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## The Greatest Speech Ever Given (The Sermon on the Mount) Matthew 5-7

*There have been many memorable and impactful speeches given throughout our nation's history. Lincoln's Gettysburg address. King's "I have a dream" speech. Kennedy's challenge to reach the moon by the end of the decade. Beginning with this week's State of the State Address we will hear many speeches in the capitol in the coming weeks. It is unlikely any will rise to the level of those great speeches.*

*During this legislative session we will begin studying the greatest speech ever given - Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. A sermon is simply a speech - a verbal proclamation and explanation of God's Word calling for a response. The Sermon on the Mount is certainly the greatest sermon ever preached, because of its preacher and its content. As we hear countless speeches and presentations during this regular session, it will do us well to study this greatest speech of all as Jesus Himself proclaims what it means to follow Him.*

Jesus began His public ministry in Galilee, preaching "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**" (Matt. 4:17). He traveled throughout Galilee teaching, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and sickness (4:23). News about Him spread, and large crowds began to follow Him. In Matthew 5 read that "**When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying...**" He then lays out in this sermon a summary presentation of the gospel of the kingdom.

Statements from the sermon are probably the most quoted Bible verses in the capitol. However, when people talk about The Sermon on the Mount, they will often take bits and pieces they like out of context and simply present them as positive messages from Jesus which we all should strive to follow. "**Turn the other cheek**"; "**Go the extra mile**"; "**Love your enemies**"; "**Judge not, that you be not judged**"; and "**The Golden Rule**" are all familiar truths. We are tempted to take these and other statements from the sermon without consideration of how they fit as a whole. If we are to truly understand the real meaning and importance of these statements, we need to understand the Sermon on the Mount in its entirety. In the world of politics and political speeches, no one likes having their words taken out of context. We must keep this in mind with the Sermon on the Mount, keeping each part in context of the whole sermon, the whole of Jesus' teaching in the gospels, as well as the rest of Scripture.

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is, for the Christian believer, the greatest sermon ever preached. It is spoken by Christ Himself and is a distillation of all His teaching. Matthew 4:23 informs us "**Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom...**" In The Sermon on the Mount we have recorded the content of Jesus' message of the gospel

of the Kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount teaches that belonging to the kingdom is a matter of the heart, not a matter of keeping an external list of standards. A key to the whole sermon is found in Matthew 5:20: "**For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.**" The scribes and Pharisees went to extremes in keeping external rules. Jesus taught that true righteousness was a matter of the heart. The Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount are not a list of standards to be kept in order to gain salvation. They are a description of character found in those whose hearts and lives have been changed by the work of Christ and who have become members of God's kingdom.

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*We are not told in The Sermon on the Mount "live like this and you will become a Christian"; rather we are told, "Because you are a Christian you live like this".*

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The Beatitudes serve as the introduction to this great sermon and will be the basis of our studies throughout the session. They describe in a general way the character of those who are Christians, those who genuinely belong to God's kingdom. The rest of the sermon gives specific examples of how that character is expressed in life.

### Key Verses

We find in Matthew 5:17-19 what could be considered the key verses of the Sermon on the Mount:

**17"For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.**

**18"Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same,**

**shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.**

**<sup>19</sup>“For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.**

We will look at these verses more closely in a future study, but we should take note of verse 19 as it relates to the meaning of Jesus' whole sermon. He warns the crowd that their righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees if they desire to enter God's kingdom. In their minds this would have been impossible. These religious leaders were the most righteous people they knew. How could they ever hope to surpass the righteousness of these "super-spiritual" people? Jesus is describing the righteousness that comes from a changed heart, righteousness that comes from within. Another key verse that stands out is 5:48 – **“Therefore, you are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect”**. As Jesus presents the description of those who are part of God's kingdom, we immediately realize how far short we fall. We are not perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. We have all sinned. Yet Jesus was perfect. He lived a perfect life, suffered and died for our sin, and rose again. When we repent and trust in Him, our sins are forgiven, and His "perfection" is credited to us. As we consider the whole of this sermon, all of Jesus' life and teaching, and the rest of scripture we find this is the gospel of kingdom Jesus is teaching us.

### **Contrast Between External Righteousness and True Righteousness**

One of the hallmarks of the Sermon on the Mount is the contrast Jesus makes between the external, legalistic righteousness of the religious leaders and the true righteousness that is found through faith in Christ. The scribes and Pharisees had made religion a matter of merely keeping the law. They had taken God's law and added a host of manmade rules and traditions.

Jesus' message emphasizes that Christianity is not about keeping rules, laws, and traditions. It is about the character that comes from a heart that has been changed through the power of the gospel. This is best demonstrated in the form Jesus uses six times in the sermon: **“You have heard that it was said...But I say unto you...”**

**5:21-22 On dealing with Anger:** “You have heard that the ancients were told... “But I say to you...”

**5:27-28 When speaking of Adultery:** “You have heard that it was said ...but I say to you ...”

**5:31-32 On the issue of Divorce:** It was said...but I say to you...”

**5:33-34 When teaching about vows and oaths:** “You have heard that the ancients were told...but I say to you...”

**5:38-39 On the subject of revenge:** “You have heard that it was said...but I say to you...”

**5:43-44 And finally, on the topic of loving our enemies:** “You have heard that it was said...but I say to you...”

The repetition of this structure points out the stark contrast between the legalistic righteousness of the religious leaders and the true righteousness found in Christ.

### **From General to Particular**

When you read the Sermon on the Mount, you find that Jesus goes from the general to the particular in His description of those who belongs to His Kingdom and their character and actions. In the Beatitudes and the verses immediately following (Matthew 5:3-20) we find a general description of believers, their character, the results of their life and faith, and the need of all who would be part of God's kingdom to have the true righteousness He describes. Then Jesus goes on to describe the particular ways in which this character will be displayed in specific circumstances and situations of daily life. (5:21-7-29). Jesus begins with a general theme, and then He gives illustrations of this theme in particular.

Martin Lloyd-Jones in his classic work, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* makes three important observations as to why we should study it. (Lloyd-Jones, Martin. *The Sermon on the Mount*. Eerdmans Publishing. P. 12-13)

Jesus died and rose again in order to enable us to live out the principles found in the Sermon on the Mount. It is the power of the gospel in changing our hearts which allows us to live out the life described in this passage.

Studying the Sermon on the Mount shows us our absolute need for the new birth in Christ. Gaining the genuine righteousness described here is impossible without the heart and life changing power of the gospel.

Living out the Sermon on the Mount is the best means of evangelism. People in the capitol, in our neighborhoods, and in our families need to see genuine Christians. It is as we live the life described in the Sermon on the Mount that we genuinely become salt and light to those in the world around us and we have the credibility to share the good news of the gospel with others.

### **Conclusion**

As we consider an introduction and review of the Sermon on the Mount as whole, it will help us to consider the crowd's response to Jesus' message. Matthew 7:28-29 tells us **“When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.”** There was something about Jesus' teaching that amazed the crowds. He spoke with the authority of God, and whether the people understood who He was or not, this authority grabbed their attention. I encourage each of us to have this same response to this tremendous portion of God's Word. Let us recognize the authority of God in its message. Let us seek to grasp and apply to our own lives Jesus' description of true righteousness.

### **CAPITOL BIBLE STUDIES**

Thursdays

8:00 AM Government Org. Conference Room (East Wing)

12:00 PM Senate President's Conference Room