

# The Teachings Of Jesus

## (The Sermon on the Mount)

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### Analysis of the Sermon

The Sermon on the Mount runs from Matthew chapters 5 through 7. It is prefaced by an editorial comment (5:1-2) and concluded with an editorial comment (7:28-29). What falls in between is a somewhat complex collection of the teachings of Jesus in the form of a sermon. As a compositional piece the body his speech may be broken down into five blocks of teaching material. Each block consists of moral or ethical motifs, all of which contribute to the overall moral theme of the sermon. Here in this sermon we see the essence of the moral/ethical system of Jesus of Nazareth. This sermon may be analyzed follows. Jesus thinking on moral behavior is to be found in moral character rather than moral codes, which was the moral system of first century Judaism.

#### **The Editorial Comments of Matthew 5:1-2**

*And seeing the multitudes, he went up on into the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. 2 Then he opening his mouth he taught them, saying (Matt 5:1-2, author's translation).*

The language of this verse sets the stage for what follows. There are three expression which are of significance: (1) He sat down; the teaching posture of the ancient teachers or rabbis, (2) his disciples (*talmadim*) came to him (i.e., to receive teaching), (3) he taught them: the content of that teaching is what we know as "the sermon on the

mount." All the dynamics of a teaching setting are present here in the early lines of this text.

## **FIRST BLOCK (5:3-16)**

### **The Beatitudes**

Jesus introduces the sermon by addressing the issue of moral character, in that moral character is the key to the blessed or happy life (i.e. having a sense of well-being). He states each beatitude (5:3-12), then follows each with a saying (*logia*) concerning the effect of the moral attribute (5:13-16), which constitutes the blessed life. If one possesses the characteristics found in the beatitudes, his godly or moral character will be as salt and light in its influence on others.

## **SECOND BLOCK (5:17-48)**

### **The Ethics of Jesus: Codes Verses Character**

1. *"I Have Not Come to Destroy the Law but to Give It Fulfillment,"* (5:17)

Jesus' intent was to show what this body of ancient codes was intended to accomplish. It was given with the intent of developing moral character in man not becoming a collection of moral codes designed to control human behavior (5:17-20).

2. Code Ethics Verses Character Ethics as Deterrents to Immoral Behavior Illustrated by a Series of Contrasts (5:21-48)

- (1) *Concerning murder (code vs character), (5:21-26)*
- (2) *Concerning adultery (code vs character), (5:27-30)*
- (3) *Concerning divorce (code vs character), (5:31-32)*
- (4) *Concerning oaths (code vs character), (5:33-37).*

(5) *Concerning the resistance of evil (code vs character),*  
(5:38-48)

## **THIRD BLOCK (6:1-18)**

### **The Righteousness of God** *(Jewish Tradition Vs the Teaching of Jesus)*

1. The Motive for Acts of Righteousness  
(Code Verses Character), (6:1)
2. In Application: A Series of Contrasts (6:2-18)

- (1) *Alms/giving (code vs character), (6:2-4)*
- (2) *Prayer (code vs character), (6:5-15)*
- (3) *Fasting (code vs character), (6:16-18)*

## **FOURTH BLOCK (6:19-34)**

### **Living Out of a Misplaced Sense of Values**

1. The Problem of Materialism (6:19-21)
2. The Problem of Evil-Sightedness (6:22-23)
3. The Problem of Divided Loyalties (6:24)
4. The Problem of Anxiety (6:25-30)
5. The Solution: Seeking First the Reign of God (6:31-34)

## **FIFTH BLOCK (7:1-27)**

### **Moral Character and Moral Conduct** *(Living in Consistency with Who You Are)*

1. Criteria for Judging Others (7:1-5)
2. Distinguishing the Sacred from the Secular (7:6)
3. The "Golden Rule" of Moral Behavior (7:7-12)
4. The Difficulty of Living as a Moral Being (7:13-14)
5. Judging the Moral Teacher by His Moral Character

and Conduct (7:15-23)  
6. Concluding Admonitions (7:24-27)

**Reaction of the People: He Taught Them  
Not as the Scribes (7:28-29)**

*And so it was, when Jesus had ended these words, the people were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes, (Matt 7:28-29, author's translation).*

To fully appreciate what is being said here, one needs to know something of the nature of Judaism in the first century Mediterranean world. A key term here is "tradition," especially, rabbinic tradition; or as called in the Gospels, "the traditions of the elders" (Matt 15:2-6).

There were two major types of teaching tradition within first century Judaism: (1) rabbinic tradition (*haggadah* and *halachah*, and (2) rabbinic interpretation of Scripture (*midrashim*, *darashim*, etc). In later centuries the whole body of rabbinic tradition was compiled into a collection of documents called "The Talmud." The Talmud earlier existed as the *Mishnah*, produced in the second century CE and the Talmud later developed in Babylon and in Jerusalem. The Talmud consisted of two types of writing: (1) the *Mishnah* consisted of an authoritative body of theological thought, and (2) the *Gemarah*, which was a body of authoritative exegesis of Scripture.

These authoritative interpretations of Scripture are what we are concerned with here in the Sermon on the Mount. The Rabbis had given fixed (i.e. orthodox) interpretations of the *Torah*. Jesus is, in all probability, referring to the authoritative interpretations of the scribes in his words, "You have heard it said . . ." (Matt 5:21), meaning the oral (rabbinic) traditions.

It is often thought that Jesus is taking issue with Moses and the *Torah* here. This is not likely. Throughout the Gospels,

when Jesus refers to the Scriptures, he does so with such introductory formula as, "It is written," "What says the Scripture?" "Have you not read?" The use of the term "heard" would more easily be understood as a reference to the oral tradition extant within first century Judaism. It is this oral tradition that Jesus is setting his teaching over against, not the OT Scriptures or Moses himself.

Rather than teach out of the authoritative rabbinic traditions, Jesus taught the people out of his own authority; and his teaching was not only but in opposition to the traditional exegesis of the scribes of old, so much so that the people were amazed at what they heard.

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