

The Greatest Sermon Ever Preached

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[0 : 00] I'm so glad that you are able to be here today because you are going to hear the greatest sermon ever preached.

You are going to hear the greatest preacher who ever lived preach the greatest sermon ever preached.

By greatest, I mean most influential. You are going to hear the most influential preacher who ever lived preached the most influential sermon ever heard.

You are going to hear Jesus of Nazareth preach what has been known as the Sermon on the Mount. One of Jesus' first disciples, Matthew, tax collector, gathered that sermon in chapters 5, 6, and 7 of the gospel that bears his name.

And through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the living Jesus is going to preach this sermon again today for us in this place, in this city.

[1 : 16] Whenever the most influential preacher who ever lived preaches the most influential sermon ever preached, something happens.

Something always happens. Something redemptive happens. The sermon challenges us to the core.

The sermon cleanses us to the core. The sermon renews us to the very core of our being. No one here today is going to leave the same.

We are all going to be changed in one way or another. Now, the first people who heard Jesus preach his sermon were amazed.

Matthew chapter 7, verse 28. The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at his teaching.

[2 : 23] Why were they amazed? Next verse, verse 29. For he was teaching them as one having authority and not as their scribes. One having authority and not as their scribes.

Matthew was not putting down the scribes. The scribes are very bright people. They're well educated. They seek to understand the scripture. They are articulate theologians.

Matthew's not putting them down. The scribes have tried their best to try to articulate the nature of true reality. So Matthew's not putting them down. He's just saying that the scribes, for all of their brilliance, did not teach with authority.

Oh, they taught authoritatively. They would often try to substantiate their teaching in the divine word. But even as they taught authoritatively, they did not teach with authority.

The word that Matthew uses is the word exousia. It's made up of two words. Ek-uzia. Ek is a preposition that means out of. Out of the very center.

[3 : 32] Uzia is the feminine participle of the verb to be. Meaning being. So, ek-uzia means out of the very center of being. Jesus spoke out of the very center of reality.

When the first crowds heard Jesus preach his sermon, they were stunned by what he had to say. I mean, he challenged the socks off of them. He went against the grain of just about everything they thought was true.

And yet they took it. They did not walk away because they recognized that Jesus spoke out of the very center of reality. As G.K. Chesterton observed about the opening of the Sermon on the Mount.

The Beatitudes. He says, on the first reading, nothing makes sense. But on the second reading, nothing else makes sense. Because this teaching of Jesus comes out of the very center of everything.

This is the really real. This is true human living, was their response. Now, there are many things to say before we launch into and listen to the sermon.

[4 : 45] And over the next weeks and months, as we take a series through this sermon, we'll say those things. But before we hear the sermon today, I want to make one observation that I will come back to again and again in the coming weeks.

This is the one thing I want to emphasize today. We must never separate the Sermon on the Mount from the Preacher on the Mount. They must be held together.

If you separate this Sermon on the Mount from the Preacher on the Mount, everything goes haywire. And the purpose for Jesus preaching it goes off the rails.

You see, if you separate the Sermon on the Mount from the Preacher on the Mount, the Sermon becomes either frustrating idealism and we end up hanging our head in defeat and shame, or the Sermon becomes this oppressive legalism and we get tired and weary and we lose our life.

It's when the Sermon on the Mount and the Preacher on the Mount that are held together, that's when the Sermon on the Mount works. Many people will say that the Sermon on the Mount is the essence of Christianity.

[6 : 00] I understand why they say that. These are the most influential sayings of all of Jesus' teaching. But the essence of Christianity is not the Sermon on the Mount.

The essence of Christianity is the Preacher on the Mount. The essence of Christianity is not a new ethic. The essence of Christianity is not a new worldview.

The essence of Christianity is not even salvation. The essence of Christianity is a person. And if you separate the Sermon from the person, it all goes cattywampus.

Now, this becomes clear as you listen to Jesus preach. The people who first heard Him were stunned by the way He spoke about Himself. Yes, they were stunned by the kinds of things He was saying, but they were mostly stunned by the way He spoke about Himself.

As you listen to the Sermon, you hear again and again this authoritative I, me, my, mine that comes through. Truly, I say to you six times.

[7 : 08] Truly, I say to you. You have heard it was said, but I say to you six times. But I say to you. On account of me. Call me, Lord, Lord.

I did not know you. Depart from me. These words of mine. This emphasis, this person at the center of things. So, we must never separate the Sermon on the Mount from the Preacher on the Mount.

So, it seems to me that an important question to ask is, who is this Preacher on the Mount? Who is this man who goes up on a mountain and speaks in a way that no one else has ever spoken?

Seems to me that the best thing to do is to ask Matthew who this Preacher is. Matthew, after all, is the one who recorded the Sermon on the Mount, or at least part of it. I think that Jesus said a whole lot more that day.

I don't know if you would agree with that. Matthew just records the kernel of the Sermon on the Mount. Who does Matthew think this Preacher is who preaches this Sermon? Well, that he answers in chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 of his Gospel.

- [8 : 24] Think of those first four chapters as Matthew kind of painting a portrait of this Preacher. The Preacher on the Mount, Jesus of Nazareth, is the son of Abraham.
- He's the fulfillment of the promise that God made long ago, that one day a son or a seed of Abraham would come, and in him all the families of the earth would be blessed.
- That tells me that when he preaches this sermon, he preaches it to bless us. He's blessing all the families of the earth in preaching. The Preacher on the Mount, Jesus of Nazareth, is also the son of David.
- He's the fulfillment of the promise God made that one day a seed of David, a son of David, would be born, who would reign over an everlasting kingdom of justice and peace.
- That suggests to me that when this preacher preaches his sermon, he's installing justice in the world. He's bringing peace into the world. The Preacher on the Mount is God come to the rescue.
- [9 : 32] In chapter 1 of Matthew, in the Christmas story, Joseph is told to name the son of David, son of Abraham, Jesus. Why give him the name Jesus?
- The text says, for he himself will save his people from their sins. He himself will save his people from their sins. Who is this he himself who saves? Give him the name Jesus.
- Jesus, Yeshua. Yeshua means Yahweh saves. Or as I like to put it, God to the rescue. This Preacher on the Mount is God coming to rescue us from our sins.
- Which suggests to me that when he preaches his sermon, he is saving us from our sins. He's going to say some hard things. And when you hear the hard things, remember he's saving them to save us from our sins.
- The Preacher on the Mount is God with us. Matthew says in chapter 1 that all this took place so that what the prophet said could be fulfilled.
- [10 : 36] Look, a virgin will be with child and they shall give him the name Emmanuel, which means God with us. Jesus is God with us in human flesh.
- That's why when he speaks, he can speak out of the very center of reality. He is the center of reality. The Preacher on the Mount is also the great king whom the Magi from the east came to worship.
- Matthew says this was to fulfill what Micah said through the prophet. What God said through the prophet Micah. Out of you, Bethlehem, will come a ruler who will shepherd my people.
- Jesus is the shepherd king. And when he preaches, then he is preaching to restore our soul and to lead us into the paths of righteousness.
- Jesus is the preacher is the new Israel. As an infant, he goes with his parents down to Egypt. They flee as immigrants to Egypt.
- [11 : 37] And finally, then his adoptive father, Joseph, is told to return to the Holy Land. And then Matthew says this is such this is to fill what it said. My son shall come out of Egypt.
- My son shall come out of Egypt. It's his way of saying that Jesus is the new leader of the new Exodus, that he's the one who is going to lead us out of bondage and into the promised land, which means that that when he preaches his sermon, he's preaching to break bondages in our life.
- And he's preaching in order to lead us into the true holy land. This preacher is the Lord himself. John the Baptist said, prepare the way of the Lord.
- Jesus is the Lord of lords and ladies. Come to put everything back together again. Come to rectify the earth, which says that when he preaches the sermon, Jesus is seeking to put back together the broken pieces of our life.

The preacher on the mount turns out to be someone who baptizes. John the Baptist said that he could baptize in water, but that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

[12 : 50] Jesus loves to pour out his spirit on his people. He loves to pour out his fire on his people, which suggests to me that when Jesus preaches his sermon, he's filling us with his spirit and he's purifying us.

He's wanting to make us pure. That's why this sermon, why the bones of this sermon are full of fire. You can't live in this sermon without getting fire. It turns out that the preacher on the mount, the baptizer, also gets baptized.

This is what surprised John the Baptist. I mean, here he is, the son of Abraham, the son of David, coming with other people to go into baptism. People were going into the waters of baptism as sinners.

And here now Jesus is going into the water. What are you going into the water for, Jesus? John the Baptist is asking, and Jesus says, because we're now going to fulfill all righteousness. Because now I'm going to be numbered with the transgressors, as the prophet Isaiah says.

I'm identifying with sinful humanity. I'm becoming one with sinful humanity. Which suggests to me that when Jesus preaches, he knows what he's talking about.

[14 : 00] Often people will dismiss Jesus as naive. He's not naive. He's one of us. He knows our world. That he's speaking the way he speaks because he knows the reality of living in a sinful world.

This preacher on the mount, Matthew continues, is the one to whom all the nations of the world are going to be given. At his baptism, the voice, the father's voice says, you are my son.

He's echoing Psalm 2, where the promise is made to the son that he will receive all the nations of the world as his inheritance. The preacher on the mount is also the great servant of the Lord.

Because at his baptism, the voice also says, with whom I'm well pleased. With whom I'm well pleased takes us back to Isaiah 42, which is the beginning of all these servant songs leading up to that great song in Isaiah 53, where we learn that the servant of the Lord comes to bear the sickness and the sins of the world.

Which suggests to me that when Jesus is preaching this sermon, he's preaching to heal us. And he's preaching to bring us into his peace.

[15 : 08] Remember that as you hear him say some hard things. He's doing this to heal our souls. The preacher on the mount is also the one who knows what it means to be tempted.

Right after his baptism, he's led into the wilderness for 40 days and he experiences this encounter with evil. He gets the full onslaught of evil. Jesus experiences evil in a way that no one ever has or ever will.

And Jesus stands against that evil. He's the first person in history to stand fully against that evil. And that suggests to me that when he preaches his sermon, he's wanting you and me to stand.

He preaches this sermon so we can stand against evil. And the preacher on the mount is the light in the darkness.

Matthew watches Jesus began to do his public ministry. And in his mind, he goes back to Isaiah 9, the text we've been looking at in Advent and Christmas. Those people walking in darkness have seen a great light.

- [16 : 09] Those who are living in a land in the shadows of death, on them a light has dawned. Jesus Christ is the light in the darkness, which suggests to me that when he's preaching his sermon, he is piercing any of the darkness of our soul.
- He is saying what he says to draw us out of the shadows of death. And then one more part of this portrait of the preacher.
- The preacher on the mount is the one who brings the future into the present. This he says in his gospel, Matthew 4, 17.
- From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say, repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near. That's Jesus gospel. That's the gospel according to Jesus of Nazareth.
- The kingdom of heaven has come near. Jesus comes fulfilling the promise that one day God would come and establish his saving rule on the earth.
- [17 : 10] But the surprising thing about Jesus word is that this happens before people expect it. They expect it will happen at the end of time. But Jesus is saying it's happening in the fullness of time, in the middle of time.
- What was to happen only at the end is now happening in the middle. The kingdom of heaven is invading the earth. The future is invading the present. George Ladd used to say, Jesus came on the scene announcing the presence of the future.
- And because the future is breaking into the present, he began to heal broken bodies and free people from demonic oppression. The kingdom has come near.
- Repent. Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near. Of course, repent. What else are we going to do? We have to turn around. That's what repent means.
- And think again. Turn around and embrace this startling news that the kingdom is now breaking into the world. And when we turn around, the kingdom life begins to emerge in us.
- [18 : 14] When we turn around and embrace this preacher, the life of the preacher begins to emerge in the world. When we turn around, the Sermon on the Mount begins to happen.
- And it goes like this. Matthew 5, 6 and 7. Blessed. Right on.
- Blessed. For they shall be comforted.
- Blessed. Right on. Are the gentle and the meek. For they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.
- For they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful. For they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart.
- [19 : 20] For they shall see God. See God. Now. Blessed are the peacemakers. For they shall be called the children of God.
- Blessed are those who are persecuted. For righteousness sake. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you. When people insult you and persecute you.
- And say all kinds of evil against you falsely. On account of me. Rejoice and be glad. For great is your reward in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You.
- You. You. You are the salt of the earth. You are what keeps the earth from putrefying. You are what gives to the earth flavor. You are the salt of the earth.
- But if the salt should become tasteless. How can it be made salty again? It's no good. Just to be put out on the street. And trampled underfoot by people. You. You.
- [20 : 21] You. You. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. People don't light a candle and then put a bushel basket over it.

No. They light a candle. They put it on a lampstand. So that it gives light to all the people in the room. You. Let your light shine before others. That they may see your good works.

And glorify your Father who is in heaven. Now. Do not think. Do not think. That I have come to abolish the law and the prophets.

I did not come to abolish. I came to fulfill the law and the prophets. Truly I say to you. That until heaven and earth pass away. Not the slightest stroke or letter from the law will pass away.

Until all is accomplished. Not the least of these commandments. And teaches others to do so. Will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever keeps them and teaches them.

[21 : 19] Will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you. Unless your righteousness. Unless your right relatedness. Exceeds that of the scribes on the one hand.

And the Pharisees on the other hand. You will not enter the kingdom of heaven. You won't experience the kingdom of heaven. You won't experience the kingdom of heaven on earth. So for example.

You have heard it was said. You shall not murder. And whoever murders. Shall be liable to the court. But I say to you. Whoever is angry with your brother or sister.

Is liable to the court. And whoever says to a brother or sister. Raka. Empty headed. Is liable to the supreme court. And whoever says. You fool.

Is guilty enough to go into the fires of hell. Therefore. If you are presenting your offering at the altar.

[22 : 16] And there you remember. That a brother or sister has something against you. Leave your gift at the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother or sister.

And then you can come back. And give your offering. Quickly make friends with your opponent at law on the way. Otherwise your opponent will turn you over to the judge.

The judge will turn you over to the officer. The officer will put you in jail. I tell you. You're going to be there. Until you pay up every last cent. You have heard it was said.

You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you. Whoever looks at a woman. To lust after her. To possess her. Has committed adultery. With her in his heart.

So if your right eye. Causes you to stumble. Pluck it out. Throw it away. It's a whole lot better. That one part of your body perish. Than that the whole body go into hell.

[23 : 15] And if your right arm. Causes you to stumble. Cut it off. Throw it away. It's better that one part of your body perish. Than that your whole body go into hell. You've heard it was said.

When a man sends a woman away. Give her a certificate of divorce. But I say to you. Whoever divorces his wife. Except for the cause of unchastity.

Commits adultery. And whoever marries such a divorced woman. Commits adultery. You have heard that the ancients were told.

You shall not make any false vows. And you shall keep your vows to the Lord. But I say to you. Do not make any vow at all. Either by heaven.

For it is the throne of God. Or by earth. For it is his footstool. Or by Jerusalem. For it is the city of the great king. Do not make an oath by your head. You can't make one of your hair. Black or white.

[24 : 14] Just let your statement be. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Or no. No. Anything beyond that. Is of the evil one.

You have heard it was said. Eye for eye. Tooth for tooth. But I say to you.

Do not resist the one who is evil. If someone slaps you on your right cheek. Turn to him the other also. Notice. I did not say. If someone slaps you on your right cheek.

Let him. Left cheek. I said if someone hits you on the right cheek. Turn to him the other also. That is a very different thing. If someone wants to sue you for your shirt.

Give him your coat. If someone forces you to go one mile. Go with him too. Do not refuse the one who is asking of you.

[25 : 14] And do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. Now. You have heard it was said. You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you.

Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. So that. So that. You will be children of your father who is in heaven.

For your father. Causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good. He sends the rain on the just and the unjust. You know. If you only love those who love you. What reward do you have?

I mean. Even don't the tax collectors do that? And if you only greet your brothers and sisters. What more is that than anyone else? I mean. Even the Gentiles will do that much.

I have. I have. A much bigger agenda for you. You. Are to be. Perfect.

[26 : 12] As my heavenly father is perfect. Now. Beware. Beware. Of practicing your righteousness. Your right relatedness. In order to be seen by others.

Otherwise you have no reward with your father who is in heaven. So. When you are giving alms. When you are giving to charity. Do not sound the trumpet. Ta-da-ta-ta. As the hypocrites do. In the synagogues on the street.

In order to be honored by people. I tell you the truth. They have their reward in full. They are honored by people. But you. When you give.

Do not let your right hand know what your left hand is giving. That your giving may be in secret. And your father who sees in secret. Will repay. And when you pray. Do not be as the hypocrites.

Who love to stand in the synagogues. And on the streets. And pray. In order to be honored by others. I tell you the truth. They have their reward in full. People notice that they were praying. Big deal.

[27 : 09] But you. When you pray. Go into your room. Close the door. And pray to your father who is in secret. And your father who sees in secret.

Will repay you. And when you pray. Do not use meaningless repetition. As the Gentiles do. For they suppose that for their many words. They will be heard.

Do not be like them. They do not know. That your father already knows. What you need. Before you ask him. When you pray. Pray this way. Our father in heaven.

Hallow your name. On earth. As it is in heaven. Bring your kingdom. On earth. As it is in heaven. Cause your will to be done. On earth. As it is in heaven.

Give us this day. Our daily bread. And cancel our debts. As we cancel the debts of others. And when you lead us to the test. Do not let the test become a temptation.

[28 : 03] But rescue us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom. The power and the glory forever. Amen. For if you forgive. One another's transgressions.

Your father in heaven will forgive you. But if you do not forgive. Your father will not forgive your transgressions. And when you fast.

Do not be like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance. In order to be seen by others as fasting. Tell you the truth. They have their reward in full. Others saw them fasting.

But you. When you fast. Wash your face. Anoint your head. So that your fasting is in secret. And your father who sees in secret.

Will repay you. Now. Do not. Do not. Treasure treasures for yourself.

[28 : 58] On earth. Where moth and rust destroy. Where thieves break in and steal. But treasure. Treasures in heaven. Where moth and rust. Cannot destroy.

And where thieves cannot break in and steal. For where your treasure is. Your heart will be. If it's on earth. Your heart will be on earth. If your treasure is in heaven.

Your heart will be in heaven. Because. Your heart. Follows your treasure. The eye. The eye. The eye. Is the lamp of the body. If the eye is clear.

Then the whole body will be full of light. But if the eye. If the eye. Is not clear. Then there will be darkness inside.

And if the light inside is darkness. How great is that darkness. No one can serve two masters. You will either hate the one.

[29 : 53] Or love the other. Or you'll be devoted to one. And despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. It's not possible. You can't do it.

You cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore. For this reason. I tell you. Stop. Being. Anxious.

Stop being anxious for your life. As to what you will eat. And what you will drink. And your body. For what you will wear. Is not life more than food? Is not life more than food?

Is not life more than food? And is not the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air. Start looking at the birds of the air.

I'm calling you to study birds. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns. Yet your father takes care of them. Now are you not worth more to your father than the birds?

[30 : 54] And which of you by being anxious can add a span to his life? And why are you anxious about what you wear? Consider the lilies of the field.

Start looking at the lilies of the field. Notice that they do not toil nor spin. Yet I tell you. That not even Solomon in all of his glory was arrayed as one of these.

If God so have raised the grass which is here today but tomorrow thrown into the furnace, will he not care for you much more, you little faith ones?

So do not be anxious saying, what shall we drink? What shall we eat? With what shall we wear ourselves? The Gentiles do that all day long.

But you, you keep seeking first the kingdom of God and the righteousness of God and all these things will be added to you. Therefore, do not be anxious for tomorrow.

[31 : 55] Tomorrow will care for itself. And besides, today has enough trouble of its own. Now, do not judge lest you be judged.

Because in the way that you judge another person, you will be judged. The measure you use will be measured on you. Why do you look at your sister's eye to see the speck in her eye but don't notice the log in your own eye?

Why do you say to your sister, here, let me take this speck out of your eye when you look. There's a big log in your own eye. You hypocrites. Take the log out of your own eye and then you might be able to see clearly to put the speck out of your sister's eye.

Do not cast before dogs holy things. Do not put your pearls before swine. That's why they'll trample them underfoot and turn around and tear you to pieces.

Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. For whoever is asking is receiving.

[33 : 09] Whoever is seeking is finding. To the one who is knocking, the door will be opened. Now, what father among you has a son comes and asks for a loaf of bread and you give him a stone?

Or what father has a son come and asking for fish and you give him a snake? You don't do that, do you? Do you? Do you? Do you? When your children want some bread, you give him a stone?

When they want fish, you give him a snake? Do you? Do you? No. So, if you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father in heaven give what is good to those who are asking him?

Therefore, however you want others to treat you, so treat them. This is the law and the prophets.

I did not come to abolish the law and the prophets. I came to fulfill the law and the prophets. This is the law and the prophets. However you want to be treated by others, so treat them.

[34 : 19] Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction and many are on it.

But the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life and few are those who find it. Beware of the false prophets.

They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they're ravenous wolves. You'll know them by their fruits. Grapes don't come from thorn bushes, do they? Figs don't come from thistles, do they?

Good trees produce good fruit. Bad trees produce bad fruit. A bad tree does not produce good fruit and a good tree does not produce bad fruit.

Any tree that produces bad fruit is cut down and put into the fire. So, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven.

[35 : 28] But the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day, on the great day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name?

Did we not cast out demons in your name? Did we not do many miracles in your name? And I will say to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawless ones.

So, whoever hears these words of mine and does them can be compared to the man who built his house upon the rock.

The rains came down, the floods came up, the winds blew and burst against that house, but it did not fall because it was built on the rock.

But whoever hears these words of mine and does not do them is like the foolish man who built his house upon the sand.

[36 : 34] The rains came down, the floods came up, the winds blew and burst against that house, and it fell because it heard what I said to do, but did not do it.

It fell. And great was its fall. Well, as you can probably imagine, I've been living in this text for a little while.

And it's a funny thing. I would just speak it out loud everywhere I went. So I was going around Queen Elizabeth Park one day and all of a sudden found myself, blessed are the pure in heart, they will see God.

You know, I thought, oh, I've got to tame this. So I went over to the cemetery where no one would see me and I could do it better. But two images came to me throughout these past weeks or months.

One is that of a ship that longs to be unstuck. A ship that wants to sail and really move forward, but it's got all these barnacles on it.

[37 : 42] And I had the sense of the Sermon on the Mount just sanding the barnacles off. And the other image I lived with is with a very, very sharp, hot knife.

Just going through everything in my life. Not because my life was soft and the knife could get there, but because this knife is so sharp and so hot, it can cut through anything.

That's the preacher on the Mount. Go now in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the love of the Father who sent him, and in the friendship of the Holy Spirit who is going to move us greater and greater into this true humanity.

Peace be to you. Amen.