

## **Matthew 4:12-25**

### **A Kingdom Invitation (Intro to the Sermon on the Mount)**

**Introduction:** The Sermon on the Mount is probably the most famous sermon from all of scripture and definitely the most famous teaching of Jesus. Some consider it the epitome of the teachings of Jesus and therefore the essence of Christianity.

*A.M Hunter Writes, “After Nineteen hundred years the Sermon on the Mounts still haunts men. They may praise it, as Mahatma Ghandi did; or Like Nietzche, they may curse it. They cannot ignore it. It’s words are winged words, quick and powerful to rebuke, to challenge, to inspire. And though some turn from it in despair, it continues, like some mighty magnetic mountain, to attract to itself the greatest spirits of our race (many not Christians), so that if some world-wide vote were taken, there is little doubt that men would account it the most searching and powerful utterance we possess on what concerns the moral life.” A.M Hunter, A pattern for Life.*

All though I wholeheartedly agree with this statement I don't think it's how modern people think of the Sermon on the Mount (if they even think of it at all). Our culture is become increasingly more hostile to the scripture and skeptical of it's wisdom and claims. Yet our culture claims to be after the main objective of this sermon - The good life.

This sermon is Jesus' answer to the universal philosophical and religious question - how can one truly be happy?

The sermon on the mount is a vision for a true way of being and living that will result in happiness and human flourishing. This is a question that we are still obsessed with today - The New York times published an article earlier this year stating -About 12,000 Yale students signed up for a new psychology course, for this year, making it the most popular in the school's history. What was the subject? - Happiness

But if you come to this sermon expecting to find our culture's definition of flourishing or true happiness.. you will be sorely disappointed. It denies and denounces many of the vices and virtues of our current culture. Rather many of us will find an insurmountable mountain to climb and those who scale it on their own, white knuckled and by the skin of their teeth, will not find the flourishing promised when they get to the top.

## **1. How should we approach this Sermon?**

### **1. Not so Literal**

1. Sadly the modern church has turned the world's greatest sermon from one of instruction or even invitation to indictment...And since that doesn't square well with our version of Jesus we tend to dismiss the sermon in a number of ways.
2. Historically, the church, by and large doesn't know what to do with this sermon. I think this is due in part because we have wrongly relegated every biblical story and command to a grace vs law paradigm.
  1. Pinchas Lapide wrote, "The history of the impact of the sermon on the mount can largely be described in terms of an attempt to domesticate everything in it that is shocking, demanding and uncompromising, and render it harmless."
  3. Isn't it true though - we take Jesus' radical teaching and say he must be using Hyperbole, "Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect," (nobody could really be this good). Doesn't Paul tell us that we will always wrestle with the flesh in an endless battle till Jesus returns? Jesus' point must be to raise the bar so high that we forsake our own working or doing and "just trust in him....Don't try, just believe". But by doing this we completely de-claw the sermon, undermine its high demands, and remove any effort on our part. We're not taking Jesus seriously. Do you really think Jesus would have wasted his time even giving the sermon if that was his point? Or that Matthew as well as Luke would have taken the time to meticulously record this sermon for us, if the point was simply not to do anything except "trust Jesus"? If that's the point, why read and study this Sermon at all when we can spend all our time with Pauline theology instead?
  4. Sadly so many christians are missing out on the flourishing and happiness that Jesus offers because they have been given a theology that says, " just let go, and let God". We hear testimonies of those who lived like hell and then gave their lives to Jesus in one moment in time and since then have never struggled... and so we think that we need to be "saved" again and again, or that we need a second baptism or we've just given up on this vision for flourishing in this life and are just waiting for the New Heaven and New Earth.

1. Can I just say, The Gospel, God's grace, is opposed to earning, it is not opposed to effort..

## 2. Literally?

1. I actually believe that the Sermon on the Mount is to be taken seriously, very seriously. It is to be followed and lived out! But If we are approaching this sermon on our own, rolling up our sleeves getting ready to work it out we should see that it's requirements are undoable, it's an insurmountable mountain .. it is not something we can do on our own and this why it's so important to read things in context so we approach this Mountain of a sermon correctly...

## 3. The Context

1. **Matthew 4 reads, “From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.**
2. When Jesus first shows up he isn't teaching anything, He is first proclaiming and incarnating the presence of the Kingdom of God. He isn't requiring people to do anything except to turn around and reconsider (repent).
3. The Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God is a huge Biblical idea woven throughout scripture. To proclaim that the kingdom of God was here was a was hugely packed statement! For the Jew the Kingdom of God referred to God's final and eternal reign over his creation - for where God rules his Kingdom is present. The Kingdom of God meant, a guaranteed new heavens and new earth, a healed material creation. Absolute wholeness and well being- physically, spiritually, socially, and economically."
4. The Kingdom was bound up with the Old Testament concept of *shalom* - *The peace and glory of God permeating every part of the creation.* The Kingdom was said to be fully established when all that is broken and wrong with this world is mended and made right. As

such, it is tightly bound up with poverty, oppression, misery and sin in all its various forms being brought to an end, and an ushering in of absolute flourishing, prosperity and blessing of the creation. Jesus was claiming and displaying that THAT kingdom was here. (Isaiah 11; 25:6-9; 60-61; 65:17-25)

5. Jesus' message wasn't just -the kingdom is here -but Repent, the kingdom is here. In essence He is saying drop whatever you are doing, turn from whatever you are preoccupied with, whatever you think life is really about, think again; give me your full attention and your full consideration, sit down, tune in, listen up and receive the vision of the kingdom of God. He's inviting us into the Kingdom, to join it. (The parable of the wedding feast -everything is provided and prepared, come to the feast)
6. Once we see this we can clearly see the beatitudes are the Kingdom characteristics, the kingdom way of life. This sermon is not rules to get into the kingdom, And I don't think it is unobtainable rules just to get us to see that we can't keep the rules so we should stop trying. It is also not rules of how we "must behave" if we are to stay in the kingdom...
7. What Jesus is saying is - Now that I am here, God's new world is coming into being. Once you realize that, you'll see that these are the habits of heart which anticipate the new world here and now.. These qualities - purity of heart, mercy, and so on, are not, things that you have to do to earn a reward, or a payment to God. Nor are they merely the rules of conduct now that you've become a christian... They are themselves signs of life, the language of life, the life of the kingdom of the new creation, the life of the new covenant, the life which Jesus came to bring..
  1. *"What Jesus teaches in the sayings collected in the Sermon on the Mount is not a complete regulation of the life of the disciples, and it is not intended to be; rather, what is taught here is symptoms, signs, examples of what it means when the kingdom of God breaks into the world which is still under sin, death, and the devil. You yourselves should be signs of the coming kingdom of God, signs that something has already happened."* -Joachim Jeremias
  8. So the sermon isn't Jesus giving you principles to go and make your self happy. It's not Jesus' sage wisdom for a DIY life, a self made man or woman. As C.S. Lewis said, Our faith is not a matter of hearing what Christ said so long ago and "trying to carry it out"

rather, “*The real son of God is at your side. He is beginning to turn you into the same kind of thing as Himself. He is beginning, so to speak, to inject his kind of life and thought, his ZOE, into you; beginning to turn the tin soldier into a live man; the part of you that doesn’t like it is the part that is still tin.*” C.S Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

1. The commands of the NT are not so much telling us to do something but are telling (rather inviting) us to become something through the King -Through his life death and resurrection and by the giving of his spirit in us - We are to become fully human beings who reflect the image of our Father in heaven, who is gracious to all, who causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. Who love their enemies, who bless those who curse us, who go the second mile, who tell the truth, who are faithful in all their commitments because that’s just the kind of people they are or rather the people they have become.
4. The sermon on the mount is a huge vision because God has big plans for your life, he has big plans for my life. Not plans to make you famous, or to make you a billionaire, or a rock star..or the founder of some new tech start up, no, something so much bigger, something so much greater! He wants to make you whole, he wants to make you perfect, he wants to make you wise, he wants to mold you into his likeness so that you can rule and reign with him in the new heavens and the new earth to shine like the stars forever and ever, to share in his glory, to be conformed to the image of His Son!
  1. This sermon should bring out in each of us a conviction that we are not what we should be, we are not what we could be, we are not what God intends us to be.... There is not a person in this room that is hidden from that indictment. Not one of us are what we should be, could be, or will be. But I do believe that this Sermon is to be taken as an invitation from Jesus to let him make us into what he intends us to be, what God created us to be - A flourishing humanity.

**Conclusion: The sermon on the mount is a vision for human flourishing but first it is a call to receive the King and the Kingdom. Will you except Jesus invitation into his kingdom and his vision for flourishing? Will you turn from whatever else you are preoccupied with and give yourself fully to his plan and his instruction? Will you come and sit at the feet of Jesus? will you make yourself his disciple,**

**will you learn from him and take his yoke on you? Will you enroll in the Jesus school of discipleship? Will you begin to surrender yourself to him and to what he wants to make you into? I believe that is the true invitation of this sermon and how we properly approach it.**