

Deeper Discoveries

Sermon on the Mount

Lesson 1: Matthew 5: 1-2



Literary Design

The Sermon on the Mount is the first of five major teachings that Jesus gives in Matthew:

- Teaching 1: Matt 5:1–7:29 The Sermon on the Mount (Life in the Kingdom)
- Teaching 2: Matt 10:1–11:1 Instructions to the Twelve (Proclaiming the Kingdom)
- Teaching 3: Matt 13:1–53 Parables about the Kingdom
- Teaching 4: Matt 18:1–19:1 Instructions for Life in the Kingdom
- Teaching 5: Matt 24:1–26:1 The Fall of Jerusalem and the Coming Kingdom

Some Bible scholars believe Matthew arranged these five lessons to correspond to the five books of the Torah, also called the Law or the Instruction. These are the five books written by Moses. By organizing his Gospel this way, Matthew is showing that Jesus is the greater Moses—the Prophet whom Moses said God would one day send to teach His people: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. *You must listen to him.*” (Deut 18:15). Later, on another mountain, the Father says about Jesus, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. *Listen to him!*” (Matt 17:5). Matthew wants his readers to do exactly that.

Each of these five lessons begins and ends in a pattern. They begin with Jesus teaching his disciples, coming to him, and sometimes a crowd. They end with a statement like, “When Jesus had finished these sayings...” If you write in one of your Bibles (and it's a great habit to develop), find the beginning and ending of each of these five lessons and mark them. As you read through this gospel, notice how Matthew connects them together with stories about Jesus' ministry. Together, they lead to the climax of his Gospel: Jesus' death on the cross, his resurrection, and the coming of his kingdom—the kingdom he spoke of in each lesson.

Old Testament Connections and Themes

The Greater Moses

The opening of the Sermon on the Mount reminds us of Moses. Just as Moses went up Mount Sinai to receive God's Law and teach it to Israel, Jesus goes up a mountain to teach His disciples what life in God's kingdom looks like.

This connection becomes even stronger in Matthew 5:1. The phrase “he went up on the mountain” is the exact wording used in Exodus 19:3 in the Old Testament to describe Moses going up Mount Sinai to receive God's Law. This same wording appears three times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and each time it describes Moses climbing Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:3; 24:18; 34:4). Matthew also tells us that Jesus sat down to teach. This detail may remind readers of Moses. The Talmud^[2] shows that some Jewish teachers understood Deuteronomy 9:9 to mean that Moses sat while receiving God's Law on Mount Sinai. The early Jewish readers of Matthew's gospel would certainly have made this connection.^[3]

Mountains as Places Where God Meets His People

In the ancient world, mountains were often seen as places where heaven and earth met. People believed that the gods ruled from the mountains, issuing their commands and fighting great battles. In the Hebrew

Scriptures and Jewish tradition, mountain stories shaped the way people thought about Mount Sinai, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and the LORD.

Matthew uses this same picture throughout his Gospel. Several important events in Jesus' life take place on mountains:

- On a **very high mountain** in the Judean wilderness, Jesus defeats Satan's temptations and shows that He is ready to carry out God's plan to save His people (Matt. 4:8–11).
- On the **Mount of Transfiguration** (Matt. 17:1–3), heaven and earth seem to meet once again. Like Mount Sinai, the mountain is filled with God's glory, a cloud, God's voice, and the presence of Moses and Elijah.
- Near the end of His ministry, Jesus spends His final days on the **Mount of Olives** as He prepares to accomplish His work on the cross (Matt 21:1).

When Jesus gives His most famous sermon on a mountainside, the setting is no accident.

Matthew presents Jesus as the greater Moses, the One who brings God's truth with full authority. The mountain also reminds us that God is present with His people. As Jesus teaches the crowds and heals the sick, they are witnessing the power and presence of God Himself. ^[4]

Commentary

These chapters do not record everything Jesus said in this sermon. They take only about ten minutes to read, so it is unlikely that Jesus climbed the hillside, gathered a large crowd, and spoke for only that long. At other times, He taught people for several days (see Matt 15:32). These three chapters summarize much longer teaching. Because they summarize His message, they include only selected topics.

It seems that Jesus first intended to teach these truths to His disciples, not to the crowds. After seeing the crowds (4:23–25; 5:1), He went up into the hills, and His disciples gathered around Him.

At this point in Jesus' public ministry, the word disciples did not refer only to the Twelve, who are not introduced until chapter 10. It also did not mean Christians in the full sense that developed after Pentecost. *The people who first believed in Jesus did not yet understand that He, the Messiah, would suffer and die as the sacrifice for sin.* Even so, many people followed Him, wanted to obey His teaching, and considered themselves His disciples. In the same way, the people who followed John the Baptist called themselves his disciples (see 11:2). Jesus wanted to teach and prepare this committed group. However, His popularity continued to grow. By the end of this sermon, large crowds had gathered to listen as well (see 7:28–29). Later, it became almost impossible for Him to avoid the crowds (see 14:13–14). ^[5]

^[1] The Talmud is a collection of 3rd–6th century writings that cover the full gamut of Jewish law and tradition.

^[2] Charles L. Quarles, *A Theology of Matthew: Jesus Revealed as Deliverer, King, and Incarnate Creator*, ed. Robert A. Peterson, 1st Ed., Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 37. Edited.

^[3] David B. Schreiner, "Backdrops: The Collision of Heaven and Earth: Why Mountains Matter in the Gospel of Matthew," *Bible Study Magazine* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press; Faithlife, 2020), 27. Edited.

^[4] D. A. Carson, *God with Us: Themes from Matthew* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 34. Edited.