

945 The Sermon On The Mount *(this is an edited version of my blog 945)*

When I wrote about The Path (blog 935) and incorporated the text into my essays THE TRUTH 3 and 4, I read a critique of The Path which said it was practically congruent with any text in Western religions, outlining the values of virtue and proper conduct of living. This spurred me on to have a closer look at the source of the Christian value system ... on researching the subject it came down to Jesus Christ's The Sermon On The Mount, as recounted in Matthew's gospel, in approx. 80 AD ... about 50 years after Christ delivered the sermon. As it turns out there probably never was an actual sermon on a mountain, but the text is a conglomeration of pious teachings, as remembered by Luke (who wrote about Jesus Christ before Matthew) and Matthew. Furthermore, there are many interpretations of the sermon as it is recorded, probably at least a dozen different ones. My favorite is by Martin Luther, the reformer of Christianity and founder of Protestantism: Martin Luther did not believe the Catholic ideas about the Sermon. He created the two realms view. Luther divided the world into two realms, or sections: the religious realm, and the secular (non-religious) realm. He thought the Sermon only applied to the religious part of life. In the everyday world, people might have to do things the Sermon said they should not do. For example, in his secular job, a judge might have to punish a criminal instead of forgiving him. However, as a religious man, the judge should still feel sorry for what happens to the criminal. Here then is the gist of it: The Sermon On The Mount is by far Jesus Christ's longest explanation of what it looks like to live as His follower and to serve as a member of God's Kingdom. In many ways, Jesus' teachings during The Sermon On The Mount represent the major ideals of the Christian life. For example, Jesus taught about subjects such as prayer, justice, care for the needy, handling the religious law, divorce, fasting, judging other people, salvation, and more. The Sermon On The Mount contains both the Beatitudes (see next page) and the Lord's Prayer. In the end, Jesus made it clear that His followers should live in a noticeably different way than other people because they should hold to a much higher standard of conduct - the standard of love and selflessness Jesus Himself would embody when He died on the cross for believers' sins. It is interesting that many of Jesus' teachings are commands for His followers to do better than what society allows or expects. Of interest to me is the incongruity of the concept of Christianity's "Father up in Heaven"; this is very much in contrast to the teachings of the inner God - which nevertheless is supported by Meister Eckhart (see my essays GOD 2 as well as GOD 1). So, I cannot reconcile any belief I have with the Christian tenets as taught by Christ, other than the universal ideals of love, humility, compassion and forgiveness (see also my essays JESUS and SCRIPTURE). George Bernard Shaw once described TSOTM as "an impractical outburst of anarchism and sentimentality." The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche treated it even less kindly when he wrote that "Christian morality is the most malignant form of all falsehoods" (for context read Richard Dawkins' The God Delusion). In 1929 humanist John Herman Randall acknowledged that Jesus was "a truly great moral genius", but then wondered how a Galilean carpenter could have uttered the final word on human ethics. But many people hold the sermon in great reverence even when they do not know or understand it very well.

It is safe to say that The Sermon On The Mount is the best known, least understood, and least practiced of all the teachings of Jesus. The modern mind, religious as well as irreligious has treated this sermon in a variety of ways. As earlier noted, some have rejected it as wholly impractical or positively evil. Others have received it, but with significant reservations. Humanism, at its kindest, has viewed it as a remarkable but tentative moral code wholly separated from the cross or a divine Christ (Focusmagazine.org/the-sermon-on-the-mount-by-paul-earnhart.php). One of the most important debates over the sermon is how it should be applied to everyday life. Almost all Christian groups have created their own ways to understand and use the Sermon in their lives. In a book called *Understanding the Sermon on the Mount*, Harvey McArthur lists twelve different views about the Sermon (go to my blog for details). E. Earle Ellis, a professor of theology, says that in the Sermon Jesus is asking believers to live in a way that will be normal in the future kingdom of God. As Ellis says, we are to speak Jesus' words, think his thoughts, and do his deeds. Since this will be the ethic of the future kingdom of God, people should live their lives in a way that will help them be ready to live in God's kingdom. In a book called *The Hiram Key*, Christopher Knight and Robert Lomas say the Sermon on the Mount never happened. Knight thinks that Matthew 'stuck all kinds of passages together as though they were spoken one after another to a crowd on a mountain top.' He believes that 'the teachings were drafted into this one 'occasion' to avoid interrupting the flow of the overall story.' Following is the beginning of TSOTM with the Beatitudes, in a translation of the original Aramaic text. For the purpose of this page, the text is shortened; furthermore, it is not always clear what is Matthew's transcript of Christ's words and what are his comments: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, MATTHEW, CHAPTER V.

1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into the mountain : and when he had sat down, his disciples came unto him. 2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: 3 Blessed are the poor in spirit : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek : for they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled. 7 Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers : for they shall be called sons of God. 10 Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad : for great is your reward in heaven. 13 Ye are the salt of the earth : but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted ? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men. 14 ... 15 (Men do not) light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the stand, and it shineth unto all. 16 Even so let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. 17 Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets, I came not to destroy, but to fulfil. 18 ... 19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven : but whosoever shall do and teach them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 ... 21 Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, thou shalt not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgement : 22 But I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgement ...