

Matthew
An Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 5:1-2
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Both believers and skeptics have almost universally acknowledged the moral grandeur of “The Sermon on the Mount.” What Jesus taught in these three chapters in Matthew's Gospel has touched all of Western civilization, and the West, has reached much of the rest of the world. St. Augustine called this passage “The Perfect Pattern of the Christian life.” The great American statesman, Daniel Webster, two weeks before his death, wrote these words.

Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief. My heart has assured me and reassured me that the Gospel of Jesus Christ must be a divine reality. The Sermon on the Mount cannot be a merely human production. This belief enters into the very depth of my conscience. The whole history of man proves it.

The German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, wrote that, “The Sermon on the Mount contains moral teachings which are unparalleled in their purity and sublimity, surpassing all other religious or ethical codes known to man.” The great English poet John Donne, I think, put it most beautifully of all when he wrote these words.

As nature has given us certain elements and all our bodies are composed of them, and art has given us a certain alphabet of letters and all words are composed of them, so our blessed Savior, in these three chapters of this Gospel, has given us a sermon of texts of which all our sermons may be composed. All the articles of our religion, all the canons of our church, all the injunctions of our princes, all the homilies of our fathers, all the body of divinity is in these three chapters in this one sermon.

Today, it is with great joy that we begin our extraordinary journey through “The Sermon on the Mount,” the most famous sermon ever preached. Last time that we studied Matthew together, we studied the last three verses of chapter 4, “A Summary of Jesus' Public Ministry in Galilee,” and in those three verses, Matthew summarizes almost two years of Jesus' public ministry; but he also introduces us to the next two major sections of his Gospel. We learn about “Jesus' Teaching Ministry” in chapters 5 through 7; and we learn about “His Healing Ministry” in chapters 8 and 9. As we learn, these verses also show us why “The Sermon on the Mount” was necessary in Jesus' day and why it's still so important for today, because really, the last verses of chapter 4 provide us with two reasons that Jesus preached the sermon. Verse 23, because His priority was, in fact, “Teaching;” it's what He did, what He came to do. And secondly, in verses 24 and 25, because “His Great Popularity Was Confusing.” The large crowds that followed Jesus created great spiritual confusion about who were truly His disciples, and that's what prompted Jesus to preach the sermon.

Now, this same sermon is recorded in two places in the Gospels, obviously here in Matthew 5 to 7, and also in Luke, chapter 6. Luke's account is only 29 verses; Matthew's 107 verses. So obviously, Matthew's Gospel is the longest of the two, but even so, if you read Matthew's version out loud, it still only takes about ten minutes. I hate to tell you this, but Jesus didn't preach a ten-minute sermon. No, what Matthew recorded here is just a summary that's greatly abridged and condensed. We know from the Gospels that Jesus often taught all day, where people ran out of food and didn't have a place to stay the night. This is just a brief overview. It's like a detailed outline of what Jesus said. And oh, by the way, if you trace the rest of Jesus' ministry, you'll find Him coming back to these same themes and repeating them in different

messages in different places. So, because this is condensed, because this is abridged, it deserves and requires our diligent, our careful, and even an extensive study of these verses.

How does this sermon fit the flow of Matthew's Gospel? Well, as I've reminded you, the theme of Matthew's gospel is that "Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah of the Hebrew Scripture; He is the divine Savior and King." And as Matthew develops that theme, so far, we have seen "The Messiah's Arrival." We've seen "His Preparation." We're currently in the heart of this Gospel, "The Messiah's Ministry," which begins in chapter 4, verse 17, runs through chapter 16, verse 20. So far in this section, we've looked at "A Summary of Jesus' Ministry." We've seen "The Beginning of His Great Galilean Ministry" at the end of chapter 4. Today, we begin to consider "The Principles of His Kingdom," or we could even say "The Principles of His Ministry" in chapters 5 through 7.

Let's begin by reading the introduction to this sermon in chapter 5, verses 1 and 2. You look at your copy of God's Word, and this is what we read. "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." Now, those two verses, obviously, are not yet the sermon. Rather, Matthew here, in these two verses, provides us with the background, a kind of "Introduction for 'The Sermon on the Mount.'" And it's a very important introduction because we learn in these verses some really important realities. Before we begin to study Jesus' actual sermon, there are four important details that we first need to know and understand, and that's what we want to look at this morning. This sets the stage for our study of the sermon itself.

The first detail that we need to note is "The Setting of the Sermon," the setting of the sermon. And I want to begin, not in Matthew's Gospel, but I want to turn over to Luke's version in Luke

6, where Luke provides us “The Historical Setting” of the sermon. It's here in Luke's account, in Luke 6, that we discover the circumstances in which Jesus preached this sermon. So, think for a moment about the day on which Jesus preached “The Sermon on the Mount,” and then go back to the night before. The night before, Jesus had gone into the hill country, north and east of Capernaum, to pray. Look at chapter 6, verse 12, “It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God.” You remember, Jesus had made Capernaum, that city on the Sea of Galilee, on the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee, He had made it His ministry headquarters, and now His hometown after he left Nazareth. He lived there in Capernaum. But on this night, He leaves the city of Capernaum and His residence there, He leaves the city, goes out to one of the hillsides nearby, and He begins to pray. And He prays all night. The next morning, He called all of His disciples to Him. Look at chapter 6, verse 13.

When day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles: Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James and John; and Philip and Bartholomew; and Matthew and Thomas; James *the son* of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot; Judas *the son* of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

So, after praying all night, Jesus called all of the disciples that were there in the immediate area to Himself. They were on the mountain with Him. And out of all of those followers, He chose and appointed twelve of them as His apostles. This is the first time that those twelve are called out in such a way, are appointed in such a way. That same morning, Jesus, the larger group of His followers, and the twelve whom He has just called and appointed, all of them went down the hillside and found that a crowd had gathered. Look at chapter 6, verse 17.

Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place; and *there was* a large crowd of His disciples, and a great throng of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon (That's modern Lebanon.), who had come to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were being cured. And all the people were trying to touch Him, for power was coming from Him and healing *them* all.

So, the night before, Jesus left His hometown, went to a nearby hill, prayed through the night, called all of His disciples the next morning, appointed twelve as His apostles. They all came down the hill, discovered a crowd has gathered, and this is what transpired. Now, that's "The Historical Setting," and that's where Matthew picks up his account.

Go back to Matthew, chapter 5, and here we learn "The Physical Setting" in which this sermon takes place. Verse 1 says, "He went up on the mountain." Now, that's why, by the way, this sermon has traditionally been known as "The Sermon on the Mount." But the Greek word for 'mountain' is a word with a wide range of meaning. It can describe anything from 'a hill' to 'a high mountain.' In this case, we know it was a hill near Capernaum on the northwest corner of the lake called the Sea of Galilee. If you look at a map of that area, you see that Capernaum occupies a place on the northwest corner of the lake, and the highest hill near Capernaum is called "The Mount of Beatitudes." You can see it on the slide; I've indicated it. It's the thirteen-hundred feet higher than the city itself. Although we can't be absolutely sure, it's very likely that this traditional site, or at least one of the hills nearby, is where Jesus taught this sermon. So that's the setting, "The Historical Setting," and "The Physical Setting" in which the sermon occurred.

Now, that brings us to a second important detail, and that is “The Audience of the Sermon.”

Verse 1 says, “When Jesus saw the crowds.” Now, in Matthew's summary of Jesus' Galilean ministry, he told us that large crowds followed Jesus wherever He went. Look back at verse 25 of chapter 4, “Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and *the* Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and *from* beyond the Jordan,” as we saw. In other words, from all over Israel and from all of the neighboring countries, people came in large crowds flocking to see Jesus, to have their loved ones healed, to be healed themselves, and to hear His teaching. So, there were these large crowds wherever Jesus went. In chapter 5, verse 1, Matthew then introduces us to one of these collections of crowds.

Now, who's in this crowd? Well, Luke describes the makeup of this crowd in detail. Turn back, keep your finger here, but turn back to Luke, chapter 6, and look again at verse 17. This huge crowd, or we could say crowds, consisted of three distinct groups. Notice verse 17, “Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place; and *there was* a large crowd of His disciples, and a great throng of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon.” Again, three distinct groups there. First of all, Jesus came down with them. The pronoun ‘them’ refers back to the twelve Apostles who were listed in the previous verses. So that's the first group. There were the twelve Apostles. Then Luke adds, “*there was* a large crowd (also a great multitude) of His disciples.” So, there were that day a large crowd of those who claimed to be Jesus' followers. In addition, Luke adds in verse 17, there was “a great throng of people from” Israel and other nations. So that's the makeup of these crowds that have gathered.

Now, go back to Matthew, chapter 5. In verse 1, Matthew writes, “When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him.” According to Luke, as we saw a moment ago, Jesus found a level place or a plateau on that hillside, and there,

according to Matthew, He eventually sat down. That was the authoritative position of a teacher in first century Israel. You remember in Luke 4, after Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah in His hometown synagogue of Nazareth, He handed the scroll back to the one who was responsible for it, and then He sat down, and He began to teach. If we were following the first century Jewish model, I would be sitting down, and you would be standing—that's what's happening here. He took the authoritative position of a teacher. “After He (Jesus) sat down,” notice verse 1 adds, “His disciples came to Him.” All His disciples gathered around Him, undoubtedly closest to Him were the twelve whom He had just personally chosen and appointed as His Apostles. Verse 2 says, “He opened His mouth and *began* to teach them.” So, having assumed the position of a teacher, Jesus now began to exercise the authority of a teacher and to teach.

Now, Matthew is clear here that Jesus' primary audience for this sermon was those who claimed to be His disciples. The larger crowd simply overheard; they listened in as Jesus taught His disciples. Notice what it says, verse 1, “His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and *began* to teach them,” that is, His disciples. So, this sermon is aimed then at His followers. Luke is even clearer. Luke 6:20 says, “Turning His gaze toward His disciples, He *began* to say.” So, around Jesus then were those who claimed to be His true subjects, His students, His followers, those who claimed that He was now their teacher, that He was their rightful King, that they belonged to His spiritual kingdom. This instruction is for them. It's how those in His kingdom are supposed to live. Jesus wanted His disciples, then and now, to understand that those who belong to His spiritual kingdom must live radically different from the rest of the people around us. So, when you come to “The Sermon on the Mount,” and this is crucial, don't miss this, Jesus isn't teaching a system of ethics for everyone on this planet; He's preaching a sermon to His followers. We'll discover this sermon is full of the Gospel; it's full of warnings to unbelievers.

But primarily, in this sermon, Jesus explained to all of those who claim to be His disciples how we are to live in His spiritual kingdom. This sermon is a sermon on discipleship for those who are His disciples. So professing believers, that's most of us here, were Jesus' primary audience then, and that's still the primary audience of this sermon. If you're a professing follower of Jesus Christ, this sermon is a sermon Jesus preached for you.

The third important detail about this sermon we need to consider, that will help us really work through it, is “The Structure of the Sermon,” the structure of the sermon. I'm going to give you a tentative outline of the entire sermon. So just know that I reserve the right to tweak it as we go along, but this is at least a tentative outline, and I think it's mostly right. First of all, you have “The Citizens of the Kingdom” in chapter 5, verses 3 through 16. Jesus begins by identifying those who are truly His spiritual subjects, those who really do belong to Him. First of all, He identifies “Their Character” in the verses we call “The Beatitudes,” verses 3-12. He begins by saying, “Here are those, here's how you recognize those who truly are My disciples, who truly are citizens of My kingdom” (Paraphrase). Then He describes “Their Influence” in verses 14 to 16; they are like “salt and light.”

Now, that brings us then to the body of this sermon, and I'll call the body of this sermon “The Righteousness of the Kingdom.” That is, it describes what those who are in His kingdom, how they live, what their lives are like, begins in chapter 5, verse 17, runs through chapter 7, verse 12. As we'll see, there are similar phrases at the beginning of that section and at the end that are like bookends that show us this is the heart of the sermon; this is the body of the sermon. And in this body, Jesus describes what those who are His citizens, the citizens of His kingdom, how they really live. First of all, they have “A Right Relationship to the Scripture.” They are committed to obey the Scripture, not externally like the Pharisees. They're committed to

obedience from the heart. It's not good enough not to commit murder; His true followers are committed not to be angry in their hearts. It's not good enough not to commit adultery; His true followers are committed not to lust in their hearts, and on it goes. We have a relationship to the Scripture that is a commitment to obey it from the heart. Also, they have "A Right Relationship to God," chapter 6. They're committed to love God supremely above all things. They're concerned, because they love God, about His glory and not their own. And they're concerned to make sure that nothing in their life, including the material things they enjoy, displaces God and His rightful place. And they also have "A Right Relationship to Others," chapter 7, verses 1 through 12. This is a very complex section. It describes a number of relationships; we'll look at it when we get there.

And finally, you have the conclusion of the sermon in which Jesus describes "The Dangers of the Kingdom," chapter 7, verses 13 to 27. What are the dangers of the kingdom? The first danger is beware of "The Wrong Entrance." One danger is you miss the right gate; you go in the wide gate that doesn't lead to eternal life but leads to hell. How does that happen? It's because of the danger of "False Teachers." False teachers are standing at the front of the wide gate going, "This is the way, enter here, this is the way to heaven." And another danger is the danger of "A False Profession" of Christ, to say, "Lord, Lord," when your life is not marked by any reality of His being your Lord. So that's the structure of the Sermon on the Mount, and we'll see it unfold.

A fourth and final important detail concerns "The Interpretation of the Sermon," the interpretation of the sermon. Next Sunday, Lord willing, we'll begin the sermon itself, but first we need to make sure that we're interpreting and understanding it correctly. Throughout church history, there have been many different ideas about how this sermon should be understood. In fact, there are five common interpretations of "The Sermon on the Mount." Now, as you might

guess, I'm going to give you the four that I don't believe are true, and I'll end with number five, alright? So here are common interpretations. Number one, "The Theological Liberal Interpretation." Those who are theologically liberal, they don't believe the Bible, they don't believe, often, in miracles, they don't believe a lot about our faith. Those who hold this interpretation say that this sermon simply presents a system of moral ethics that everyone on this planet has the power, in and of himself, to follow. In other words, this is just how a person ought to live. These people deny the necessity of salvation. They say, "You're not dead spiritually, you're just slightly sick, and you can help yourself get better. And if you want to achieve a right standing before God, just live out the ethics of Jesus, just live out 'The Sermon on the Mount.'" Mahatma Gandhi, the Hindu leader, captured the heart of this view when he called "The Sermon on the Mount," "the world's finest collection of ethical teaching." Sadly, there are many theological liberals connected to Christianity who share Gandhi's perspective. They say, "Look, you don't need to be saved from your sin, you just need to live better. Just adopt the ethics of Jesus and God will be happy, and He'll accept you."

There are two primary problems with this view. First of all, it is contrary to the entirety of Scripture. I mean, read Romans 3, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS...THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD...THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD." In addition to that, listen to Romans 8, verse 7, talking about unbelievers, "The mind set on the flesh (Here's every unbeliever's mind.) is hostile toward God, for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*." An unbeliever doesn't have the capacity to obey God in a way that pleases God. In fact, the next verse says, "He cannot please God." The Greek word is '*dunamai*,' He doesn't have the power, he doesn't have the capacity, he doesn't have the ability to please God. So, this view cannot be right.

A second reason it can't be right is it's contrary to the context of the sermon itself. As we already saw, Jesus spoke these words to whom? He spoke these words to those who were already His disciples. Lloyd-Jones writes, "No man can live the Sermon on the Mount in and of himself and unaided. There is nothing that so leads to the Gospel and its grace as the Sermon on the Mount." You see, if we truly contemplate Jesus' commands in this sermon, we quickly find that humans without the Holy Spirit have no capacity to follow Jesus' ethics. Let me just give you one example. Look at chapter 5, verse 21, Jesus says:

You have heard that the ancients were told, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER," and "Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court." But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court, and whoever says to his brother, "you good-for-nothing" (obviously in anger), shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever (in anger) says, "You fool," shall be guilty *enough to go* into fiery hell.

Okay, let's just have a test. How many of you here have never been angry in your heart with anyone else? You get the point! You can't live out the ethics of this sermon and find yourself acceptable to God—it's impossible!

A second common interpretation is "The Roman Catholic Interpretation." The official position of the Roman Catholic Church is what we can call "The Double Standard of Obedience." Now, sadly, the seeds of this view appear in the writing of Augustine, but it was fully developed in the medieval period by Thomas Aquinas. And the Roman Catholic interpretation of this sermon divides it into two categories of commands. First of all, they say, in this sermon, there are "General Precepts," and obeying these is "necessary for salvation." Secondly, they say, in this

sermon, there are “Specific Counsels,” and obeying these is not necessary for salvation, but “for perfection.” So, the Roman Catholic doctrine says this. “Part of how you are justified, how you are declared right with God is by keeping the general precepts in this sermon. And those who are more spiritual (like the priests and the monks and the saints of the church), those also keep the specific counsels.” Friends, the truth is, as we’ll see, the Roman Catholic view of this sermon contradicts the very first words out of Jesus’ mouth. Chapter 5, verse 3, look at what He says, “Blessed are the poor (beggars) in spirit,” those who acknowledge they have nothing to present to God. They have nothing God wants; they have no way to achieve a right standing with God. They are beggars and they come to God throwing themselves on His mercy. It says, “to them belongs the kingdom of heaven (God).” You see, a right standing before God is all grace, and that’s where Jesus begins.

A third common interpretation is “The Absolutist Interpretation.” This has been held by monastics through the last two-thousand years, as well as by the Anabaptists. And this view says that all Jesus’ commands, in this sermon, “must be obeyed in their strictest literal sense.” In other words, those who take this approach in reality deny that Jesus uses figures of speech in this sermon, like hyperbole. They would look at commands like “cut off your hand” and “pluck out your eye,” and say, “Well, we ought to consider that.” So, they interpret Jesus’ words with a wooden literalness. We obviously interpret the Scriptures literally, but we know there are figures of speech. They really deny those figures of speech. Let me give you a couple of examples.

Look at chapter 5, verse 39, Jesus says, “But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.” Now, they would say, the absolutists would say, that this means any form of self-defense is wrong. “If you’re a true

follower of Jesus Christ, then you must be a pacifist,” they would say. When in reality, as we'll see, this expression is in a context, and the context is taking personal vengeance—that's what Jesus is forbidding. Take another example, verse 40, “If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.” They teach that if someone sues you, even if they sue you unjustly, you must always give them more than they ask for. Again, this verse has a context; it's the context of personal vengeance. A third example is verse 42, “Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.” Absolutists say, “This command to lend is absolute and never to be tempered in any way.” So, if you have a relative who's addicted to drugs and they ask you for money, give them money, even if you know they're going to run right out from you and spend that money on drugs. The problem with the absolutist view is that it fails to recognize that Scripture interprets Scripture. Whatever Jesus means in this sermon can't contradict what other passages teach. So, in the Old Testament Law, for example, you were permitted to defend yourself even to the point of taking another life if your life was threatened. And so, Jesus can't mean here, “No, that's all wrong. You should never do that.” In fact, Jesus Himself didn't practice this sort of wooden absolutist literalism in interpreting His own teaching in the sermon. For example, based on chapter 5, verse 34, the absolutist says a Christian should never take an oath of any kind ever. And yet Jesus Himself allowed Himself to be put under oath at His trial later in this same book, as we'll see in chapter 26. So, that's not a good interpretational model either.

A fourth common interpretation is “The Classic Dispensational Interpretation.” We live in Dallas and much of this comes from Dallas Theological Seminary, which I appreciate, and have respect for, in the past in many ways, but this classic dispensational view is a problem. I was raised on the Scofield Bible and Scofield was a classic dispensationalist, and he and others like

him, teach this. Listen carefully. They say that when Jesus came in the incarnation, He first offered a literal earthly kingdom to the Jews right then. If they had accepted Him as their Messiah, they say, Jesus would have immediately established a literal earthly kingdom, a physical kingdom, then and there. But because the Jews rejected Him, that kingdom was then put on hold into the future. And so instead, Jesus went to the cross. Friends, I completely reject that. The cross was never plan B! Jesus was a Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. He Himself said it's why He came, "to give His life as a ransom for many." But because they say this, they say that the teaching here in "The Sermon on the Mount" was intended for life in that literal kingdom that Jesus promised the Jews. They say, since it didn't happen then, this sermon is not meant for us. Its teachings are now appropriate only for life in the future Millennial Kingdom. Listen to Scofield in his reference Bible, "The Sermon on the Mount in its primary application gives neither the privilege nor the duty of the church. The sermon (He says.) is not for the church;" it's not for us.

Now, this view is so full of problems that even Dwight Pentecost and John Walvoord, two classic dispensationalists, wrote a book trying to back away from it and to balance it. They argued that the ethical teaching in this sermon is for every Christian in every age, but it's still meant for a different time. Why? Because, they say, "Look, read the sermon, you find no reference to the new birth, no reference to the Gospel, justification, they're not mentioned explicitly." Listen, if we use that argument, we could wrongly conclude that the letter of James is not intended for Christians today. As I said, there are many problems with the classic dispensational view of "The Sermon on the Mount." Let me give you a couple. First of all, number one, there is nothing in this sermon that states or even implies that its truths are for the future millennium only; not one thing—you won't find it. Number two, Jesus demanded these

things of His first century disciples, and they clearly weren't living in the millennium. Number three, every command in this sermon is taught somewhere else in the New Testament where it clearly applies to church-age believers. And number four, the sins that Jesus addresses in this sermon, they're not going to characterize believers during the future millennium-we're perfected! These sins are only present during this age. Jesus addresses ongoing sins among His disciples like anger, adultery, lust, divorce, the breaking of vows. In this sermon, we find believers struggling with the temptation to idolatry when it comes to money. We find His followers being surrounded by evil people who strike them on the cheek, enemies who persecute them. There are dogs and swine and false teachers. None of that is like the millennium. So, that view is wrong as well.

There's one other common view, and it's the one that best fits the biblical data. We'll call it "The Reformed Interpretation." This view is also sometimes called the "Realized Eschatological View." Don't be scared by that if you don't know what it means; here's what they mean. This view recognizes the reality of what theologians call the "already, but not yet" principle. The "already, but not yet" principle. Here's what that means. Some aspects of the kingdom have already been realized. Friends, we already live in a spiritual kingdom ruled by Jesus Christ. It's already. But other aspects of the kingdom have not yet come. Jesus will one day rule over a literal geopolitical kingdom on this planet, but not yet. The spiritual truths that Jesus teaches in this sermon apply to both. They apply to right now, the spiritual aspect of His kingdom, as well as to when we live in the future Millennial Kingdom without the sin that's described here. In effect, this sermon acknowledges that by God's grace, we as believers can begin to live like kingdom citizens right now. Not long after, back in the mid 80s, when I started listening to John MacArthur, I heard him preach a series on this passage and I loved his title. He called it

“Kingdom Living: Here and Now.” That's what this sermon's about, “Kingdom living here and now.” Of course, because of our sin and our flesh, we will never manifest perfectly all that this sermon demands of us until we're in Christ's presence and we're glorified; but it's still for us today.

So, to summarize then, Jesus intended “The Sermon on the Mount” to accomplish two great spiritual objectives. Two great spiritual objectives. Number one, He wanted this sermon “To show unbelievers how impossible it is to merit acceptance with God and to drive them to the Gospel.” As we walk through this sermon, you're going to see it. The standard for what God is pleased with is so impossibly high that you will never make yourself right with God based on your own efforts to keep it. I just looked at one example. There are countless examples. If you're here this morning and you're not a follower of Jesus Christ, let me tell you that as we walk through this sermon, you're going to see that you don't now, and never could, measure up to God's standard that would allow you to be accepted by Him. Your only hope, my only hope, isn't the ethical teaching of Jesus, it's the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. It's that He died in order to purchase forgiveness for all of those who would repent and believe in Him. And God raised Him from the dead, accepted His sacrifice. That's how we get into the kingdom. That's the only way you will ever be right with God; it's the only way you can be accepted by Him. My prayer for you today is that you will do just that; that you'll abandon all hope in yourself; that you will see already that what God wants from you is for you to be a beggar in spirit, for you to come to Him, acknowledging that you have nothing He wants, and throw yourself completely on His mercy, begging for Him to save you because of the work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

There's a second objective that Jesus had, and that is, for the rest of us, “To teach His disciples in every age how to live in the spiritual kingdom that we already belong to.” Think about this,

Christian, living out the truths of this sermon is the only path to true and lasting happiness. That's why Jesus begins the sermon saying, "Blessed," happy, nine times! Let me tell you, Christian, you will never find "true and lasting happiness" outside obedience to Jesus Christ. Living out the truths of this sermon, secondly, are "The most powerful tool for effective evangelism." You see, the way you and I can be salt, remember that power of our influence? The only way we can be salt in a rotten world, and the only way we can be light in a darkened world, is by living out the truths in this sermon and proclaiming them to others. And thirdly, living out the truths of this sermon is "The only way to please God." Do you understand that? This is a lesson in discipleship; this is a lesson in what God expects from you. What we're going to see as we track our way through this sermon is, if you have, by grace, entered into Jesus' spiritual kingdom, if you're His disciple, if you're a follower of His, then this is how to live in a way that pleases Him, and pleases the Father who has made you His son or His daughter. That's the journey that awaits us in this amazing sermon.

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for Your Word. What a treasure! Thank You that under the inspiration of Your Spirit, You prompted Matthew to write it, and to write it in these words, to reflect what our Lord said so beautifully, so powerfully. Lord, we are so grateful to have this treasure, and I pray in the weeks and months ahead that you would open our hearts and minds to truly understand it. Help us to be true disciples, to be taught by Jesus. Help us in the months ahead to, as it were, sit at His feet, just like the disciples did that day, and to hear Him teach us how to be His followers in a way that pleases You. Father, give us open minds to understand, and give us subjected wills that are open to obey.

Lord, I also pray for those who are here this morning who have thought that they could somehow earn their way into Your favor, that they could earn acceptance with You. Lord, help

them to see that that's hopeless, that the only way to come to You is a beggar on our knees, crying out for mercy we don't deserve because of the work of Jesus Christ, His perfect life, His substitutionary death, and His resurrection. And Lord, before their head hits the pillow today, I pray that they would find themselves on their knees doing just that, crying out for Your mercy, and finding You to always be merciful. Lord, thank You. Use these truths to shape and fashion our minds and our lives, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.