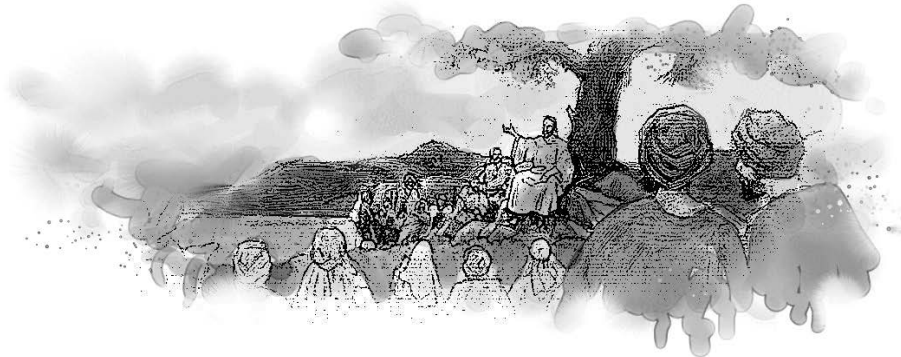


# The Sermon on the Mount



## SABBATH—APRIL 9

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Matthew 5–7; Romans 7:7; Genesis 15:6; Micah 6:6–8; Luke 6:36; Matthew 13:44–52; Romans 8:5–10.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Jesus finished saying all these things. The crowds were amazed at his teaching. He taught like one who had authority. He did not speak like their teachers of the law” (Matthew 7:28, 29, NIV).

**IN THE BOOK OF EXODUS**, we see God lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. Then He “baptizes” them in the Red Sea. He brings them through the wilderness for 40 years. He works signs and wonders for them. He meets with them personally on a mountaintop, where He gives them His law.

In the book of Matthew, we see Jesus come out of Egypt. He is baptized in the Jordan River. He goes out into the wilderness for 40 days. He works signs and wonders and meets personally with Israel on a mountaintop, where He makes clearer this same law. Jesus walked the history of Israel. And in Him all the covenant<sup>1</sup> promises are fulfilled.

The Sermon on the Mount is the most powerful sermon ever preached. Jesus’ words have deeply influenced His listeners and all who would accept its life-changing messages in all future years to come.

But we must not just listen to this sermon. Instead, we also must make it an important part of our lives. This week, we will study what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). We also will study what Jesus said in Matthew 13 about making use of His words in our lives.

### DEFINITIONS

1. covenant—a promise or agreement between God and His people.

## PRINCIPLES (IMPORTANT RULES) AND STANDARDS (Matthew 5–7)

Read quickly through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7. Then write briefly what it says to you.

“Perhaps no other religious speech in the history of man has attracted more attention than the Sermon on the Mount has. Many non-Christian thinkers and activists<sup>2</sup> have refused to worship Jesus but have admired His preaching. In the twentieth century, Mohandas Gandhi<sup>3</sup> was the sermon’s most famous non-Christian supporter.”—Adapted from Craig L. Blomberg, *The New American Commentary: Matthew* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1992), volume 22, pages 93, 94.

This sermon has been understood in many different ways. Some see it as a very strict set of rules that no person can possibly live up to in his or her own strength, apart from God. This knowledge of our weakness as sinners causes us to claim the righteousness (holy life; cleansing and forgiving mercy) of Jesus as our only hope of salvation. We all have fallen far short of the principles that God asks us to follow in the Sermon on the Mount. Others see the sermon as a speech about the laws that govern how we should act as citizens. Still others see it as a call for all people to practice pacifism.<sup>4</sup> Some have seen the social gospel in the sermon, calling believers to bring the kingdom of God to earth through human power.

In a sense, probably everyone brings something of himself or herself into this sermon. This is because it so powerfully touches us in important areas of our lives. As a result, we all respond to it in our own way.

Ellen G. White writes: “In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus meant to undo the harm that had been caused by false education. He wanted to give His hearers a right understanding of His kingdom and of His own character [thoughts; feelings; actions]. . . . The truths Jesus taught are as important to us as they were to the people who followed Him. We, as well as they, need to learn the basic principles of the kingdom of God.”—Adapted from *The Desire of Ages*, page 299.

So, the Sermon on the Mount gives us the basic principles of God’s kingdom. It tells us what God is like, as the ruler of His kingdom. It also tells us what God calls us to be like, as people under His kingdom. God calls us to live according to the rules of His kingdom. It is a very different call from the principles of the kingdoms of this world. (Read Daniel 7:27.)

### DEFINITIONS

2. activists—people who use or support strong actions (such as public protests) to help make changes in politics or society.

3. Mohandas Gandhi—India’s famous leader (1869–1948) who fought for his nation’s freedom from England’s rule. He was shot to death in 1948.

4. pacifism—the belief that it is wrong to use war or violence to settle disputes.

## THE SERMON VERSUS<sup>5</sup> THE LAW (Genesis 15:6)

Some Christians think of the Sermon on the Mount as a new “law of Christ.” They think that it replaces the “Law of God.” They say that the “old” law is now replaced with a law of grace (forgiveness and mercy). They also think that Jesus’ law differs from the Law of God itself. But these views are misunderstandings of the Sermon on the Mount.

**What do Matthew 5:17–19, 21, 22, 27, 28 say about the idea that, somehow, the law (the Ten Commandments) was replaced by the Sermon on the Mount? (Read also James 2:10, 11; Romans 7:7)**



**The children of Israel were saved by grace at the Red Sea before they were asked to obey at Sinai.**

### DEFINITIONS

5. versus—a word used to show two different things, choices, ideas, and so on that are being considered or compared (when two things are shown to be different).

Craig S. Keener writes: “Most Jewish people understood that the commandments were framed with the idea of grace in mind. The idea of grace helped to explain the meaning of the law more fully. Jesus asks for more grace to be practiced in the lives of His followers. . . . Without any doubt Jesus planned the kingdom to be based on grace (compare Matthew 6:12; Luke 11:4; Mark 11:25; Matthew 6:14, 15; Mark 10:15). In the Gospel stories, Jesus accepts those who humble themselves and accept God’s right to rule, even though they fall short of being perfect Christians (Matthew 5:48). But the kingdom grace that Jesus preached was not grace without works as most Christians think. In the Gospels the kingdom message changes those who humbly accept it just as it crushes the proud and those who are too smug and satisfied with their spiritual condition.”—Adapted from *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), pages 161, 162.

**Read Genesis 15:6. How does this help us to understand that salvation has always been by faith?**

The faith of Jesus Christ is not a new faith. It has been the same faith from the time of Adam and Eve’s fall in Eden. The Sermon on the Mount was not salvation by grace replacing salvation by works. It was always salvation by grace. The children of Israel were saved by grace at the Red Sea before they were asked to obey at Sinai. (Read Exodus 20:2.)

**What should your own experience with the Lord and His law teach you about why salvation has always had to be by faith and not by the law?**

## THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE SCRIBES<sup>6</sup> AND PHARISEES<sup>7</sup> (Matthew 5:20)

Read Matthew 5:20. What does Jesus mean when He says, “ ‘You must be more godly than the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. If you are not, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven’ ” (NirV)?

Salvation always has been by faith. Judaism (the Jewish religion) was always a religion of grace. But legalism<sup>8</sup> crept in. It can creep into any religion that takes obedience seriously, such as Seventh-day Adventism. At the time of Christ, many (but not all) of the religious leaders had fallen into a kind of “hard religious way of thinking . . . without mercy or love.” [This way of thinking left them with] “no power to save the world from sin.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, page 53.

Rules that are man-made have no power to change lives or character (thoughts; feelings; actions). The only true faith is that which works by love (Galatians 5:6). That alone is what makes outward actions acceptable in the sight of God.

**Read Micah 6:6–8. In what ways are these verses a summary of the Sermon on the Mount?**

Even in Old Testament times, the sacrifices were not a way of removing sin. Instead, they were a symbol of what Christ would one day come to do. They were to show us that through His death and return to life we could find power to live a life of love and have the character of God. This life is something that can be lived only through a complete surrender to God. And it also requires an understanding of our full dependence on God’s saving grace. Many of the scribes and Pharisees made a big show of “purity”<sup>9</sup> and faith. But they were not good examples of how a follower of the Lord should live.

**Suppose you are a great believer in salvation by faith alone. And you believe that only Jesus’ righteousness can save you. Then what can you do to keep legalism from creeping into your spiritual life?**



**The only true faith is that which works by love.**

### DEFINITIONS

6. scribes—interpreters of Jewish law in Jesus’ day.

7. Pharisees—members of a leading Jewish group in Jesus’ day that followed religious laws and teachings very strictly.

8. legalism—strictly following the law and believing that obeying it will save you from sin.

9. purity—freedom from sin and evil.

## THE PRINCIPLES OF THE KINGDOM (Matthew 5:48)

Perhaps the strongest teaching of Jesus is found in Matthew 5:48. Read the verse. How are we as sinners supposed to do that?



We are to love those we would not find it easy to love.

Of all the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, this has to be one of the most powerful verses: to be as perfect in the same way as “your Father in heaven.” What does that mean? An important part in understanding this verse is found in the first word, *therefore*. It suggests a conclusion to what came before it. So, what exactly came before?

**Read Matthew 5:43–47. These verses are brought to a close with Matthew 5:48. How do these verses help us to understand better what Jesus meant by Matthew 5:48? Read also Luke 6:36.**

This is not the first time an idea like this is found in the Bible. Way back in the book of Leviticus (Leviticus 19:2), the LORD says to His people, “ ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy’ ” (NKJV). In Luke (Luke 6:36), Jesus said, “ ‘Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful’ ” (NKJV).

The whole meaning here, in Matthew 5:43–48, is not about obeying rules, even though they are important. Instead, the whole point of these verses deals with the importance of loving people. We are to love not just those whom anyone could love but those whom we would not find easy to love. (Again, this is about the rules of God’s kingdom, not man’s).

The important thing to remember here is that God does not ask of us anything that He cannot do in us. If left to ourselves, if controlled by our sinful and selfish hearts, who of us would love our enemies? The world does not teach us to love our enemies. But we are now citizens of another kingdom. We have the promise that if we surrender ourselves to God, then “the One [Jesus] who began a good work in you will carry it on until it is completed. That will be on the day Christ Jesus returns” (Philippians 1:6, NIV). And what greater work could God do in us than to get us, in our own limited way, to love as He loves us?

**How different would your life be, right now, if you were to love your enemies?**

## RECEIVING THE WORDS OF THE KINGDOM (Matthew 13:44–52)

A mountaintop was not the only place Jesus preached. He preached the same message of the kingdom all over Israel. Matthew 13 records that Jesus taught from a boat “while all the people stood on the shore” (Matthew 13:2, NIV). Jesus then told the people parables.<sup>10</sup> These parables taught how important it is not just to hear God’s Word but to live it.

**Read Matthew 13:44–52. What is said in these parables that helps us to live out the truths shown in the Sermon on the Mount?**



**Nothing we have in this kingdom, this world, is worth our losing out on the next one.**

Two points are important in the first two of these stories. In both, there is the idea of separation. They teach the need for getting rid of what one has in order to get something new. It may be treasure in a field or a pearl. The other important point is the great value each man put on what he had found. In both cases, they went and sold all that they had in order to get the treasure. We cannot buy salvation (Isaiah 55:1, 2). But the point of the parables is clear: nothing we have in this kingdom, this world, is worth our losing out on the next one.

So, to do what God asks of us, we need to make a choice to separate ourselves from all the things of the world and of the flesh. And we are to let God’s Spirit fill us instead (read Romans 8:5–10). This might not be easy. It will require a death to self and an acceptance of one’s cross. But we should always remember the importance of what God promises us. Then we will have all the good reasons we need in order to make the right choices.

**Read the third parable (Matthew 13:47–50). This story, too, is talking about a separation. In what ways does the separation seen in the first two parables help us to understand what is happening in this final parable?**

### DEFINITIONS

10. parables—short stories that teach a moral (the difference between right and wrong) or spiritual lesson.

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Sermon on the Mount,” pages 298–314, in *The Desire of Ages*, and the book *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (available online at <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/mb/mb.asp>).

In the parables of Matthew 13:44–50, the men found something of great value. In all the three parables, what the men found was the truth. It was the truth that leads to eternal life, as opposed to eternal destruction “in the furnace of fire.” This difference is important because we live in an age where the idea of “truth” is thought of as old-fashioned or as dangerous. And, unfortunately, this is a false idea that some Christians have accepted. So with this in mind, we know that the message of these parables is that truth will make a difference for eternity in every human life. This should not be surprising. The Bible is based on the idea of complete and unchanging truth. After all, Jesus said, “‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’ ” (John 14:6, NKJV). If that is not telling a complete and unchanging truth, what is? Paul said that “we know [truth] in part” (1 Corinthians 13:9). So, it is clear that there is a lot we do not know. But Paul’s statement that we know “in part” suggests that there is more truth to know, truth that really makes a difference, either for eternal life or eternal death. Eternal life or eternal death? It cannot get any clearer than that.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 What would it be like living in a world in which everyone followed the principles found in the Sermon on the Mount?
- 2 Jesus told the parable of the wise and foolish builders (read Matthew 7:24–27) in sight of the shores of the Sea of Galilee. In the dry season, the difference in the appearance of the rock and the sand on the shores was not very noticeable. A builder could build his house on sand, thinking it would hold firm as rock. But in the parable when the rains came, the sandy foundation was uncovered, and the house fell down. Jesus compares people to houses on sandy foundations when they hear His words, but do not follow them. How do the storms of our own lives show whether our foundation is of rock or sand? How can we have a foundation that will keep us strong even through the worst of troubles?