

Dr. David Turner, Matthew

Lecture – 3A – Matthew 5:1-16: The Sermon on the Mount I: Introduction and the Beatitudes

Hello, this is David Turner. Welcome to Lecture 3A, our introductory lecture on the Sermon on the Mount and Beatitudes. Please notice that you have some supplemental materials for this lecture on pages 12 through 14 of the supplemental materials for the class.

Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount. We need to think about the Sermon on the Mount from two or three angles here, beginning with the historicity of it. The Sermon on the Mount does not appear as a discrete sermon in Mark, and it appears only partially so in Luke.

That's in Luke 6:17 through 7:1. Several theories exist to explain this variation among the synoptic Gospels. Some believe that Matthew has created this sermon from traditions, documentary sources, and his own ingenuity, so that the sermon should not be attributed to the historical Jesus. In this view, the sermon comes totally from Matthew, not from Jesus at all.

This view is unacceptable to evangelical Christians since it tends to make the Gospels unhistorical fabrications concocted strictly for theological reasons. A second view is that Matthew has created the structure of the sermon by collating various teachings of the historical Jesus, which were originally uttered at different times in different locations. There are many evangelicals who hold to this view.

But it will not be followed here, because Matthew's narrative plainly brackets the sermon with indicators of a specific time and place when the sermon occurred. These historical markers, 5:1 and 2, and 7:28 to 8:1, must be ignored or viewed as fictional in order to take this second view. In a third view, Matthew accurately records the gist, or the *abscissa novox*, the very voice of Jesus, from a historical sermon that he actually uttered.

In other words, we do not have memorex from the sermon. We don't have an audio tape. It wasn't caught on video.

Matthew gives us a reliable summary of it. He does not add to it his own notions, and he gives us the important parts of it. He summarizes it and gives us the gist of it.

The *abscissa novox* is Latin, which means the very voice of Jesus is found in this sermon. Yet it was put together by Matthew, and its present literary form is attributed to him. A final view, and the most conservative one, is, of course, that

Matthew gives us an exact and complete, word for word, *abscissima verba*, the very words, *verbatim*, you might say, of Jesus.

It's as if it were a shorthand transcription or an audio tape of the exact sermon Jesus uttered. Both of these last two views are held by conservative evangelicals, but the third view is highly preferable for reasons pertaining to the genre of the Gospels and the historical transmission of the teaching of Jesus. An authentic report of a historical event need not involve a word-for-word transcription, and it's difficult to conceive how such a transcription could have been compiled in the first place, let alone transmitted to the likely author Matthew, who was not yet a disciple of Jesus, according to 9:9. Rather, in this sermon, we have a reliable summary of what Jesus said, an account which bears the marks of an editor.

The fact that certain of the sayings of Matthew's sermon occur in other contexts in Mark and Luke is evidently due to Jesus repeating key themes in his itinerant ministry. Now on to the literary structure of the sermon. Notice page 13 in conjunction with what I'm about to say here, which is outlined on page 12 of your materials.

After his unique story of Jesus' infancy in Matthew 1 and 2, Matthew develops the body of his Gospel as five blocks of discourse and narrative material. The first block is 3 to 7, the second is 8 through 10, the third is 11 through 13, the fourth is 14 through 18, and the final one is 19 through 25. He concludes his Gospel with the account of Jesus' death, resurrection, and mission mandate in chapters 26-28.

The five sections, then, of the body of Matthew stress alternately Jesus' works and Jesus' words, and they are divided by the key phrase that came about when Jesus had finished, which occurs at the end of each of the discourses. We've discussed this more fully in the introduction already. The discourse which we call the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 through 7, then, should be seen as the representative ethical teaching of Jesus, developing the summary statement of 4:23, which presents a word-deed complex.

Thus, 4:23 and the similar summary in 9:35 provide a frame, or bookends, for Jesus' ministry of teaching and doing miracles. His teaching is represented in 5 through 7, and his miracles in 8 and 9. Both the words and the works demonstrate the authority of the kingdom of heaven. 7:28-29 for the words, 9:6-28 for the works.

The Sermon on the Mount is difficult to outline, but it can be structured as follows, and we have this pictured on page 13 for you. There is a narrative framework at the beginning that places Jesus on the mountain, seated and teaching his disciples. This narrative framework at the beginning of the sermon is complemented by the narrative framework at the end of the sermon, which shows the amazement of the crowds due to Jesus' authoritative teaching.

The Beatitudes can serve us as the introduction to the character traits of disciples, those who have repented at the preaching of the kingdom and who seek to live according to its standards. The body of the sermon proper begins in 5:17 and ends in 7:12, where there is another inclusio, that is to say, bookends, which is formed by the reference to the law and the prophets. Jesus announces his relationship to the law in 5:17-20. Then in 5:21-48, he explains it more clearly with six specific contrasts.

Then he turns to the hypocritical versus genuine religious practices in 6:1-18, materialism and anxiety in 6:19-34, spiritual discernment in 7:1-6 and prayer in 7:7-11. The final summary statement in 7:12 completes this theme of obeying the law and the prophets, which began in 5:17. The conclusion to the sermon is 7:13-27, where you have three contrasts spoken very vividly, indicating that we have to make a correct response to Jesus' teaching. We have to take the narrow road. We have to avoid the bad fruit, the false prophets, the bad trees, that is, and we need to build our lives on the solid foundation of the words of Jesus Christ.

Major interpretive approaches to the Sermon on the Mount. There is certainly a plethora of interpretive approaches to this sermon as documented in Warren Kissinger's book published in 1975. We can only mention a few of these approaches here.

Dispensational interpreters traditionally view the sermon as Jewish law for the kingdom in the future, not gracious teaching, which is directly relevant for the Church. This kingdom teaching may relate to the time of Jesus' earthly ministry, or to the future tribulation, or the millennium. This view mistakenly assumes that Matthew was written to Jews.

Lutheran interpreters similarly view the sermon as law, not gospel, but think that its high legal standards will show people their sinfulness and draw them to the cross for forgiveness. Schweitzer, that is, Albert Schweitzer, the famed medical doctor, viewed the sermon as an ethic for the supposedly short interim period that Matthew conceived between the advents of Jesus. Other interpreters across the spectrum of denominations and views of eschatology take the sermon as an ethic for today, but differ on whether the sermon is a merely personal ethic or an agenda to be implemented through political processes.

A view taken here is that the sermon does certainly amount to personal ethics for followers of Jesus today. It's not a privatistic thing, though. Followers of Jesus are to be salt and light in this world.

The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' authoritative teaching about the way believers should live today. Those who repented when they heard the gospel preached by John and Jesus, 3:2, 4:17, need to know how to live under God's saving rule, the

kingdom of heaven. As Jewish believers, they especially needed to know how Jesus' teaching related to the Old Testament and that their righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees.

They needed to practice their religion for God's reward, not for human approval. They needed to put physical needs and material possessions in proper kingdom perspective. Spiritual discernment and prayer were also priority matters.

In case anyone was listening carelessly, without a desire for obedience, they were warned to enter the narrow gate, to avoid fruitless trees, and to build on the rock. In all this, they realized that full obedience to these standards would be attained at the future coming of the kingdom, chapter 6, verse 10. This will then serve us as an introduction to the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5 through 7. Now we turn to the first major section of the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes.

First of all, the literary structure of the Beatitudes. Altogether, there are nine Beatitudes in 5:3 through 12, but the ninth Beatitude found in 5:11 and 12 is really an expansion of the eighth Beatitude in 5:10. Now, there are some interpreters, preeminently Davies and Allison in their 1988 volume on Matthew, who opt for a structure with three sets of three Beatitudes. But the first eight of the nine exhibit such a tightly knit parallel structure that it's more likely that we should understand them as two sets of four.

That's what I've tried to picture in the handout on page 14. The first four Beatitudes, the first set, emphasize the disciples' vertical relationship to God. The second set of four emphasizes the disciples' horizontal relationship to people.

Both of these relationships occur in an atmosphere of oppression, and it's clear throughout both of them that the disciples are persecuted. Notice then on page 14 how the first and last Beatitude, 5.3 and 5.10, speak of the presence of the kingdom. Notice the conclusion in both of these, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

But all of the other Beatitudes in 5:4 through 5:9 use the future verb throughout in the second half of the Beatitude. Notice how 5:4 and 5:9 are parallel, 5:5 and 5:8 are parallel, and 5:6 and 5:7 are parallel, the way we have them laid out. And if you notice the grammatical forms, particularly those of you who have some ability with Greek, you can see this even more clearly.

So, the literary structure of the Beatitudes is two sets of four. Now we move on to the meaning of the Beatitudes, and we ask the primary question: are the Beatitudes to be understood and preached as requirements that we must meet in order to be admitted to the kingdom, or are they the blessings which come to us with belief in Jesus as our Messiah? Inter-requirements or eschatological blessings? There are two contrasting views of the meaning of the Beatitudes, centering on whether they

should be understood as gracious kingdom blessings or as ethical entrance requirements. Robert Gulick is the one who has put it this way in his book on the Sermon on the Mount.

If the latter, one should try to work up the characteristics mentioned here so that one might earn God's approval. If the former, one should thankfully acknowledge the grace of God that these characteristics are evidence of God's gracious working in our lives, and we should cultivate them as we live as disciples of Christ. Certainly, this second view is correct.

Those who repent at the message of the kingdom, 3:2.4:17, acknowledge their spiritual bankruptcy, and they rejoice in God's blessings of salvation. The Beatitudes then reveal key character traits that God approves of in his people. These character traits are gracious gifts indicating God's approval, not requirements for works which merit God's approval.

However, those who have repented should cultivate these characteristics. Each Beatitude contains a pronouncement about who is blessed, backed up by a promise about why they are blessed. God does not necessarily endorse popularity, keeping the rules, possessions, spectacular displays, or knowledge.

The qualities which God approves are explained in two sets of four, describing respectively those relating to God and those relating to other people. Notice how this is similar to Matthew 22, verses 37-40. God approves those who relate to him by admitting their spiritual poverty and mourning over their sin, humbly seeking spiritual fullness, 5:3-6. He approves those who relate to others mercifully and purely as peacemakers, even though such people may be persecuted for their righteous behavior, 5:7-12. At first, this may sound like some sort of cruel, sadistic joke, appealing only to masochistic types.

It's as if Jesus is saying that those who are unhappy are happy. But in reality, Jesus is showing the error of superficial self-centered living. Genuine realism, not false optimism, is true bliss for the followers of Jesus, for it will lead them to ultimate comfort.

The radical spirituality of the Beatitudes directly confronts several cultural views of God's approval. One of these is that popularity with one's peers indicates divine approval. But this is plainly contradicted by the statement that those who are persecuted by their peers have God's approval, 5:10-12, 7:13-14. Another mistaken view is that one may have divine approval if one simply keeps a prescribed set of rules.

But Jesus states that only a righteousness which surpasses mere rule-keeping will suffice for his kingdom, 5:20. Some would say that an abundance of material

possessions is an indication of divine favor, but according to Jesus, preoccupation with such possessions is antithetical to the values of his kingdom, 6:19-21 and 33. The ability to perform miraculous displays is sometimes associated with divine approval. But some miracle workers will learn on the last day that God does not acknowledge them as his people, 7:22-23. In the civilized world, there is a premium on education.

This has influenced Christianity in many ways, including its view of its clergy. But according to Jesus, one has to obey his words, not simply know what they are, 7:26. So to conclude on the Beatitudes, the character traits of kingdom rule are chiefly humility toward God and mercy toward people. By God's grace, these traits are present in principle in the lives of God's people.

Yet God's people must cultivate these traits so that they are actually present in fact. In a world that values pride over humility and aggression over mercy, Jesus' disciples are, in the words of Stott in his book *Christian Counterculture*, exactly that, Christian counterculture. As they maintain this countercultural witness to the world, the disciples may look to their master, who perfectly exemplified the character traits of the Beatitudes.

Jesus was meek, notice 11:29. Jesus mourned, 26:36-46. Jesus alone fulfilled all righteousness, 3:15, 27:4 and 19. Jesus certainly exemplified mercy, as he showed it to others, 9:27, 15:22, 17:15 and 20:30-31. Above all, Jesus was certainly the epitome of one who was oppressed and persecuted. Therefore, as disciples cultivate the countercultural graces of the Beatitudes, they are in reality cultivating likeness to their master, their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Now we move from the Beatitudes to Matthew 5 verses 11-16. To analyze this section, the structure is relatively simple. The first part of it, 5:11 and 12, is a Beatitude which expands the implications of the Beatitude on persecution found in 5:10. Four aspects of the expansion may be noted.

The Beatitude is made more personal by the switch to the second person. It's no longer blessed are those who, but blessed are you. Second, the Beatitude is made more challenging by the commands to rejoice during persecution.

Third, the Beatitude is made more rationally satisfying by the mention of the reason for the persecution and of others who have been persecuted, that is to say, it is because of the connection with Jesus and similar to that of the prophets. And finally, the Beatitude is made more specific in terms of its promised reward. The second part of this section, in 5:13-16 speaks to the matter of the kingdom testimony in the midst of an oppressive world.

This testimony is described metaphorically as salt in verse 13 and as light in verses 14-16. The metaphor of light is further pictured as a prominent hilltop city, 5:14, and an oil lamp set upon a high stand, not under a basket, 5:15. These pictures aid the disciples in their task of illumining the world, 5:16. Now, the context of this short section is quite interesting. Those who repent and submit to God's rule in Christ are approved by him as humble, merciful people as they relate to God, 5:3-6, and to other people, 5:7-10. Now, Jesus explains in Matthew 5:11-16 that such people will have a definite influence upon this world in two ways.

This should put to rest any notion that discipleship is merely a private matter between a person and God. First, in 5:11-12, Jesus expands his Beatitude on persecution from 5:10 by pointing out that insults and slander may occur because of his disciples' connection with him. When this occurs, the disciples are in good company with the prophets, and they may expect a great reward.

Thus, the disciples' influence on the world will often be unappreciated and opposed. Second, in 5:13-16, Jesus uses two vivid pictures to speak of his disciples' influence. They are salt and light, 5:13, salt, 5:14-16, light.

As salt, they will purify and preserve their society only if they retain their saltiness. One retains the saltiness by cultivating those Beatitude principles that we've already discussed. As light, their good deeds will result in praise going to the Father if only they display that light prominently for all to see.

In the following section, 5:21-48, Jesus explains how his fulfillment of the law and prophets impacts the ethical lives of the disciples. They are to learn more about the type of behavior that constitutes good deeds, which influence the world around them as salt and light. If their righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, as stated in 5:21, then they need to know specifically what type of righteousness that involves.

And in 5:21-48, then, you have some specific issues which will truly make them show up as salt and light in the world. Witness to the World, Jesus' disciples are to be influential for the kingdom even in the midst of an oppressive world. Salt and light in 5:13-16 can be taken to imply two aspects of witness in the world.

Disciples like salt must mingle with the world in order to flavor, purify, or preserve it. But disciples like lamps must remain distinct from the world in order to illumine it. Salt is of no value if it loses its flavor, but its flavor is not meant to be kept in a salt shaker.

Now, there seems to me, there's some tension here which disciples must reckon with. I have a friend who is a Reformed Christian. I'm personally a Baptist.

And he told me once that he felt like the Reformed people were better with the salt metaphor and the Baptists were better with the light. By that, he was saying that Reformed Christians more generally tend to try to engage the world as salt and to transform the culture, whereas Baptists tend to be separatists and tend to sort of try to be the light set apart on the hill somewhere. I think we need to have both images in our minds to be effective.

We can't isolate ourselves from the world as some fundamentalists, some Baptists, may tend to do at times by trying to be a light set apart. We have to be engaged with the world. We have to be like salt permeating the food.

But the salt has to maintain its purity, or it loses its flavor and thus is not good for anything. The terminology of 5:13-16 underlies Matthew's stress on the Church's universal mission. Jesus' disciples have a role to perform in the world, and they have been graciously equipped to perform that role by the eschatological blessings described in the Beatitudes in 5:3-10. The church that Jesus will build, 16-18, is the agency by which the kingdom influences mankind.

The entire earth, compare 6:10, 9:6, 11:25, 16:19, 18:18-19, 28:18, must be salted, and the whole world, compare 13:38, 24:14, 26:13, must be illuminated. It's important to notice, then, that Jesus speaks of the salt of the earth and the light of the world. This is not something that speaks of a little community hiding in a corner somewhere.

The disciples' light must shine upon people. Certainly, this passage makes it clear that the isolationism of some Christians, even though it may ostensibly spring from sincere motives relating to maintaining the church's purity or orthodoxy, can't be sustained. Matthew tells us that Jesus was not an ascetic.

That is, he was often associated with disreputable sinners, 9:10. He feasted and he drank, 11:19. Yet in these relationships, Jesus did not lose his saltiness nor conceal his light.

No doubt, disciples must not take lightly the wiles of the world, the flesh, and the devil. But the answer to that danger is not isolation but active engagement, which leads to the conversion of individuals and the transformation of culture. Anything less is an inexcusable truncation of the gospel of the kingdom.

Well, as we look in conclusion at what we've already noticed in the Sermon on the Mount, I think we are challenged by the fact that God really makes our obligation twofold. We can't say it's too complicated. We relate to him, and we relate to our fellow humans.

Much like Jesus put it later when asked what the greatest commandment is, loving God with all our being and loving our neighbor as ourselves. The first four beatitudes show us how to love God. The second four show us how to love people.

The lofty goals that are there are able to be accomplished as we're empowered by the Spirit and supported by our fellow believers. As we live up to those attitudes and characteristics which are already ours in principle through conversion, we become salt and light in the world. If we want to be a good testimony, we tend to do whatever the latest fad is about being a testimony.

But when it comes right down to it, if we're the type of people described by those beatitudes, we can't help but be salt and light in this world as we live in it as people who want to shine the glorious light of the gospel of Jesus on a culture, on a world which has been darkened by sin. May the Lord help us not only to grasp Matthew's message but to get involved in the teaching of Jesus and to be salt and light.