

# THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT (MATT 5–7): A PILGRIMAGE TOWARDS TEMPLE HOLINESS IN THE SON

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“I think that whoever meditates in earnest love upon the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, found in St. Matthew’s Gospel, will find there a perfect model for Christian living. . . At the close of the Sermon we see that it has brought together all the precepts we need for our guidance in life. . . I have made these observations to show that this Sermon is perfect, since it gives us all the precepts needed for Christian living.” — St. Augustine (*On the Lord’s Sermon*)

“The sermon contains the whole process of forming the life of a Christian.” — St. Thomas Aquinas<sup>1</sup>

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: THE NEW LAW

1. Only in Matthew’s Gospel
2. Jesus delivers the New Law:
  - a. Mosaic imagery consistent with rest of the book
    - i. “He went up on the mountain” (Matt 5:2)
    - ii. “I went up the mountain to receive the tables of stone, the tables of the covenant. . .” (Deut 9:9).
3. Holiness of the Old Law:
  - a. Exclusive: *isolates* Israel from the nations due to their weakness (e.g., sacrifices offend Egyptians)<sup>2</sup>
  - b. External: primarily concerned with external actions (e.g., purity laws)<sup>3</sup>
4. The Prophets and the New Law of the New Covenant
  - a. **Jer 31:31, 33-34:** I will make a new covenant . . . *I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*
  - b. **Ezek 36:27:** *And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.*
5. Holiness of the New Law:
  - a. Inclusive: for all peoples
  - b. Internal: written on the heart (not tablets of stone)
    - i. **CCC 1984:** The Law of the Gospel fulfills and surpasses the Old Law and brings it to perfection . . . by reforming the heart, the root of human acts.
  - c. Intensifies requirements of the Law:
    - i. **Matthew 5:48:** You, therefore, must be *perfect*, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
6. New Law of the Family: Divine Fatherhood emphasized (=the Kingdom is the divine family!)
7. New Law of Grace: Made possible by God’s grace

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: THE NEW LAW

1. Not a haphazard collection of sayings or simply an assortment of the “maxims of Jesus”<sup>4</sup>
2. The Sermon on the Mount and Temple themes<sup>5</sup>
3. “Mountain” evokes Sinai, the primordial Temple

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<sup>1</sup> *Summa Theologica* IaIIae 108 a 3.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 8:25–27: “Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron, and said, ‘Go, sacrifice to your God within the land.’”<sup>26</sup> But Moses said, ‘It would not be right to do so; for we shall sacrifice to the LORD our God offerings abominable to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice offerings abominable to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us?’”

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 15:10–12: “And he called the people to him and said to them, ‘Hear and understand: <sup>11</sup> not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.’”

<sup>4</sup> Against this view see Dale C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), chapter 4, “More Than an Aphorist”.

<sup>5</sup> See especially John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

- a. Tripartite structure (graded holiness)
    - i. Most of Israel remains at the foot of the mountain (=outer court) (Exod 19:12, 23)
    - ii. Leaders permitted to ascend upwards (inner court) (Exod 19:22)
    - iii. Moses alone allowed to enter into the cloud at the top (holy of holies) (Exod 24:2)<sup>6</sup>
  - b. Tabernacle: *extension of Sinai* (e.g., cloud descends on Tabernacle as on Sinai; cf. Exod 19:16; 40:34–38)
4. Sermon teaches true temple holiness
- a. Jesus as the True Temple: “Something greater than the temple is here” (Matt 12:6).
  - b. Temple imagery in the Sermon
    - i. Matthew 5:23: “So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup>Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison; <sup>26</sup>truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny.”
    - ii. Matthew 7:24: “Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; <sup>25</sup>and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. <sup>26</sup>And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; <sup>27</sup>and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.”
5. Pilgrimage motif: Journeying towards the New Temple from exile
- a. Matthew 7:7–8: “*Ask*, and it will be given you; *seek*, and you will *find*; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup>For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”
  - b. Jeremiah 29: 10–13: I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you *back to this place* [=Zion]. <sup>12</sup>Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. <sup>13</sup>You will *seek* me and *find* me; when you *seek* me with all your heart, <sup>14</sup>I will be *found* by you. . .

## THE BEATITUDES: BECOMING LIKE CHRIST, THE TRUE TEMPLE

**Matthew 5:3–12:** “(1) Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>(2) Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. <sup>5</sup>(3) Blessed are the meek [humble], for they shall inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup>(4) Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. <sup>7</sup>(5) Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. <sup>8</sup>(6) Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. <sup>9</sup>(7) Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. <sup>10</sup>(8) Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup>(9) Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

1. Teaching of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
  - a. Beatitudes at the heart of Jesus’ teaching (CCC 1716); The New Law (CCC 1967)
  - b. “Blessed” (Gk *makarios*): also translated “happy”
  - c. True happiness is found in God: God alone satisfies (CCC 1718)
2. Pope Benedict on the Beatitudes
  - a. “Anyone who reads Matthew’s text attentively will realize that the Beatitudes resent a sort of veiled interior biography of Jesus...” (*Jesus of Nazareth*, 74)
  - b. Jesus is Poor: “no place to lay his head (Matt 8:20)
  - c. Jesus is Meek: “Come to me. . . for I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matt 11:28-29)
  - d. Jesus as the Son of God who Has Seen God:
    - i. “No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known” (John 1:18).

<sup>6</sup> Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 59–64.

- e. Jesus is the Merciful Son of God, the True Peacemaker, the One who Suffers for Righteousness Sake
  - f. To be a disciples is imitate and be united to Christ:
    - i. **1 Cor 11:1**: Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.
    - ii. **Gal 2:20**: I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.
3. Beatitudes: Paradoxical
- a. Happiness found in suffering? Reversal of covenant blessings?
    - i. Old Law promised earthly blessings
    - ii. New Law looks to realities the earthly blessings signified
  - b. True happiness *not* found in this world
  - c. We are made for something more than worldly goods
  - d. True Happiness found in being united to Christ, the true temple
4. Becoming a Temple (in Christ!) in the World: You are. . .
- a. “Salt”: used in temple sacrifices (Lev 2:13) & linked with covenant of priesthood (Num 18:19)
  - b. “City on a Hill”: Jerusalem / Mt. Zion (cf. Isa 2:2–4)
  - c. “Light of the world”: Israel (Isa 49:6; “Zion” in 49:14; cf. Ps 132:17: “a lamp for [his] anointed” in Zion)

## FULFILLING THE LAW

**Matthew 5:17–20**: “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to *fulfill* them. <sup>18</sup> For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> *Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.* <sup>20</sup> For I tell you, *unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*”

## THE SIX “ANTITHESES”

1. “You have heard that it was said... / But I say to you...”
2. Jesus reveals *fullness* of the Law
  - a. Not simply the “letter” of the law
  - b. Not simply legalism
  - c. St. Paul: “the letter of the law kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6)
3. Three elements of Jesus’ Teaching in the Six Antitheses: Internalizes, Internationalizes, & Intensifies
4. The Six Antitheses<sup>7</sup>
  - a. OT condemns Murder / Jesus: Anger is a sin (5:21–26)(Deut 5:17)
  - b. OT condemns Adultery / Jesus: Lust is a sin (5:27–30)(Deut 5:18)
  - c. OT allowed divorce / Jesus: No divorce and remarriage (5:31–32)(Deut 24:1–4)
  - d. OT condemns False Oaths / Jesus: avoid all oath swearing (hyperbole) (5:33–37)
  - e. OT justice: “Eye for an Eye” / Jesus: turn the other cheek (5:38–42)
  - f. OT: Love your neighbor, hate your enemies / Jesus: Love your enemies (5:43–47)
5. Becoming Christ: Believers to become sons in the son; must image the Father like the Son (cf. Col 1:15)
6. Priestly Imagery:
  - a. Matt 5:48: “Be *perfect* [Gk *teleioi*] as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
  - b. Gk *teleioō*: used for priestly ordination in Greek OT<sup>8</sup>

## THE OUR FATHER: A PRAYER FOR THE NEW EXODUS<sup>9</sup>

- **CCC 2761**: The Lord’s Prayer “is truly the summary of the whole gospel” (Tertullian, *De orat.* 1:PL 1,1155).

<sup>7</sup> The language of “antitheses” (i.e., teachings “antithetical” to the Law) is not exactly accurate but I employ it as the conventional language.

<sup>8</sup> See LXX Exod 29:9, 29, 33, 35; Lev 4:5; 8:33; 16:32; Num 3:3). See the discussion in Albert Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest According to the New Testament* (Petersham, Mass.; St. Bede’s Publications, 1986), 50.

<sup>9</sup> Brant Pitre, “The Lord’s Prayer and the New Exodus,” *Letter & Spirit* (2006): 69–96.

- **CCC 2763:** The Lord's Prayer is the most perfect of prayers. . . . In it we ask, not only for all the things we can rightly desire, but also in the sequence that they should be desired. This prayer not only teaches us to ask for things, but also in what order we should desire them (St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II-II,83,9).

### STRUCTURE OF THE *PATER NOSTER*:

—Address: *Our Father, who art in heaven*—

- a. God as “Father” / “Abba”
  - i. Jesus teaches us to address God as he does (Mark 14:36)
  - ii. More than our Creator: He is the true Father / Need to purify our hearts
    1. Matthew 7:9–11: what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup> Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? <sup>11</sup> If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!
- b. “*Our*” Father: We united in the Son
- c. “Who art in heaven”: our true family is the Trinity; heavenly homeland
- d. Exodus connections
  - i. “Father” language linked to Exodus traditions (Exod 4:22; Deut 32:9–14)
  - ii. Linked with the coming New Exodus in Prophets (Hos 11:1; Isa 63:10–17)

—*The “Thee” Petitions*—

1. Hallowed be thy name
  - a. Hallowed: “Holy” (“All Hallows Eve”: Halloween)
  - b. “Your Name is Holy”
    - a. We recognize the holiness and glory of God
    - b. That God may cause all to recognize the glory of his name
    - c. Prayer of praise and thanksgiving
    - d. Linked with Exodus hopes
      - i. God delivers His people to reveal the holiness of His name
        - i. “so that my name may be declared throughout all the earth” (Exod 9:20; cf. 3:13–22)
        - ii. Linked to New Exodus Hopes (Ezek 36:22–28)
2. Thy Kingdom Come
  - a. Kingdom is present in Christ
  - b. Especially realized in Second Coming when Christ comes in *glory*
  - c. Already present in a hidden way in the sacramental life of the Church
    - i. **CCC 2816:** The Kingdom of God has been coming since the Last Supper and, in the Eucharist, it is in our midst.
  - b. Linked with Exodus & New Exodus Hopes
    - i. The parting of the Red Sea: “*The LORD will reign for ever and ever*” (Exod 16:18).
    - ii. **Micah 4:7–8:** . . . the LORD will *reign* over them in Mount . . . <sup>8</sup> . . . to you shall *it come, the former dominion shall come, the kingdom* of the daughter of Jerusalem.”
3. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
  - a. Must pray like Christ
    - a. **Matthew 26:39:** My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.”
  - b. Linked with New Exodus (Jer 31)

—*The “We” petitions*—

4. Give us this day our daily bread
  - a. Two meanings (cf. CCC 2837):
    - i. “daily”: the food we need each day
    - ii. “daily”: *epiousios*—“super-substantial” bread (Eucharist)

- b. Exodus connection:
  - i. Manna given as “daily” bread (cf. Exod 16; Jesus as the True Manna in John 6)
  - ii. Psalm 78: “bread of angels” (*panis angelicus*)
- 5. Forgive us our trespasses [=debts] as we also have forgiven those who trespass against us
  - a. Need to return to God like prodigal son
  - b. Need to forgive others
    - i. **Matthew 6:14-15:** For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; <sup>15</sup> but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. [cf. Matt 18:23-35]
  - c. Call to be like God: “be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect” (Matt 5:48)
- 6. And lead us not into temptation
  - a. God “tempts no one” (James 1:13-14)
  - b. The need to ask God to prevent us from giving into temptation
  - c. Need for constant vigilance and prayer
    - i. **Matthew 26:41:** Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.
    - ii. **Matthew 18:7:** “...it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the man by whom the temptation comes!”
  - d. Temptation: “Tribulation” / “Test” (Gk *peirasmos*) / especially linked to that of the “end-times”
    - i. Tribulation / Test linked to Exodus (Deut 7:19, 29:3) and the New Exodus (Deut 4:27-34)
- 7. But deliver us from (the) evil (one) (linked with Exodus (cf. Isa 27:1; Rev 12)

## INSTRUCTIONS ON DISCIPLESHIP

- 6:1-4: Almsgiving—do not be like hypocrites in the Temple (cf. Mishna: Temple & Almsgiving; *m. Shekalim* 5:6)
- 6:5-13: Prayer—close your door and pray in secret! (prayer closely linked with the Temple in Judaism!)
- 6:14-15: Forgiving and receiving forgiveness (atonement accomplished at the Temple; cf. Lev 4:20)
- 6:16-18: Fasting: was and anointing yourself (all linked with the Temple)
- 6:19-21: True treasure is in heaven (Temple treasury; 1 Kgs 7:51; 14:26; 15:18; etc.) / Heavenly treasury of merit<sup>10</sup>
- 6:22-23: The Sound Eye (“The lamp” of the body)(Lampstand in the Temple; cf. e.g., Ps 118:27)
- 6:24: Serving Two Masters / “Lords” (Temple as the “House of the Lord”)
- 6:25-34—Childlike trust in God the Father (Solomon / Glory: Linked with Temple’s Glory)
- Matt 6:33:** But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

## THE ACTIVE LIFE AND DEALING WITH OTHERS

- 7:1-5: Judging others (the speck / the log) (Temple is place of judgment); *seeing our sins first*
- 7:6: Giving what is holy (=a holy / cultic vessel, portion, etc.) to dogs (*Didache* 9:5: Eucharist<sup>11</sup>); *dogs will turn on you!*
- 7:7-12: Ask, Seek, Knock: *God will give us his grace if we but ask*
- 7:13-14: The Narrow Gate<sup>12</sup>; *the gate is not easy to enter*
- 7:15-19: Know false prophets by fruits (evokes Jeremiah’s condemnation of the temple); *wolves in sheep clothing!*<sup>13</sup>
- 7:21-23: Not all who call “Lord, Lord!” will be saved (Enter in Kingdom); *actions speak louder than words*
- 7:24-27: The Disciple as the Wise Builder (like Christ, the Temple builder); *building our life on Christ*

<sup>10</sup> See Donald Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1—13* (Word Biblical Commentary 33A; Dallas: Word, 2002), 157-58: “The concept of treasures in heaven as good works stored up before God is a common one in Jewish tradition (see Tob 4:9; 4 Ezra 6:5; Sir 29:10-13; *Pss. Sol.* 9:5; for rabbinic references cf. *m. Pe. a* 1:1; further references in Str-B 1:430).” See also Gary Anderson, “Redeem Your Sins by the Giving of Alms: Sin, Debt, and the “Treasury of Merit” in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition,” *Letter & Spirit* 3 (2007): 39-70.

<sup>11</sup> “But let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who have been baptized into the name of the Lord, for the Lord has also spoken concerning this: ‘Do not give what is holy to dogs.’”

<sup>12</sup> “Gate”: *pulē*. Luz (*Matthew 1-7*, 435) explains the word indicates not the door of a house (*thura*) but “the gate of a city or temple”.

<sup>13</sup> See especially Jeremiah 6 where the Lord is described as the “grape-gatherer”, gleaning the good fruit, condemning the temple (6:9, 20).