

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **Happiness Is...**

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-2

Code: 2197

We're looking at Matthew chapter 5. Obviously, it's going to take us some time to get through all of this. The Sermon on the Mount takes up chapter 5, chapter 6 and chapter 7. And I believe that all of this was delivered by our Lord as one sermon, at one particular time. And, of course, these truths were again and again taught by him at different points, at different intervals in different locations. But there is a tremendous strength and power to putting this all together as one great sermon. And we're going to take a long time to study these revolutionary truths, these truths that hit the world like some kind of a bomb that exploded on the minds of those who heard them.

But let me begin our discussion of this wonderful section - a discussion which, no doubt, will range over many months to come - with this statement. Jesus is in the business of providing people with happiness. And that's why we've entitled this opening message "Happiness is ..." Sadly, not everybody really understands that, not everybody really believes that. In fact, there are many Christians who aren't too sure that they really experience the reality of true happiness. But Jesus is in the happiness business. Happiness is his concern.

Now this is very evident to us because here, in the very first sermon ever recorded as having been preached by Jesus Christ, as we enter into the gospels the first time we meet a sermon of our Lord, it is a sermon that begins with the constant ringing theme of happiness.

If you'll notice in verse 1 and following, you'll see the word "blessed" used 9 times. The word simply means "happiness" or "happy" and we may read these that way.

"And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain and when he was seated, his disciples came unto him and he opened his mouth and taught them saying, 'Happy are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Happy are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Happy are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Happy are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

"Happy are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Happy are the pure of heart, for they shall see God. Happy are the peacemakers, for they shall be called "the sons of God." Happy are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Happy are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted the prophets

who were before you.' ”

Nine times we see the word “blessed,” the word “happy.” And I say it again, the Lord is in the happiness business. The Lord is in the business of giving men and women blessing. The ultimate end of it all in verse 12 is that these points of happiness should result in rejoicing and exceeding gladness. And so I say it again, God is in the business of making our lives full of joy, full of gladness, full of happiness.

Now this is only the introduction to the sermon. Having stated that basic goal of His teaching to bring about true happiness - and I'm not talking about the world's happiness based upon happenstance or circumstance. We'll get into that in detail as we go. But true happiness is the goal, and like any good preacher he states his objective at the beginning.

The very beginning of the Sermon on the Mount tells you the whole point of the Sermon on the Mount, and that is that we should know real blessedness, real happiness, real joy, real gladness, genuine divine reward. And then from there on, he goes to talk about how it is that that becomes possible, what kind of life style it is that produces this kind of happiness. That becomes the running theme through chapter 5, chapter 6, and chapter 7.

Now we have to get the basics before we can understand this absolutely fantastic sermon, I think the greatest single sermon ever preached. We have to get the foundation. So tonight we're just going to lay some ground work and we're going to give you a little bit of a teaching approach to it rather than a preaching approach, but you've got to get a grip on these basics so that the rest will be meaningful to you.

First of all, I want to set for you the context. I want to give you a little bit of a backdrop, a little bit of background. I want to frame it a little bit if I can, so that you'll understand the significance of these words to the people at the point in time, at this juncture biblically. It all needs to fit together. We need to understand context a little bit.

First of all – and there are several contexts to look at. First of all, we have to get a biblical context. By that I mean a biblical background. Where are we in the Bible? Where are we in the flow of God's revelation? Where are we in God's plan of revealing his truth to man? Well, this is a new point. This is a dramatic change. This is an incredible transformation.

Just to show you what I mean, I want you to look at the very last message of the Old Testament. The very last message is in Malachi 4:6. This is the way the Old Testament ends. This is what it says. Malachi, the last book and the last verse of the last chapter. “And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to their fathers - ” now listen to this, “ - Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.” How interesting. The Old Testament ends with a curse. The New

Testament begins with a blessing. Now that's a dramatic change.

The last words of the man of God, "a curse." That's the last words. "A curse." The first words of the Man of God, the living Christ, "Blessed." Blessed. Blessing and cursing. The Old Testament: The law, Sinai, thunder, lightning, judgment, cursing. The New Testament: Zion, grace, peace, blessing. A dramatic change.

The word "blessed," *makarios*, in fact, that's a common name for people who are Greek. You may remember the Bishop Makarios of the Greek Orthodox Church. *Makarios* is an adjective that simply, basically means "happy" or "blissful." That's really what it means. But I want to expand that a little bit so you'll understand the significance of this new message. The word basically comes from a root *makar*, that root means "to be happy," real happiness. Not in the world's sense of happiness based upon positive circumstance.

Both Homer and Hesiod spoke of the Greek gods as being - now note this because this is a very important point - they spoke of the Greek gods as being blessed in themselves and they said it was a state unaffected by the world of men who were subject to poverty, weakness and death.

In other words, the ancient Greek concept of *makar* and *makarios* is the idea of a kind of happiness, and a kind of blissfulness, and a kind of contentedness, and a kind of blessedness that is unaffected by circumstance. That's really what they were saying.

The word, then, has the idea of an inward bliss, an inward happiness which is neither the result of circumstance nor subject to change on the basis of circumstance. This is the basic New Testament meaning of "blessed." It means an inner peace, an inner bliss, an inner happiness, an inward joy that is not produced by circumstance nor is it affected by circumstance. It is a state of happiness, a state of wellbeing in which God desires his children to live.

Now let me take it a step further. It is a word that indicates character. It is a word that talks about character. It is touching man at the very base of his existence. It is a character word. And the reason I say that is because it is used to describe God. For example, we find many times in the Bible the statement, "Blessed be God." For one, Psalm 68:35 says that. "Blessed be God." Psalm 72:18 says, "Blessed be the Lord God." Psalm 119:12 said, "Blessed art Thou O Lord." First Timothy 1:11 says, "The blessed God." In other words, whatever - now get this - whatever this state is, it is true of God. Do you understand what I am saying? Whatever it is, it is true of God. Whatever it is to be blessed and blessed, it is true of God.

Now since this word is used of God - and by the way it is also used of our Lord Jesus Christ. It says in 1 Timothy 6:15, "The Lord Jesus Christ who is the blessed and only potentate, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords." So this blessedness is a character which is true of God, a character aspect which is

true of God and of Christ. Now that makes it something we need to take a step further.

If whatever this blessedness is, it is true of God and it is true of Christ - now watch this - then the only people who will ever experience it are those who partake of God and partake of Christ. Okay? There is no blessedness apart from that. But Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1:4 that we who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ - watch this - are "partakers of the divine nature." Right? We are partakers of the divine nature.

The upshot of that as applied here is that we can know the same bliss, the same inner state of contentment, the same happiness deep down within us that is known by God and the Lord Jesus Christ themselves. What a marvelous thing that is to realize. *Makarios* then, is fundamentally an element of the character of God. And man will only know that element insofar as he is a partaker of the divine nature.

So - watch - from the very beginning it is established, the Sermon on the Mount has nothing to say and nothing to offer to someone apart from faith in Jesus Christ. That's basic. But for those of us who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ, for those of us who by faith in Christ have become partakers of the divine nature, the same bliss, the same contentment, the same happiness, the same sense of blessedness that is known by God of Himself and Christ of Himself can be known by us of ourselves.

It's a tremendous thought. Once a person knows God through Christ, blessedness becomes available to him or to her. So to begin with - note this, people - that when we talk about happiness, or we talk about blessedness, it is in a biblical context and it is not talking about a superficial attitude based on circumstance, it is talking about an inward attitude based upon the very indwelling of the character of God Himself.

So we see, then, that this is a tremendous thing that God is saying. That whereas the old covenant ends with a curse, the new one ends with the potential of the very character and nature of God indwelling the believer so that there would be a blessedness that is only true of God Himself. I don't know if you get a hold of that. That is an absolutely mindboggling thought, that you and I could be such partakers of the divine nature as to know the very bliss that the eternal God knows in his own mind. That's the kind of contentment God wants for us.

The Old Testament is the book of Adam, and Adam and his story are the story of the Old Testament. It's kind of a sad story. The first king in the earth was Adam and it was said by God to Adam that he had dominion over the earth. He was the first monarch, but he fell and since he fell the Old Testament had to end with a curse. But in the New Testament there's a new king and that's why Matthew starts the New Testament, because he is the one who presents the King.

The King is immediately presented. The last Adam, the second Adam, the greater than Adam, and He is a King who does not fall. The first king fell and left a curse. The second King reigns and leaves a blessing. One writer put it this way, "The first Adam was tested in a beautiful garden and failed. The last Adam was tested in a dangerous desert and succeeded. Because the first Adam was a thief he was cast out of paradise but the last Adam turned to a thief on a cross and said, 'Today, shalt thou be with Me in paradise.' The book of the generations of the first Adam ends with a curse. The book of the generations of Jesus Christ ends with a promise, 'There shall be no more curse.' " That's how Revelation ends.

So the Old Testament gave us a law to show man in his misery and the New Testament gives us life to show man in his bliss. Big difference. So Matthew introduces to us immediately - as we've been studying in our study - immediately introduces us to the new king, doesn't he? Fantastic new reality dawns upon human history. There is a new king. There is one who can reverse the terrible curse of Adam.

And immediately as we hit the New Testament we face Matthew's presentation of the king. And we have already studied the ancestry of the king, and we studied the arrival of the king, and we've studied the adoration of the King, and we've studied the prophetic anticipation of the King, and we've studied the announcer of the King, John the Baptist, and the affirmation of the King, and the advantage of the king as He won in his temptation, and the activity of the king. And now we come to the address of the king, the manifesto of the monarch himself. The Sermon on the Mount is the great statement of the king as he opens his mouth and gives blessing instead of cursing to those who desire it. That's the general biblical context in which this sermon is delivered - a new age, a new king, a new message.

But there is also the fact that as you look at the beatitudes as this blessed message is given it seems somewhat paradoxical. And Matthew is presenting a kingdom that doesn't really fit what most people would have anticipated. You see, happiness as Matthew outlines it here in the words of Jesus isn't exactly the way the world would do it. In fact, it says here that the happy people are the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, the hungry and the thirsty, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted, the reviled.

Now you say, "Wait a minute. I'm not sure I want that kind of happiness. Sounds like misery with another name. You've got to be kidding." Well, that's the point. There is a paradox because all the way down connected to happiness is misery. And I'm going to say it right here and you're going to see it as we go. Misery is the key to happiness.

You say, "Now, wait a minute. Misery is the key to happiness?" That's right. We'll see that as we go in detail. But to most people, the whole thing seems absolutely absurd. One writer said this. "It is as if Jesus crept into the large display window of life and changed all the price tags." It's all backwards.

What do you mean happiness comes out of misery? What are you saying? Why the world says, "Man, look, happiness is – we've got books on that. Happiness is duh, dut, duh, duh. You know, we work on that a lot." Happiness is the gogetter, the guy who can push everybody out of his way and the guy who can get what he wants, when he wants, where he wants and how he wants. That's happiness.

Happiness is macho. Happiness is doing your own thing. Happiness is grabbing all the gusto you can get. That's happiness. Happiness is acquiring the world's things. Happy are the rich, and happy are the noble, and happy are the famous, and happy are the popular. But that isn't it. The message from this king doesn't really fit the picture. And Matthew is so dynamic in such a presentation because his message just devastates worldly attitudes, even of the Jewish people themselves who would have read Matthew first of all.

Even Seneca, the Roman philosopher, tutor of Nero in the first century said this. "What is more shameful than to equate the rational souls' good with that which is irrational?" What he was saying was any fool knows you can't fill up a man's empty soul with external things. You can't fill a rational need with an irrational object. That's what the world tries to do.

Jesus comes into the world to announce that the tree of happiness doesn't grow in the cursed earth. Have to tell you that, folks, the tree of happiness doesn't grow in the cursed earth. But so many seek it. Think about Solomon. Solomon was the most magnificent king that ever lived. If anybody should have been happy according to the world's standard, he should. He had nobility. Listen, his parentage was the royal line of David through which the Messiah would come, the most royal, noble line in the history of the world. There was nobody with more nobility than Solomon.

His palace was the paragon of the earth and it was located in the city, the city of God, the city of Jerusalem. His wealth was so immeasurable and his treasure was so vast that the Old Testament says silver was as common as rocks. His pleasure was fabulous food, incredible stables. I was in Solomon's stable up in Megiddo, incredible - literally thousands of the finest horses that could be found in the world.

He had the buildings, and the servants, and the vineyards, and the fishponds, and the gardens. Women? By the hundreds. His intelligence? Why, he was the most intelligent man who ever lived. He had it all. In the world's evaluation, he had it all. He should have been an infinitely happy man and all he had to say about it is this. "Vanity, vanity all is vanity." The word means "emptiness." And the New Testament put it this way. "A man's life consists not in the abundance of things which he possesses."

Listen, if you're looking for happiness in the world's goods, you're in the wrong place. The tree of happiness doesn't grow in the cursed earth. It's not there. Physical things don't touch the soul. Did you get that? It's a simple point but I want you to think it through. Physical things don't touch the soul.

You cannot fill a spiritual need with a physical substance. It can't be done. But people try to do it.

You know, I mean if you're really miserable in your marriage, go buy a new car. Or if you had a rotten argument with your wife, go out and buy a new suit. You'll feel better. You cannot fill a spiritual need with a physical substance. That's foolish.

You can't do the other, either. When you're hungry you don't want a lecture on grace. You want your dinner. And when you're out on the desert and you're dying of thirst you don't want somebody to talk to you about the wonderful mercy of God. You want water. You cannot fill a physical need with a spiritual substance. It's just as ridiculous to think you can fill a spiritual need with a physical substance. It can't be done.

Things which cannot quiet the heart in a storm cannot provide any kind of blessedness. You can't pour oil on a wounded spirit. I think about Saul when he was sore distressed, all the jewels in his crown couldn't do anything to comfort him. I think about king Belshazzar in the book of Daniel, he was carousing, and drinking, and living it up, and they were having a wild party like few in the history of any nation, and all of a sudden while he was there Daniel 5:3 says he was drinking wine in the golden vessels of the temple and he was really draining it down and everybody's cup was gold and then a figure of a man's hand appeared on the wall and wrote Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin, "You are weighed in the balances and found wanting." And all of a sudden the Bible says his countenance changed. And you know what happened? The wine went sour and the food was like a rock in his stomach.

One of the great Puritan saints who has written wondrous things that really touch the heart of anyone who is a student of the Bible is a man named Thomas Watson, and Thomas Watson said this. "Things of this world will no more keep out trouble of spirit than a piece of paper will stop a bullet. Worldly delights are winged," he says. "They may be compared to a flock of birds in the garden that stay a little while but when you come near to them they take their flight. 'So riches make themselves wings and they fly away as an eagle,' Proverbs 23:5 says. They are like the meteor that blazes but spends and annihilates itself, they're like a castle made of snow lying under the torrid beams of the sun." External things do more to discomfort the soul than to bless it.

Ecclesiasties 5:13 says, "Riches are kept for the hurt of their owners." Did you get that? "Riches are kept for the hurt of their owners." There's no satisfaction in what the world offers, and when Jesus came into the world - listen to me, people - he wasn't offering the world stuff. And there are some people passing themselves off today as Christians who are offering the world stuff. They're promising financial prosperity, money, success. Jesus never offered that. That's never in the Sermon on the Mount. The opposite is here.

In fact, the things of the world become fuel for pride, they become fuel for lust, and they become a snare. And Jesus himself said the things of the world, the cares of the world, the riches of the world will rise up and choke out the Word. They are thorns and they will do to your soul what thorns do to your shirt or your dress.

Listen, what God is saying in all of this marvelous and incomparable sermon, in these beatitudes, is simply this, people: You will never find happiness in this world. Never. You might as well learn it. That is like seeking the living among the dead. And the angel said, "He's not here. He's risen."

And I want to just borrow that concept and say if you're looking for the living reality of real blessedness in the earth, you're looking among the dead for the living and it's not there. You've got to ascend to another level. Paul put it this way. "If ye be then risen with Christ, seek those things which are - " what? " - above. Set not your affections on things on the earth."

John put it this way. "Love not the world neither the - "what? " - things that are in the world." There's no satisfaction there. Happiness is not here. Blessedness isn't in the cursed earth, it's on another level. And the Sermon on the Mount is going to take you to that level. Are you ready? It's going to take you right out of the world. It's going to counter everything you hear by the fastpitch salesman.

It's going to counter everything you see on the billboards, everything you read in the magazines. It's going to give you an entire different standard of life, totally opposite of what the world tells you. So you're going to have a tough time really living it if you don't learn it well, because it's going to be bombarded by everybody coming along in the world system.

Now let me take you to another thought about context. There is a political context here, too, that's just fantastic. The Jews were looking for a Messiah, only their definition of a Messiah was a political ruler, right? They were looking for somebody to come, you know, riding into Jerusalem on a white horse, and zap all of the Romans, and they'd all fall over dead, and he'd lead a great revolution infinitely beyond anything they'd ever heard of, even that of Judas Maccabeus and his sons that had overthrown Greece temporarily.

Boy, they expected some really whirlwind deal to happen when the Messiah arrived. They were looking for political things. They tried to make Jesus a king there in Galilee when he first began his ministry, John tells us, because they saw a welfare state. He fed the 20,000 people and they showed up the next morning for free breakfast. They thought it was the greatest thing they had ever seen. This guy was going to feed them. There was going to be constant welfare, never have to work again. He just makes food.

They were looking at the politics of it. They were looking at the accommodation to their own humanness. And the Lord passed through and left them and didn't want to be that kind of king. Listen,



the Jews were looking for a political kingdom but Jesus never offered one. He looked at Pilate that day when he was going through the mockery of a trial and he said to - Pilate said to him, "Are you a king?" And Jesus said, "You said it." And Pilate, in effect, said, "Well, what in the world kind of kingdom are you?" He says, "I'll tell you something. My kingdom is not - " what? " - of this world. My kingdom, if it were of this world, my disciples would fight. But my kingdom is not of this world." Jesus never brought about the issue of politics. He wasn't so concerned about changing the structure as he was working on the inside. And this is what he says in this first sermon.

There's no politics in the Sermon on the Mount. None. There is not one reference to the social, political aspect of the kingdom made here, not one. The Jews were so concerned about the politics and the social life. Jesus makes no reference to that at all. The stress - I want you to get this - the stress is on being. That's the word you're going to have to see. The stress is on being. It's not on ruling or possessing it is on being.

In other words, he's not after what men do, he's after what men are. What men are. Because what they are will determine what they do. All of the ideals that are given in the Sermon on the Mount are contrary to human ideas about government, human ideas about kingdoms. In fact, the most exalted people, the most exalted people in Christ's kingdom would be the lowest of the low in the world's evaluation.

Do you know who the greatest man was who ever lived? Up until this time, who was it? John the Baptist. As far as the world was concerned, he was nothing but a raving maniac running around in a modified Tarzan suit eating bugs. And he wasn't even a part of the religious system. Jesus said he was the greatest man that ever lived. And then he went on to say, "But there's one greater than he." Do you know who it is? The least in my kingdom.

The poor in spirit, the mourning, the meek, those who hunger and thirst, feel empty inside, those full of mercy, those pure in heart, those who make peace, those who are persecuted, those who are reviled, those who have all manner of evil spoken against them. You know, that sounds to me like the biggest list of losers I ever saw. Well, by the world's standards they are. The world says, "Exert yourself. Demand your rights. Be a bigshot. Push yourself up. Hold onto your pride."

This is a different kind of a kingdom. It even advocates persecution without retaliation and blesses those who live that way. It's a spiritual kingdom. So the political aspect of this message was devastating. It was absolutely everything was the opposite of what they expected a Messiah to say.

Now, I want to talk just one more area about the religious context and you'll have a general idea of the thrust of the Sermon on the Mount. We've seen a little of the whole biblical context. We've seen a little of Matthew's perspective, something of how the world would view it, something of the politics of it. But now I want you to know the religious scene. It's really fascinating.

Jesus was confronting a very religious society. In fact, a whole society full of religionists. They were professional ritualists. And that's an important backdrop. Let me just divide them into four groups. There were four main groups within the religion of Judaism: The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes and the Zealots. We've talked about them at other times.

First of all, the Pharisees. Now here you go. The Pharisees believed that happiness was found in tradition or legalism. They were hot on the past, big on the past, real big. They believed that real happiness came through obeying the traditions of the fathers.

Then there were the Sadducees. And the Sadducees believed that happiness was found in the present, modernism, liberalism. Can the past, man, we're here. We've got to do it now. An updated religion, brand new liberalism, chuck the old stuff. You know, in a sense, they both had a little tiny bit of truth. The Pharisees were right. True religion has to be based on the past. The Sadducees had a little bit of truth because true religion has also got to work in the present.

And then there were the Essenes. And the Essenes said, "Nope. Happiness is in separation from the world." Oh, it sounds good, doesn't it? Only they were talking about geographical separation. They just moved out of town. Years ago there was an ad in a Christian magazine put in by one of our very, very fundamental Christian colleges that said the school was located 15 miles from the nearest sin. Just offhand, I'd say that's wishful thinking. But the Essenes believed we got to get out of town, where there's no sin.

So there were the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes, and then there were the Zealots. And Zealots said happiness is found in the political overthrow. Happiness is found in revolution. Happiness is found in knocking off Rome.

So, you see, the Pharisees were saying, "Go back." And the Sadducees were saying, "Go ahead." The Essenes were saying, "Go out." And the Zealots were saying, "Go against." And the Pharisees were the nostalgia buffs. And the Sadducees were the modernists. They were buying Danish furniture. And the Essenes were the isolationists. They were stashed up in a monastery somewhere. And the Zealots were the so-called religious, social activist. What a mess. Sounds just exactly like 1978 to me.

We've got religionists living in the past. We've got liberals trying to invent a new religion for the present. We've got people who think holy living is an issue of geography and they just want to make sure that they don't ever go near anything that looks like sin. And then we've got the people who think religion is a matter of leading a parade and a march on somewhere.

Jesus was confronting a whole society full of religionists. They all had their own little thing going. And the point that Jesus was making is, “Hey, you know, you're all wrong, every one of you.” For the Pharisees he was saying, “Religion is not a matter of external observance.” And for the Sadducee he was saying, “Religion is not a matter of human philosophy invented to accommodate the new day.” And to the Essenes he was saying, “Believe Me, religion is not a matter of geographical location.” And to the Zealots he was saying, “And neither is religion a matter of social activism.”

What he was saying is this, “My kingdom is inside.” Do you see? It's inside. That's the whole point. That's the whole message of Jesus to the world. That's the whole basis of the Sermon on the Mount. It's inside, not outside. Not outside rituals, not outside philosophy, not outside location or monasteries or any of that stuff, not outside activism, it's inside.

What Jesus is saying right here, I believe, is cracking open the door on the new covenant of which Jeremiah said, “God would write His law on their inward parts.” Do you see? Going inside. And so Jesus summed it up by saying to them, “Look, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes, the Zealots, and everybody who was either a conglomerate of all of that or stood underneath those four areas, I want to tell you all something, unless your righteousness exceeds that kind of righteousness you will, in no case, enter my kingdom.” Do you see?

“Unless you've got more going for you than that external stuff, you've got no part of my kingdom, because as I've said before there is no source of blessing in the cursed earth. It's beyond that. All that religion was dealing with externals and the Sermon on the Mount invades Jewish thinking with a blast that true blessedness comes from the inside, not the outside.

The same is true today. Don't comfort yourself in the fact that you've got the right theology. The liberals can't comfort themselves in the fact that they've spun off this great new theory, or the Bible is not the word of God, they've really updated it. Boy, they're really contemporary. They're flowing with the age.

A man cannot comfort himself in the fact that he's moved away from the world and moved up into a monastery and he sits there and contemplates God, undistracted by the things of the world. Nor can a man comfort himself because he thinks he's a social activist and he's running around all over the place trying to straighten out society. Those are not the things Jesus is after.

Oh, ultimately, all those things have a corner on a part of the truth, don't they? We need to be socially involved, and we need to be set apart unto God, and we need to be contemporary, and we need to be based on the past, but in and of themselves they're external, and God is after what's inside.

Way back in 1 Samuel 16:7, the Lord laid it out when he said, “the Lord looks on the heart.” And Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep your heart for out of it are the issues of life.” Well, you better guard your

heart. That's the issue. Well, you know, if you took care of your spiritual heart like you take care of physical heart it would be amazing, wouldn't it?

People today are literally going crazy over protecting their heart. Joggers everywhere, people riding bicycles, running up and down hills. Got to take care of the heart. You can go in the shopping center and stick your arm in a thing now. Put 50 cents in there and it will tell you how your heart's doing. Have you ever done that? A little deal reads your blood pressure. Boy, take care of that heart. Guard that heart. And if you've got a little bit of a problem, boy, lay off the fats and the cholesterol, watch your triglyceride count, and on, and on.

And, you know, the Bible says you better guard the heart that's the real issue. That's the real heart. The Hebrew thinking was it was the seed of all your knowledge of God, the mind. Listen, if we did as much to protect our spiritual heart as we do to protect our physical heart, we'd be in great shape spiritually. But sometimes we just ignore that area and that's what Jesus is after. In Luke 11:39 - Williams translation is great on this passage.

Listen to what it says. "Jesus said, 'Now you have the habit of cleaning the outside of your cups and dishes but inside you yourselves are full of greed and wickedness, you fools. Did not the one who made the outside make the inside too? Dedicate once for all your inner self and that once you will have everything else clean.' " See? That's what Jesus' message was. That's the heart of the Sermon on the Mount.

Now, on the basis of that context and that overview I want you to know it's important to study this. You see? Really important. I believe there are at least five reasons why it's important. I'm just going to give them to you real quick. Number one, because the Sermon on the Mount will show you the absolute necessity of the new birth. The Sermon on the Mount will show you that you can never please God on your own, in your flesh. Never. And as I said at the very beginning, the only people who will know blessedness are the people who know that blessedness insofar as it is an attribute of God and insofar as they are partakers of the divine nature, they can know and experience it.

Listen, the Sermon on the Mount to me goes way beyond the law of Moses in showing us the need for salvation. You can't live one day in a blessed condition apart from the new birth in Jesus Christ. It is the greatest thing in the New Testament to show man the desperate situation that he's in without God.

The second thing. I think we ought to study the Sermon on the Mount not only because it shows the absolute necessity of the new birth, but because it clearly points to Jesus Christ. It is perhaps the single greatest insight into the mind of our dear Lord Jesus Christ. You want to know how he thinks? Study his sermon. You want to know where His heart really beats? Study his sermon. You want to know what he really feels about living and about the standards for life? Study the sermon.

Third thing. We ought to study the Sermon on the Mount because it's the only way to happiness for Christians. If you want to be happy, if you want to be really filled with the Spirit, you don't go seeking some mystical experience. You don't go chasing some elusive dream. You don't go popping from meeting to meeting trying to catch it in the air. If you want to know happiness, and blessedness, and bliss, and joy, and gladness, then you just study the Sermon on the Mount and put it to practice.

I'll add another thing. I think we ought to study it because it's the best means I know of evangelism. You say, "What do you mean, evangelism?" I'll tell you this. If we ever live the Sermon on the Mount, it will knock the world over. It's the greatest tool of evangelism there is, to live this kind of a life.

And then lastly, we should study the Sermon on the Mount and live it because it pleases God. And you know, that's a privilege, that sinful John MacArthur, just plain old me, like Paul was singing, just ordinary me could please God. What an incredible thought. Plenty of reason to study the Sermon on the Mount. Plenty of reason to give ourselves to it.

Let me have you look as we close at the first two verses just to take it a step further. The occasion - we've seen the context. I just want to share some other points just very briefly. The occasion, verse 1. "And seeing the multitudes - " we'll stop there. Jesus always cared for the multitudes. And you know it says in Matthew 9:36, Matthew 14:14, and Matthew 15:32 that when he saw the multitudes he had what? Compassion.

Jesus saw that multitude of people. The multitude is described in verse 23 to 25 of chapter 4. "Jesus went about all Galilee teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, healing all manner of sickness, all manner of disease among the people. His fame went throughout all Syria. They brought unto him all the sick that were taken with diverse diseases and torments, those which were possessed with demons, and those who were epileptics, and those who had the palsy. And he healed them, and there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, Decapolis. Jerusalem, Judaea, and even beyond Jordan."

Here is this mass of humanity coming from north, south, east and west, following him. And when he sees them, as always, his heart is broken. You know, when he saw them hungry, he gave them food. And when he sees the spiritual hunger of their hearts, the deepest thing that is in him is God reaches out to give them what they need.

There was a wonderful attraction to Jesus Christ. Crowds just surged after him: Sick, demon possessed, Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, ritualists and harlots, Pharisees and publicans, scholars and illiterates, refined and degraded, rich men and beggars, a motley bunch. But Jesus is always the attracter of men and there's some strange attractiveness in Jesus Christ that knows nothing of class, knows nothing of money.

And I think it's so beautifully summed up in the words of the apostle Paul that "in Jesus Christ there is neither male or female, Jew or Gentile, bond nor free, neither Greeks nor barbarians." So there was a general thrust toward Christ of the multitude.

"And He saw the multitude and he spoke." And I add this. His message really wasn't to them, even. But He wanted them to hear it. They couldn't live it out. They couldn't know this blessedness, but they could at least know that it was available. And so they were the secondary audience. But they were what prompted the message because he wanted them to hear it and be attracted to it. So we see the context and the occasion.

And then a word about the preacher. Who is the preacher? "He went up into a mount. He was seated. His disciples came to him and he opened his mouth and taught them saying - " Folks, the greatest preacher that ever lived, that's who the preacher is. "Of whom they said never a man spake like this man," of whom they said, "He spoke as one having authority not as the scribes and the Pharisees." You know what they meant? He didn't quote any sources. He didn't quote any old rabbis. He spoke like he had authority on his own. Of whom the woman of Samaria said, "Come and see a man who told me all things whatsoever I have done." Oh, what a preacher.

This sermon is one of the greatest illustrations of homiletics I have ever seen. It's got three points. It can't get any better homiletics than that. A fantastic introduction, the introduction and then the first point, the citizens of the kingdom. And then the second point, the righteousness of the kingdom. And then the third point, the exhortation to enter the kingdom. And then in the last part of chapter 7, the effect that the sermon had. It's homiletic. It flows beautifully. It moves from one thing to the other. The transitions are magnificent. The master preacher.

He had structure. He had power. He had a divine commission. To one of the Old Testament prophets God had said, "I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth. Thou shalt be dumb and not be to them a reprover," Ezekiel 3. But later on, God came back to that same prophet in chapter 33 and said, "Now the hand of the Lord was upon me in the evening. My mouth was opened and I was no more dumb. And then the word of the Lord came unto me." You know, our Lord Jesus Christ with all the power that he had, with all the intellect that only God could have to develop a sermon like no other sermon, yet restricted his mouth until God's sovereign will and timing opened it. He had not only power in structure, but a divine commission.

The context, the occasion, the preacher. The setting? Look at verse 1 again. "He went into a mountain." He found a pulpit. And by the way, it's beautiful to note that the Greek adds "the mountain," the mountain. What mountain? Oh, no mountain in particular. As Jerry said it's just a slope that slopes right down the north shore, the sea of Galilee right to the water, lovely, beautiful, green, sunlit, one of the most magnificent scenes you'd ever seen in your life to sit right there on the mount

where Jesus gave this tremendous sermon and just look down to the rippling waters of the sea of Galilee, surrounded by the gentle hills of Galilee on the right and the golden heights on the left, and at the beginning of the Jordan river ascending down the Jordan valley, until it finally comes to the Dead Sea, to the right and over the hills to the west the valley of Sharon, and then the Mediterranean.

And there on that little hill sat Jesus and spoke. And it wasn't anything but a mountain but the Greek says "the mountain." And it isn't "the mountain" because of what mountain it was, but of what mountain he made it to become. It wasn't a "the mountain" till He gave this sermon, and then it was "the mountain." It was "the mountain" when Matthew wrote it and it was "the mountain" because that's where Jesus taught. He made it "the mountain."

He had a way of sanctifying the very insignificance of the place and setting it apart as "the mountain." And throughout all the hundreds of years since, the Christians have always remembered where that mountain was. It's just a little slope, but it's "the mountain." Why? He made it "the mountain."

And the style? What of the style? Not just the context, the occasion, the preacher, the setting, but the style. He was seated. "And when he was seated he opened his mouth and taught them saying - " He sat down because, you see, that was the traditional way a rabbi taught. And when a rabbi was just talking, and standing, and walking around, it was unofficial. But when he sat down – bang – boy, that was official. That was official.

We even have that today. When a professor is given an assignment at a university, we say he is given the chair. And from the chair, he teaches. The Catholic Church tells us the Pope speaks ex cathedra. You know what that means? From his seat, from his chair. When a man sat down to teach, that was authoritative. That was official. And what Jesus was saying was not some random thought. It was the official manifesto of the king. A manifesto of the king.

"He opened his mouth" is a colloquialism in Greek - beautiful colloquialism. It is used of solemn, grave, dignified, serious, weighty statements. This is not just off the cuff. This is dignified, solid, grave teaching. And also this phrase, "He opened his mouth," is used in some extrabiblical references to speak of somebody who really shares his heart intimately. So it was official. It was solemn. It was serious. It was dignified. And it was his heart.

And who were the recipients? Oh, it's right here in verse 1. "His disciples came to him." You see, they were the primary target because they were the only ones who could know the blessedness of which he spoke. They were the only ones who could live the Sermon on the Mount. They were the only ones who could follow it through. They were the only ones who could carry it out, because they were the only ones who were partakers of God's own power and presence in their life. It was only possible for them.

And by the way, beloved, let me add this. It's only possible for you as you know Jesus Christ. It's only possible as you are a partaker of the divine nature. The late archbishop Magee, England once said that it was impossible to conduct the affairs of the English nation on the basis of the Sermon on the Mount because the nation was not loyal to the king. He was right. You can't live the Sermon on the Mount unless you know the king.

And many people have tried to take the Sermon on the Mount and turn it into a social gospel, try to make it into a social gospel. But that doesn't make it. By the way, that effort doesn't happen much anymore because the two world wars kind of rattled us out of that thing. Making the Sermon on the Mount the social gospel was hit pretty hard by world wars. Will Durant, the world known historian said, "In any generation there may be eight or ten persons who will be alive in the sense of continuing influence three hundred years after.

"For instance, Plato still is, and Socrates still is, but in all of western civilization," says Durant - who is not a Christian - "the person who stands out above all others is Christ. He undoubtedly was the most permanent influence on our thoughts but not on our actions and that's an important modification. Our actions are very seldom Christian but our theology often is. We wish we could behave like Christ."

And what Will Durant is saying - and this was in the *Chicago Tribune* about a month ago - what he's saying is you can't live the Sermon on the Mount. His teachings are great. We just can't make them work. And the reason is because he's not a partaker of the divine nature. There's no resource. So Jesus taught His disciples because they alone could live it out. They alone could fill it out. They alone could carry it out. And you and I who know that same Christ can know the same blessedness.

Finally, the teaching itself comes in verses 3 to 12, blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed. Oh, it's a tremendous lesson people. What he has to say to us here is profound, life changing. I believe our church will be different when we get through this. I don't believe you can study the Sermon on the Mount and be the same. I can't. God's already been doing things in my heart. Let's commit ourselves to be the kind of people God wants us to be. Remembering this, that we have the capacity if we know the Lord Jesus Christ to see this a reality in our lives, to his glory and our blessedness. Let's pray.

Father, it's with great joy that we embark upon this adventure of studying this marvelous truth. We thank you, our Lord, for bringing us this far to the place where our hearts are open and ready to receive it. Father, we know that the reception is only for those who love the Lord Jesus Christ, only those who have living within them the very life of God could know the blessedness of God. Teach us, Father, the power of this message in our lives and in our world. We praise you in Christ's name. Amen.



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