

The Sermon on the Mount

Many Christian scholars think the Sermon on the Mount —from Matthew, Chapters 5 – 7—represents the heart of the teachings of Jesus. Moreover, it is accepted Christian teaching that the sermon given on the mount was given by Jesus to his disciples. Jesus had previously stated, *“To the multitudes I speak in parables, and to you (the disciples), I give the keys to the kingdom.”* Much of the Sermon on the Mount has to do with the kingdom of heaven, which is said not to be somewhere else or sometime else. The kingdom of heaven exists all the time, but that we do not see it. According to the sermon, we do not see it because our eyes are not clear— being filled with the world. Further, because our eyes are filled with the world, our minds are filled with the world that causes our thoughts to be worldly. In so far as we maintain this condition, we will not know the kingdom, it is said.

“Enter ye at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in there at.” (Matthew - 7:13). Jesus refers to the open broad way that is easy to access – most people are going down or through this way, the open way that is the way of the world. It is a way of thinking of one’s life—in terms of the world—it is the way of the scribes and Pharisees. It is the way where one judges others, or is hypocritical, or worries about grasping for worldly goods. It is the way of those not shining the Light. One does not have to do anything, and that, too, is the way of the world. Jesus says that most are treading that way. *“Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it”* (Matthew - 7:14). He is saying that the way to the kingdom of heaven is narrow, which few find. If we look at the world we live in, it has not changed much from when Jesus spoke on the mount.

The sermon begins with what is referred to as the beatitudes. According to Emmett Fox in his book entitled, *Sermon on the Mount*, the entirety of the teachings of Jesus, are contained in these beatitudes. The New English Bible is the source for this author. The beatitudes are written in Matthew 5:3, 5:14. The first beatitudes tell us:

The Sermon on the Mount

“How blessed are those who know their need of God, the kingdom of heaven is theirs.”

To comment: When I think I know what I am doing and when I think I know who I am, and when I think I know who your are, and when I think I know who my friends are and who my enemies are, or when I have go to the world divided up and classified into good and bad, I do not know my need of God yet. I know “far” too much—or so I think. However, Jesus calls the people who know their need for God *blessed* because if one knows the need for God, then one has questions instead of answers. But, alas, most folks are walking mini-encyclopedias of answers, knowing what is good or what is bad, what is acceptable and what is not. Additionally, people think they know what happens when born or when death occurs. All of us have a view, more or less our own. In so far as we have worldly views, we are not capable of realizing our need for God. In order to understand one’s need for God, however one conceives the concept, it involves recognizing some minimal level of one’s spiritual ignorance.

Socrates said that the cause of most human suffering is not ignorance, it is what he called double ignorance, which he defined as thinking one knows when one does not. He said this double ignorance is the condition of mankind and the cause of most human sufferings. In reality, Socrates made the first big step towards knowledge, towards wisdom, intuiting that the first step towards wisdom is one’s realization that one does not know. Therefore, those who know their need of God have to overcome this double ignorance: *I don’t know what this life is about, I don’t know who you are, I don’t know who I am, where I came from, where I’m going, whether I’ll be here or not tomorrow. I don’t know what God is.* To know that one does not know these things is to know one’s need of God, for that is where the answers to the questions that we do not have are to be found. Ignorance asks questions. There is no way out but to ask these questions. Knowing one’s need for God is to be blessed, and Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven is yours, those that know their need for God.

The second beatitude tells us: *“How blessed are the sorrowful: for they shall find consolation.”* There are many levels of meaning to any scripture including this one;

The Sermon on the Mount

therefore, it does not mean, necessarily, that people who are in a state of sorrow will find consolation, the sorrow may involve one's awareness of one's ignorance, the sorrow of not knowing God. Sorrow: why would I be blessed if I were sorrowful? Because there are states of consciousness—described in various scriptures of different religions—that want so much to know God. States of sorrow when the wanting to know God with such deep yearning that one feels to be in a most difficult trial wherein one comes to the point where one can love the separation from God. That type of state correlates with the blessedness of those who sorrow in the second beatitude.

“How blessed are those of a gentle spirit: they shall have the earth for their possessions.” (Matthew 5:5) According to Emmett Fox, the idea of the gentle spirit pertains primarily to the mind. Now, a gentle spirit is not something that I can attain by *wanting* to have, rather it is the product of a lot of other factors. To paraphrase Gandhi: humility is not a goal; it is the effect of many causes. The gentle spirit of the sermon can be attained by awareness and practice. For example one can say upon arising: Today I'm going to have a gentle spirit. My mind is going to be on others, and I will practice love and compassion for all I meet in a calm and gentle manner. If one becomes aware of slipping out of the affirmation, one can quickly adjust to the positive goal. Jesus relates that the gentle spirit is blessed with the possession of the earth—it is a way of saying that this person will be comfortable everywhere traveled. Imagine being comfortable everywhere—even if you meet someone who is against you: you might pray in secret for this one, not letting them know you pray for his or her good. Quite a loving task, to be sure.

“How blessed are they that hunger and thirst to see right prevail: they shall be satisfied.” (Matthew 5:6) Regarding the narrow gate of Matthew 7:14 wherein it is said that few find: in symbolic terms this beatitude refers to the plight that there are not many who are hungry or thirsting for truth. Some are hungry for possessions, some for eternal life, power, sex, money and what it can buy. It has been said there are only three worldly variables that lie behind all others: money, power, and sex. However, the Higher Mind hungers and thirsts for righteousness for self, for all.

The Sermon on the Mount

The fifth beatitude addresses mercy: “How blessed are those who show mercy: for mercy shall be shown to them.” And the sixth speaks of pure hearts: “Blessed are those whose hearts are pure, for they shall know God.” I opine that it comes down to the idea of purity of heart. Purity of heart? No impure thoughts? No impure imaginings? No negativity, no gossiping? A rare thing, indeed, but most children have purity of heart. Jesus does talk about returning to the child state. We can regain the purity of heart with which we entered the world. What is the way? That is for us to discover.

Matthew 5:9, relates: “*Blessed are those who suffered persecution for the cause of right. The kingdom of heaven is theirs.*” Someone who has suffered persecution for the cause of right does not necessarily mean that there will be “stoning by the heathens.” Indeed, it is taught by others the persecution one is apt to suffer will be from those closest to hand. If you find and try to enter the “narrow gate,” you may encounter persecution by those who would not have you leave their “known” world for one of spiritual discernment. If one does pursue the cause of right, one would expect resistance or enmity remembering that in Matthew 7:44 we are told to love our enemies, our very persecutors who would ill-treat us.

To enable us to love our enemy, we need to transform the impure heart in the direction of the pure one, transform passion into compassion, antipathies into sympathies, egotism into altruism. Jesus is speaking of self-transformation saying that the kingdom of heaven is within us, in all human beings. In order to love my enemy, the first step is to realize that I love neither my enemy nor myself. It is to become conscious of the fact that I do not like a person—might even hate the person. This is a huge step forward, from thinking one likes another, or from pretending one does. In this modern age, one of the best examples we have is Gandhi (who was extremely moved and impressed when he studied the Sermon on the Mount). Gandhi loved his enemies, the British, and they knew it—and they left India after having colonized and taking all its wealth of resources. Even though the British treated the Indians as subhuman beings, Gandhi loved them. He loved them when they were aiming rifles at him. He did not say I love you—no; he just stood there and loved them. The soldiers, who were bound to obey the order to shoot him, put

The Sermon on the Mount

down their guns because they felt the force of love of this small Indian man known as Gandhi. Gandhi referred to love as “soul force.”

How do I convert myself from a person who is giving out mixed and/or negative vibrations to a person who is giving out the force of love? It is the work of a lifetime requiring a vow to practice and wanting to progress.

In Matthew 5:13, Jesus said, *“You are salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thence forth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”* And in Matthew 5:14 he states: *“You are the light for all of the world.”* In some commentaries, salt and light is referred to as the wisdom of the wise; therefore, what I opine Jesus is saying to his disciples is that you have been given the wisdom of the wise, and now your duty is to spread it and to show it in your actions. There is not much credence in the Sermon on the Mount put on beliefs; rather it is shown in action, for we are known by our fruits. Or, as the old adage says, “Actions speak louder than words.”

Matthew 5:17, Jesus says that he does not come to abolish the law (of the ten commandments or other Judaic laws), but he is come to complete it. He continues that as long as heaven and earth endure the law must be fulfilled. To put it in a different light, every single cause must produce its appropriate effect that will continue on as long as there is a universe. There is a law and those who know it are blessed.

Jesus refers to false prophets in Matthew 7:15. He warns that the false prophets will be saying all the right words, even having memorized the Sermon on the Mount—even being able to eloquently discuss it. But he says beware of these false prophets because they are not leading one to the narrow gate. Further, they will make attaining the kingdom of God easy, not having to change the self, engage in true self-study, or true self-awareness—nor the acknowledgment of one’s own wretchedness. Jesus says that he is aware of false prophets, telling us that we will know them by their fruits.

Jesus talks of alms and offerings saying that if you are going to make an offering to God do not bother to make it if you have not come to terms with your fellow man. In other words, if you have done so, then make your offering in secret, with purity of heart.

The Sermon on the Mount

In Chapter five of Matthew, beginning with verse 21, Jesus restates the ancient ten commandments adding clarifications and the concept that breaking a commandment can also be in the mind, for example: “*You have been told, thou shalt not kill. I tell you, in so far as you think it, you have done it.*” Therefore, one is guilty of murder if one wishes another dead. Our entire life is a play out of what first happens in our mind.

The thing to be mastered, through self-study and self-discipline is the mind, if we truly wish to enter that narrow gate that few find. Jesus tells us not to make any oaths—be swearing to this and that: rather, a simple yes or no will do. Yet not so simple is it, to say no when you mean no, or to say yes when you mean yes. If we always live in the present moment, there is no point at all in making some sort of commitment to something other than the present. One can have a trajectory in mind, spiritually speaking, but one can only do something about it right now. It is always now.

“*The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, they whole body shall be full of light.*” Matthew 6:22: King James Version. In opposition, if the eyes are bad, the whole body will be in darkness: the only light you have is darkness. The darkness that is doubly dark is double ignorance. How does one make the eye single? If the eye is single and the body is full of light means that there are different bodies, the single eye is not physical and its essence is the ability to concentrate, to focus, to hold the attention on something and keep it there. When the eye is not single, the mind literally jumps around from topic to topic instead of focusing on one thought. Using the ideas found in the Sermon on the Mount can be an ennobling practice. To get to a point and to then make that point the “narrow gate,” then one is moving towards the narrow gate with the single eye.

We have a choice, we can love God or we can love the world, but it is taught that the wise will set the mind on God’s kingdom and His justice before everything else, knowing all the rest will come back in full. If one fully enters the kingdom, God and the world become one.

Barrett Culmback

April 1, 2005