

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 12, Chapter 5

The Sermon on the Mount will be our topic for the next few weeks as it takes up Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7. I think I can say without much objection that the Sermon on the Mount represents the most consequential and panoramic expression of what it means to be a Believer and a follower of Christ, since the instructions are recorded as having come directly from Our Redeemer's mouth. Clearly Matthew must have seen it in that light because he devoted so much time to it in his Gospel. I stated in an earlier lesson that considering the momentous nature of Yeshua's speech, it is curious that Matthew is the only Gospel of the 4 that contains the Sermon on the Mount. Admittedly Luke chapter 6 contains something similar, and a predominant number of Bible scholars say that those verses in Luke are but another version of that same sermon. I, however, stand with another group of scholars and commentators who believe it is not. The sermon that begins at Luke 6:17 and goes to the end of that chapter is regularly called The Sermon on the Plain because it claims a different location than the Sermon on the Mount. If you'll turn your Bibles to Luke chapter 6, we'll briefly glance at it only so you can see the differences.

In the CJB, the introductory words to The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 are: "Seeing the crowds, Yeshua walked up the hill." But in Luke 6 we read: "Then he came down with them (meaning His 12 disciples) and stood on a level place". The more familiar KJV is: "And he came down with them, and stood in the plain". What follows in Luke is something that is close to the words of the Beatitudes, but they are different and fewer. Afterwards are a few sayings and then something Luke calls a parable. After that are a few other sayings, some of which bear resemblance to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. The Bible commentators who are convinced that the sermons in Luke 6 and Matthew 5 are

actually one in the same base their conclusion on the foundational belief that Luke's Gospel is the more accurate in his account of the event than Matthew, because (for them) Matthew had an ulterior motive for not only including it in his Gospel but also for expanding upon it well beyond Luke's, even adding to the content if not modifying the meaning of some of Yeshua's sermon to suit his own mindset. My conclusion is that on its face the purpose of the sermon in Luke 6, the description of the make-up of the people who were there, the geography where the speech was given, and the timing of it make it another and different speech even though it had at its core the same underlying message as the sermon Christ gave up on the hill; the one called The Sermon on the Mount. However it is NOT the same event or the same speech.

I find it peculiar that many commentators seem to assume that nearly every speech or teaching of Christ must have been unique and one-off; that is, that each time He spoke and taught He dealt with different subject matter such that He never repeated Himself nor said more or less the same things but to different audiences in different locations. Nothing is more common among teachers, speakers, and leaders of all eras than to go around communicating a similar message, although structured a little differently each time, to a number of different crowds. Even in our time of television, radio and the Internet, politicians (for instance) will use the same core message in a number of different settings, slightly modified each time to suit a particular audience. Clearly there will probably never be a way to provide indisputable proof one way or the other on this debate as to whether both Matthew and Luke are reporting on the same speech, or that they are each reporting on different speeches given at different places that are similar in message.

Does it really matter, then, whether Luke's and Matthew's reports are both on Christ's seminal speech? It does. There is significance in the issue of the setting and the geography where Christ gave the Sermon on the Mount; something that would indeed have mattered more to Matthew, the learned Believing Jew, than to Luke, the learned Believing gentile. It involves the reporting of Matthew (which appears in the fabric of the backdrop for his entire Gospel account) that Yeshua of Nazareth was a kind of second Moses. I won't review what I explained to you about that in an earlier lesson. Only notice that in the case of the Sermon on the Mount just as Moses went up to the top of a mountain (Sinai) to obtain God's Torah and then came down to the side of the mountain to instruct Israel in it, so in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus went up a mountain (a hill) to address Israel and instruct them in the deeper understanding of The Law and The Torah in

general. Why do so many Christian scholars, commentators, Bible teachers and pastors not accept this connection between Moses and Christ? It is because they also do not accept that Christ in His Sermon on the Mount was instructing the people in the Torah but rather they see Him as erasing and abolishing the Torah of Moses and replacing it with His own new and different commands; a Torah of Jesus. A replacement Torah that consisted of His own teachings and commands that overrode and replaced the ones His Heavenly Father gave to Moses 14 centuries earlier. The significance of this theological worldview (a mistaken and wholly unbiblical worldview) towers over the Christianity that was established beginning with Constantine in the 4th century A.D. and remains in practice today.

Let's open our Bibles to the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.

READ MATTHEW 5 all

It is important that we establish the basis that underlies all that I will be teaching you; a faith pillar of Torah Class and Seed of Abraham Fellowship and all that we stand for. It is that Yeshua did NOT abolish the Torah and the Prophets, and also He warned against the consequences of disobedience to the laws and commands contained within them, in the slightest. In a Christianity that nearly universally says the opposite in all its institutions, it strikes me as odd that some of the most revered and published Bible commentators would say things like the following, as with Daniel J. Harrington in his commentary on Matthew: ***"The basic theme of the sermon is that Jesus came NOT to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them"***. And from Professors W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison in their enormous 3 volume commentary on the Book of Matthew, which is so highly regarded among academics that it is one of the chief reference sources for their own commentaries on Matthew's Gospel, they say this:

"(Matthew) 5:17 - 20 is primarily prokatalipsis, that is, an anticipation of objections. As the introduction or preamble to 5:21 - 48..... it is intended to prevent the readers of the First Gospel from making two errors. First, it plainly states that the subsequent paragraphs are not to be interpreted as they have been so often by many as antitheses; antitheses that, in at least two or three instances, set aside the Torah. Instead Jesus upholds the Law, so that between Him and Moses there can be no real conflict. Then, secondly, and despite the concord declared by 5:17 - 19, 5:20 tells us that what Jesus requires of HIS followers surpasses what has traditionally been

regarded (by the Scribes and Pharisees) as the requirements of the Torah. So although there is continuity with the past, the Messiah also brings something new, and it does not surprise when 5:21 - 48 goes beyond the letter of the Law to demand even more."

So in both quotes, these renowned mainstream Bible commentators are explicit in saying that whatever one might take from the Sermon on the Mount, it can never be that Christ was declaring that He came to abolish and/or replace the Law of Moses. That said, Davies and Allison go further and say that in His interpretation of the Torah, Yeshua takes the requirements of obeying it to another and higher level. Let me put it this way (because I've said it to you before): Christ's requirements take God's laws and make them even more challenging, requiring even more discipline and more devotion, for us His Believer to obey; not less. That is, the common refrain of the Church is that the Law given to Moses was an outdated burden, a too heavy yoke, and much too hard and unreasonable to follow. Therefore Christ came to abolish it all and with His new commandments make life and a peaceful relationship with God much easier for His followers. A plain and honest reading of the Sermon on the Mount takes that false notion and destroys it.

Let's begin in verse 1 by again noting that Matthew says that Christ went UP a hill in order to make a speech to throngs of Israelites, which consisted mostly of Jews. No doubt some remnants of other tribes of Israel than the Jews who represent Judah and Benjamin, and some who had engaged in intermarriage with gentiles, also were present. This we can discern from the locations listed at the end of chapter 4 that tell us where these crowds came from. To extract the best context for this epic sermon and who was there to hear it, we need to simply keep reading from the final couple of verses of chapter 4 into the first verse of chapter 5. Remember: when these Scriptures were first created they were NOT divided into chapters and verses; that wouldn't happen for another 1000 years.

CJB Matthew 4:23-5:2 ²³ Yeshua went all over the Galil teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom, and healing people from every kind of disease and sickness. ²⁴ Word of him spread throughout all Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill, suffering from various diseases and pains, and those held in the power of demons, and epileptics and paralytics; and he healed them. ²⁵ Huge crowds followed him from the Galil, the Ten Towns, Yerushalayim, Y'hudah, and 'Ever-HaYarden.

^{CJB} **Matthew 5:1** *Seeing the crowds, Yeshua walked up the hill. After he sat down, his talmidim came to him, ² and he began to speak. This is what he taught them:*

We learn that the primary reason this enormous group of people came from many scores of miles away (and more) was for healing of all kinds of maladies. They came because of Yeshua's growing reputation as a **Tzadik**, a Holy Man. A miracle worker who, under the power of God, could heal. Some Holy Men were also known for their wisdom, and they taught in addition to healing. So it wasn't out of character for Yeshua the **Tzadik** to draw huge crowds for the purpose of miracle healing, but also to speak profound truths to them. As of this point in time the Jews didn't yet suspect that Jesus was the Messiah, and Jesus had not yet publicly proclaimed that He was.

Verse 3 begins what has for centuries been called the Beatitudes. We got this strange English word from the Latin version of the Bible, where the word **beatus** is used to translate the Greek word **makarios**. Just as we learned that Matthew had a specific mathematical structure in mind in the way he presented Yeshua's genealogy to begin his Gospel, so now we find another obvious mathematical structure in the Beatitudes. It is that each of the 8 Beatitudes contain 36 words (in the Greek). If this mathematical structure is intended to symbolize something, it remains a mystery to me what it might be. It is further complicated by the probability that the Greek version of Matthew was taken from the Hebrew and so the word count in Hebrew could have been different than in the Greek. Some of the Early Church Fathers such as Augustine and Ambrose of Milan believed that it was the number of the Beatitudes (8) that was of interest, and that it was symbolic of the ascent of the soul into Heaven. That seems like a stretch to me, and few other early Church Fathers besides those I named accepted such a solution. I don't wish to speculate about it except to notice that this interesting structure of 8 Beatitudes of 36 Greek words each does exist, and perhaps they were constructed in this way for the purpose of easier memorization.

The first Beatitude is vs. 3. It is "Blessed are the poor in spirit". This Beatitude has had a number of opinions written about its meaning because it is not at all clear. What, exactly, characterizes a person who is "poor in spirit"? Since it says that such a person is "blessed", then obviously it means that a person who is "poor in spirit" is benefiting from it (at least in the spiritual sense) and Christ approves of it. To try and decipher this let's first understand what "blessed"

means. Assuming that Matthew originally wrote his Gospel in Hebrew, then likely what we have is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word **berakhah**. The Greek word used to translate **berakhah** is **makarios**. It means to be favored, fortunate, or happy. That is essentially the same meaning as the Hebrew **berakhah** so it is a solid translation. Second is the issue of what it means to be "poor in spirit". I've heard a number of sermons over my lifetime on this exact matter and I'm not sure any two agree on the meaning. Because it is supposed to be a positive and desirable trait, then what about being "poor in spirit" makes a person happy or fortunate? Dr. David Flusser believes that especially the first 3 Beatitudes are more of a description of just who constitutes the enormous audience that followed Jesus up that hill in the Galilee.

Dr. Flusser (now deceased) is a legend among Hebrew scholars and he is to be listened to as he doesn't make brash statements. Rather he puts forward well researched conclusions and opinions. Here is his conclusion about the meaning and intent of the term "poor in spirit" as explained in his widely-read book titled "Jesus". Dr. Flusser says this:

"Now for the first time, because of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we can understand the phrase 'the poor in spirit'. It was a title of honor among the Essenes. These are the poor to whom the Holy Spirit is given".

In another but separate quote Flusser further explains that among the Essenes this term referred to a person who was living in a spirit of **"poverty, humility, purity and simplicity"**. Just as today a good orator will acknowledge those who make up his audience, so it was in Yeshua's day. Assuming that what Flusser says concerning the clarification about this strange phrase that the Dead Sea Scrolls provide for us is correct, we can gather rather confidently that it was the Essenes (and perhaps those who lived on the fringes of the Essene purity movement) that Yeshua was acknowledging. Since we're told that many of His audience came from Judah, in the south, where the Essenes had their desert enclave next to the Dead Sea, and from Syria in the north, where it is known that a substantial Essene community lived in the city of Damascus, then it makes sense that many members of the pious and scripturally knowledgeable Essene community might attend Yeshua's sermon.

But now what is the intent of including the statement that for certain members of the Essenes "the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs"? We have spoken in earlier lessons that the Kingdom of Heaven is NOT a place, but rather it is a spiritual

condition. When one repents of sinning and trusts in Messiah Yeshua, then they receive the Holy Spirit. As a result the Kingdom of Heaven now lives within them. Notice the grammar; it is not some time in the future that the Kingdom of Heaven will be theirs, but rather it is that when they receive the Holy Spirit the Kingdom became theirs.

The next Beatitude is vs. 4 and says: "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted". Because the premise is that those who mourn will experience some kind of religious joy (be blessed), then one must ask what this mourning has to do with? Does it mean those who mourn the dead, such as a dear departed family member? And since Yeshua is referring in a rather general way to certain of His large audience, could death really be the subject of the mourners? I think not. I see this as a reference to the Prophet Isaiah chapter 61.

^{CJB} **Isaiah 61:1 *The Spirit of Adonai ELOHIM is upon me, because ADONAI has anointed me to announce good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted; to proclaim freedom to the captives, to let out into light those bound in the dark; 2 to proclaim the year of the favor of ADONAI and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, 3 yes, provide for those in Tziyon who mourn, giving them garlands instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, a cloak of praise instead of a heavy spirit, so that they will be called oaks of righteousness planted by ADONAI, in which he takes pride. 4 They will rebuild the ancient ruins, restore sites long destroyed; they will renew the ruined cities, destroyed many generations ago.***

This is a Messianic prophecy in Isaiah. Thus this general condition of mourning that Yeshua is speaking about doesn't so much concern grieving over the dead. Rather it is mourning over the destroyed cities of Israel that is the result of Israel's unfaithfulness..... Israel's sinning. It is also mourning over the oppression the children of Israel are suffering at the hands of foreign conquerors, which is God's judgment against them for their unfaithfulness. But also in Isaiah 61 something changes and now the Lord will call His formerly unfaithful, but now repentant, people "oaks of righteousness" as opposed to captives and brokenhearted. The mourners will become comforted because they will see that Israel is in the process of being delivered and restored. Thus the mention of the mourners is that they "will be" or "shall be" comforted. That is, it is to occur later, in the future, when this comforting will come to its fullest fruition. This is in contrast to the 1st Beatitude in which the blessing will be bestowed more or less immediately, in the

present. So those among the crowd that Yeshua is addressing in this 2nd Beatitude are called "mourners" because they are sorry that their sin, and the sins of their ancestors, has led to their land being under the control of heathens and their suffering under the hand of Roman subjugation.

The 3rd Beatitude is in vs. 5, and it is: "How blessed are the meek for they will inherit the land". You might immediately notice that I have substituted the word "land" for "earth", which we find in most Bible versions (the meek will inherit the earth). Before we delve into that issue, let's define who or what "the meek" are. The backdrop of this Beatitude is Psalm 37. Let's read a substantial portion of it.

READ PSALM 37:1 - 13

This is a Messianic Psalm of David that speaks of a future time when the "meek" inherit the Land (the Land referring to Israel). Meek is another word in the Bible whose definition is not necessarily always agreed and seems to be used differently in different settings. Often it carries the obvious meaning of gentleness and mildness. But here in Psalm 37:11 the word is probably better understood as "the powerless" because the righteous are being oppressed by the wicked. Since it seems very likely that Yeshua is making reference to Psalm 37 in this Beatitude, then His use of the term "the meek" means the same: the powerless. Further in Psalm 37 the Hebrew word for what it is that the meek shall inherit is **eretz**. **Eretz** can mean land or earth. However we must not think of earth as meaning the formal name of our planet: planet Earth. Rather, biblically, earth is another way of saying the undefined expanse of dry land that lies under the sky.

David's audience for His Psalm was Israelites. Jesus's audience for His Sermon was Israelites. Therefore "the meek" in both cases are Israelites or at least a portion of the Israelites. Biblically the inheritance of the Israelites is the land of Israel (formerly the Land of Canaan). Therefore the meaning of "the meek shall inherit the land:" is that the powerless Israelites shall, at some point, permanently inherit the land of Israel such that they will no longer be occupied and oppressed by a foreign power, which represents wickedness.

I want to pause here to put something forth as a suggestion..... perhaps a theory..... but I cannot in good conscience say it is a fact. When I look at these Beatitudes thus far, and when I think about the Jewish Yeshua speaking to a Jewish crowd, and the Jewish Matthew using the Jewish manner in which he has structured his Gospel written to be read by Jewish Believers, I see the real

possibility that each of these Beatitudes is meant to be interpreted in both the ***P'shat*** and the ***Remez*** senses. That is, in the simple, plain sense (***P'shat***) as well as in a somewhat literal sense that also incorporates an important hint (***Remez***).

Thus in the 1st Beatitude, when Yeshua speaks of "the poor, in spirit", the reference in the ***P'shat*** interpretation sense is to the people in the crowd who hold this honorary title among the sect of the Essenes; people who were standing and sitting directly before Him during His sermon. Yet, when we look a bit deeper (from the ***Remez*** interpretation sense) we understand that the way one became "poor, in spirit" among the Essenes was (by their definition) receiving the Holy Spirit. Therefore in a larger sense all who truly receive the Holy Spirit (through repentance and trust in Christ), Israelites and gentiles (Believers), can be considered as included among "the poor, in spirit" and thus be made happy and joyful (blessed) now and eternally.

In the 2nd Beatitude, those who mourn will be comforted. From the ***P'shat*** sense, the mourners are mourning over the ruination of the Holy Land of Israel and the subsequent oppressions of Assyria, Babylon, and Greece in the past; and presently Rome. Thus the comforting is that even in this they can have personal peace, because there is hope that God will remove the pagan occupiers. But from the ***Remez*** sense, the mourners are those worshippers of God who are mourning over the ruination of the entire earth because due to mankind's unfaithfulness, wickedness rules universally. The mourners are the righteous (all who have repented and put their trust in Messiah), Jews and gentiles, and all of these (us) can look forward to being comforted when the Lord comes in power and glory to destroy evil and rule in justice and mercy over all the earth, and to restore it.

In the 3rd Beatitude, the meek will inherit the earth. In the ***P'shat*** sense, those Israelites in the audience who are powerless before the occupation of Rome are being told that nonetheless they will receive the inheritance God promised to them (the Land of Canaan) before their ancestors left Egypt. In the ***Remez*** sense the powerless followers of Messiah, Jew and gentile, will together receive the even larger inheritance promised by God to be co-rulers along with Christ over all the earth's inhabitants. This co-rulership is the fullest fulfillment of the promise of the 1st Beatitude that the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

The 4th Beatitude is verse 6. It is: "How blessed are those who hunger and thirst

for righteousness. For they will be filled." The idea of hunger and thirsting after righteous is not about food and drink but rather it is a spiritual longing. But this longing is not one of passivity; it speaks of an active search and work to find it. The question to be answered about this Beatitude is: whose righteousness is being sought? What kind of righteousness is being thirsted for? Is it a human righteousness? That is, it is something that is accomplished by means of our good works and deeds?

The answer is that it is God's righteous that Yeshua is referring to. He is borrowing from a Psalm of David; Psalm 107. We won't go over it all, so here is the pertinent part.

CJB Psalm 107:2-9 ² *Let those redeemed by ADONAI say it, those he redeemed from the power of the foe.* ³ *He gathered them from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the sea.* ⁴ *They wandered in the desert, on paths through the wastes, without finding any inhabited city.* ⁵ *They were hungry and thirsty, their life was ebbing away.* ⁶ *In their trouble they cried to ADONAI, and he rescued them from their distress.* ⁷ *He led them by a direct path to a city where they could live.* ⁸ *Let them give thanks to ADONAI for his grace, for his wonders bestowed on humanity!* ⁹ *For he has satisfied the hungry, filled the starving with good.*

Notice that it is God's redeemed that is being addressed. From the **P'shat** interpretation sense the redeemed represent all Israelites (because 1400 years earlier all the tribes of Israel were redeemed from Egypt). The wandering in the desert recalls the wilderness journey of the Exodus. God rescued them and when they were finally properly prepared, He took them to a city where they could live..... meaning Jerusalem. God also satisfied the hungry Israelites by giving them manna to eat... divinely provided sustenance..... the entire time they were wandering, without a home of their own. He provided them with water as needed, often in undeniably miraculous ways. In the **Remez** interpretation sense the redeemed are all people, Jew and gentile, who have been redeemed from their sins by placing their trust in the God of Israel and His Son Yeshua. Before we did that, we were wandering aimlessly in a desert of sin and purposelessness. We were hungry and thirsty for deliverance from our emptiness and from eternal death. But since the molten core of God's righteousness is His will to deliver and save, even though at the time we weren't aware of it, by His grace He has bestowed His righteousness upon us and thus

has satiated the thirst and satisfied the hunger of our souls, and given us life eternal with Him.

The metaphor of hunger and thirst as representing a deep down seeking of God, even when we didn't know that's what we sought, is found in several places in God's Word. Among the most moving and instructive must be in Isaiah 32. There the matter of God's righteousness (as opposed to human righteousness) becomes a little more clear. Let's read it together to close out today's lesson.

READ ISAIAH 32 all

We'll begin with the 5th Beatitude next week.