

Background & Introduction to the *Sermon on the Mount*

Understanding the Background & Context of the Sermon on the Mount

The Return of the King & the Arrival of the Everlasting Kingdom

Matthew 3:1-3

Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, ² **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** ³ **For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight!’”**

- **The Jews Were Actively and Anxiously Looking for Coming of the “One”**
(Messiah, “Anointed one,” Christ, King)

Matthew 2:1-6, 16-18

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ² **“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”** ³ **When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.** ⁴ Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, **he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.** ⁵ They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: ⁶ *‘And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, Are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; For out of you shall come forth a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel...’*” Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. ¹⁷ Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: ¹⁸ *“A voice was heard in Ramah, Weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; And she refused to be comforted, Because they were no more.”*

John 1:45-46, 47

Philip *found Nathanael and *said to him, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and *also* the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Philip *said to him, “Come and see.”... “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.”

Matthew 11:2-3

Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent *word* by his disciples ³ and said to Him, **“Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?”**

John 4:29 **“Come, see a man who told me all the things that I *have* done; **this is not the Christ, is it?”****

John 7:40-43

Some of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, “This certainly is the Prophet.” ⁴¹ **Others were saying, “This is the Christ.”** Still others were saying, **“Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He?”** ⁴² Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was? ⁴³ So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him.

- **In the Jews' Eyes, The Messiah Would Return and Destroy Israel's Enemies, and Restore Israel's Greatness and Reign Forever**
 - **Return of the Great King whose rule and kingdom will never end (2 Sam. 7:11-13)**
From the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. The Lord also declares to you that the Lord will make a house for you.¹² When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.
 - **He will bring judgment on the heathen (Isaiah 42:1)**
"Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations.
 - **He will be a National Hero who will save and protect Israel (Jer. 33:14-18)**
"...In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell in safety..."
 - **He will rule with justice and punish the wicked (Isaiah 11:4)**
But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.
 - **He will rescue the oppressed and restore and rebuild Israel (Isaiah 61; Luke 4:14-22)**
- **Matthew's Gospel Sets the Stage for the King and Kingdom's Arrival (Chapters 1-4)**
 - Royal Lineage (1:1-25)
 - The Attempt to Thwart the Return of the King (2:1-23)
 - God's public affirmation of Jesus as His Son – the King (3:16-17)
 - Jesus is tested before the beginning of His Work (4:1-11)
 - His public ministry begins (4:12-17)
 - (4:17) Jesus began to preach and say, **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**
 - He chooses disciples (4:18-22)
 - Jesus' public ministry and popularity significantly increase (4:23-25)
²³ Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and **proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom**, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. ²⁴ The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. ²⁵ Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and *from beyond the Jordan.*

The Beginner's Guide to Living in the Kingdom of God

- **Not So Much a Sermon**
 - (Matthew never calls it that): **"Who wants to read a sermon?"**
- **It is an *Inaugural Address* of the Eternal Reign of the Christ**
 - How His reign and subjects will be characterized
- **Not a Kingdom of Geographical Borders, rather existing Within its subjects**

Luke 17:20-21

"The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here *it is!*' or, 'There *it is!*' For behold, the kingdom of God is within you."

John 18:36 **"...My kingdom is not of this world..."**

- **To Enter the *Kingdom* is to enter *True Life***

John 3:3-7

"Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.**"⁴ Nicodemus *said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷**Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'**"

- **The Sermon on the Mount is a picture of what Life in the Kingdom, under the new King, looks like *Here and Now – On Earth*.**

Radical, Offensive, and Disappointing

- **Radical**

...I struggled with the uncompromising harshness of Jesus's sermon. Its absolutist quality left me gasping. "Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect," Jesus said, his statement almost casually tucked away between commands to love enemies and give away money. Be perfect like God? Whatever did he mean? I cannot easily dismiss the extremism...No matter how hard I tried, I could not find an easy way around or through the Sermon on the Mount...Jesus' words kept me in a state of restlessness...If the Sermon on the Mount sets forth God's standard of holiness, I concluded, then I may as well resign from the start."

– Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*

- Martin Luther described the Sermon on the Mount as a **"Counsel of Despair,"** a list of instructions no one could ever follow perfectly.

- **Offensive**

As I viewed fifteen different movie treatments of the scene of the Sermon on the Mount, only one seemed to capture anything like the offense of the original. A low-budget BBC production entitled *Son of Man* sets the Sermon on the Mount against a background of chaos and violence. Roman soldiers have just invaded a Galilean village to exact vengeance for some trespass against the empire. They have strung up Jewish men of fighting age, shoved their hysterical wives to the ground, even speared babies to “teach the Jews a lesson.” Into that tumultuous scene of blood and tears...strides Jesus with eyes ablaze:

“I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those that persecute you. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, right? So, our forefathers said. Love your kinsmen, hate your enemies, right? But I say it’s easy to love your own brother, to love those who love you. Even tax collectors do that! You want me to congratulate you for loving your own kinsmen? No, love your enemy.

Love the man who would kick and spit at you. Love the sword who would drive his sword in your belly. Love the brigand who robs and tortures you.

Listen to me! Love your enemy! If a Roman soldier hits you on the left cheek, offer him the right one. If a man in authority orders you to walk one mile, walk two miles. If a man sues you for your coat, give him the shirt off your back.

Listen! I tell you, it’s hard to follow me. What I’m saying to you hasn’t been said since the world began!

You can imagine the villagers’ response to such unwelcome advice. The Sermon on the Mount did not puzzle them; it infuriated them.

– Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*

- **Disappointment**

Matthew 11:2-6

Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent *word* by his disciples ³ and said to Him, **“Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?”** ⁴ Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ *the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.* ⁶ **And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me.”**

Homework: Read Matthew 5-7; Meditate on the Beatitudes 5:3-11