read 5:13:
 - 13** Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.
- *What kind of people will get trampled under foot?*
- Those who do not trust in the Lord. Who aren't part of His community. Those who have lost there identity or distinctiveness.
- *What are we giving to the swine and the dogs?*
- This context to me suggests that at least metaphorically that the traditional command is not to give holy things or our trust, prayers, and faith to dogs or swine.
- *But who or what are the dogs and the swine?*
- ◆ First, let's see if we can figure a few things about the metaphor.
 - *What kind of animals are dogs and pigs? Does that give us insight into what group or groups they may represent?*
 - They are definitely unclean animals. Which certainly suggests gentiles.
 - *Do we ever encounter pigs elsewhere in the gospels? Mark 5:1-13. Can we gain insight from that situation?*
 - There is certainly Roman imagery involved with the use of the word Legion which was a troop deployment of about 6,000. However, Mark's use of the word Legion may only indicate the power of the demons and, of course, their insignificant power next to the Savior of the world. The other reference is the prodigal son; he goes into a far country were he eat pigs and he attaches himself to “a citizen.” it seems to have Roman imagery as well.
 - *What about dogs? Are dogs mentioned in the gospels?*
 - Read Matthew 15:26-28:

21 Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. **22** And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. **23** But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. **24** But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. **25** Then came she and worshiped him, saying, Lord, help me. **26** But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. **27** And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. **28** Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

- References to swine as Rome is quite common in the Talmud and Midrash.⁶
- The imagery does seem to suggest at the very least gentiles, but also probably the occupying Roman Empire (the gentiles who were affecting the Jews that most at this time).
- ◆ *Suppose Jesus is reminding the people not to give their loyalty, faith, or prayers to the Roman empire and then telling them how to be delivered from the trampling that will occur if they do. Why would this be a problem? Could one be trampled under foot by the Romans?*
- ◆ *Do you see similarities between this pericope and others in chapter 6? Do they make a similar or symmetric point?*
- ◆ *Is there an analogous situation for us today?*
- ◆ *In the full context of the triad what does it mean to, “(7) Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: (8) For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”? How do these verses contrast with the Roman power structure?*
- ◆ *What is the implicit alternative to the golden rule given the context of the Roman power structure?*
- ◆ **Triadic Structure of 7:6-12:**
 1. Traditional Righteousness: give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine
 2. Vicious Cycle: lest they trample them [your holy things] under their feet, and turn again and rend you.
 3. Transforming Initiatives: Give your trust, prayer, and faith to the Lord.

⁶Stassen, Glen H., 2003, The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 267-308.