

St. Nersess Armenian Seminary
2003 Summer Conferences
Bible Study

The Sermon on the Mount

I. The Beatitudes (1)
Matthew 5: 1-12

Introduction

The "Sermon on the Mount" is one of the most beautiful and meaningful passages in the Bible. In fact, it could be said that these three chapters from the Gospel according to Matthew present the heart of the "Good News" which Jesus came to Earth to proclaim. Jesus' instruction is very straightforward. Jesus gives very practical directions about how Christians should live their lives and the proper understanding of the Old Testament. Though there are no true parables in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uses vivid examples and analogies from everyday life to illustrate his points.

1. Have you ever climbed to the top of a mountain? What did it feel like?
2. How many of you have been to Armenia? Describe the first time you saw Mount Ararat.
3. What drives professional mountain climbers to risk their lives to climb the world's tallest mountains/

READ MATTHEW 5:1-12.

4. Why do you think Jesus "went up to the mountain" to deliver this discourse? Is there any connection between *what* Jesus taught in the beginning of the Sermon and the *place* where he chose to deliver the Sermon?
5. What does the word "Blessed" mean? Why is this passage of the Sermon on the Mount known as "The Beatitudes"? What Armenian words can be translated "blessed"?
6. What are some blessings in your life?
7. What does Jesus mean by "poor in spirit" [v.3]? What is the opposite of "poor in spirit"? Why does the Kingdom of heaven belong to those who are poor in spirit?
8. Describe a time when you or a close family member was in mourning. What possible good can come from mourning?

9. Name some highly successful businessmen. What qualities and characteristics of their personality made them succeed?
10. What does it mean to "inherit the earth"? [v.5]. Why will the "meek" inherit the earth?
11. Besides food, what do you "hunger and thirst" for? Why didn't Jesus say, "Blessed are those who are committed to their beliefs"?
12. Summarize vv. 3-6 without using the words blessed, poor, spirit, kingdom, heaven, meek, or righteousness.

<p>EXTRA CREDIT: How many times does Jesus refer to "your Father" or "our Father" in the Sermon on the Mount? List the verses.</p>
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II. The Beatitudes (2)

Matthew 5: 7-11

1. The following words are found in the prayers, litanies, and hymns of the *Badarak*. Rank them from most to least frequently repeated.

- _____ mystery
- _____ worship
- _____ love
- _____ forgiveness
- _____ peace
- _____ faith

2. One of the phrases that we repeat most in the *Badarak* is *Der voghormya*, "Lord have mercy." Which of the phrases below most accurately expresses the meaning of this important phrase?

- a. God, forgive my sins.
- b. God, do not punish me.
- c. God, protect me.
- d. God, take care of me.
- e. God, don't forget about me.
- f. God, I am worthless.
- g. God, love me.
- h. God, don't be angry with me.

[The answer is all of the above].

3. So who are the merciful? Share an incident in which someone was merciful to you.

4. What does it mean to have a "pure heart"? [v. 8].

5. Fill in the blank: "I will never be able to see God if I _____."

6. Where do you go for "peace and quiet"? What is peaceful about that place?

7. One of the most common words in the prayers and hymns of the *Badarak* is "peace." What is the Armenian word for "peace"? What does the Divine Liturgy have to do with peace?

8. What is the difference between God's peace and the world's peace?

9. Not only must a Christian "hunger and thirst" for righteousness, but he must also be willing to be "persecuted" for righteousness [v. 10]. Describe a time when you took the heat for what is right.

III. The Salt and the Light

Matthew 5: 13-16

1. Is it important to you that your friends and co-workers know that you are Armenian? Why?
2. In v. 13 the style of Jesus' sermon changes. Why does he suddenly start talking about salt? How are Christians supposed to be "salty"?
3. How salty are you? From the Christian perspective are you "tasty" or "bland"?
4. Do your friends in school and at work know that you are a Christian? Why or why not?
5. Jesus says, "You are the light of the world" [v. 14]. But in the Gospel according to John [8:12] Jesus says, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." So *who* is the light of the world?
6. About how many watts of Christian light do you generate (a) at church, (b) at home, (c) at school/work, (d) alone in your room. What could you do to increase your Christian "wattage"?
7. If I'm doing good works, why should people see them and give glory to the Father? [v.16].
8. Based on this passage, what can we do to strengthen our ACYOA groups? Our church parishes?

IV. You Have Heard It Said...But I Say To You (1)

Matthew 5: 17-32

Introduction

During Jesus' time many Jews understood their ancestral religion to be primarily a matter of remaining faithful to the complex system of laws, rules, and regulations governing every aspect of life. The most essential laws of the Jewish faith are summarized in the Ten Commandments, but the pages of the Old Testament contain thousands of detailed regulations that could be considered corollaries to the Ten Commandments. Some devout Jews (the scribes and the Pharisees) accused Jesus of overturning or annulling "the Law and the prophets," the heart of the Jewish faith.

READ MATTHEW 5: 17-20.

1. Was Jesus opposed to "the law and the Prophets"? Why or why not?

READ MATTHEW 5: 21-26.

2. In v. 21, Jesus is quoting one of the Ten Commandments: "You shall not kill" [Exodus 20:13]. How does Jesus interpret the commandment? According to Jesus, what does it mean to "kill" someone?
3. Is it a sin to be angry?
4. The *Badarak* has a built-in ritual mechanism for assisting us in obeying Jesus' directive in vv. 23-24. What is it? Describe how it works.
5. When was the last time you "reconciled" with someone? What led you to reconcile and how did you do it?

READ MATTHEW 5: 27-32

6. Jesus also reinterprets the commandment against adultery. What is the dictionary definition of adultery? How does Jesus understand "adultery"?
7. How are we to understand Jesus' words in vv. 29-30? Was Jesus speaking literally or figuratively?
8. What specific causes can you think of that lead you to have lustful thoughts and therefore, according to Jesus, to commit adultery? How would Jesus tell you to deal with these?
9. The Jewish law permitted divorce under certain circumstances. Why does Jesus limit divorce only "on the ground of unchastity"? [v. 32].

V. You Have Heard It Said...But I Say To You (2)

Matthew 5: 33-48

Introduction

In this passage, Jesus continues his reinterpretation of the Old Testament laws with three further Jewish laws that find their deeper meaning in Christ's teaching.

1. What oath do witnesses take in a court of law? What other oath-statements can you think of? Why do we require people to take oaths?
2. What does it mean to swear "by heaven" or "by earth" or "by Jerusalem" or "by your head" [vv. 34-35]?
3. Why does Jesus forbid us from swearing? What should a Christian do if he or she is called to be a witness in a court case?
4. Choose the answer that best fits you:
"When I make a promise, I keep it _____."
 - a. all the time without fail
 - b. almost always
 - c. most of the time
 - d. often but not always
 - e. if I can
 - f. if it is something very important
 - g. as long as there is an out
5. TRUE OR FALSE:
Jesus says: "Do not resist one who is evil. If any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." If Christians followed this command literally, we'd all be beaten up and evil people would prevail.
6. DO YOU AGREE or DISAGREE?
"A homeless person asked me for money yesterday, but I didn't give him any because I could smell alcohol on his breath. As a Christian, I should be prudent about where I give my money."
7. St. Paul writes: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing, you will heap burning coals upon his head." [Romans 12:20]. What does St. Paul mean by this?
8. Do you pray for those who persecute you? Why? Why not?

VI. Three Christian Practices: Almsgiving – Prayer – Fasting
Matthew 6: 1-18

1. Name some big philanthropists. What have they contributed to? How do you know about them?

READ MATTHEW 6: 1-18

2. In vv. 1-6, Jesus speaks three times about "rewards". What different kinds of rewards are there?
3. Have you ever helped someone "in secret," so that absolutely no one knew anything about it? Why is it so difficult to keep silent when we have done a good deed?
4. List some ways that you could give alms "in secret."
5. Are our Divine Liturgy and other Armenian Church services "hypocritical"? Is it wrong for people to pray together?
6. Do you have a place where you go and "shut the door and pray to your Father" [v. 6]? Do you have a regular time for this private prayer?
7. How long does your average private prayer last?
8. Jesus says that "your Father knows what you need before you ask him" [v. 8]. So why do you need to pray at all?
9. Take each line of the Lord's Prayer and paraphrase it without using any word found in the prayer.
10. What is the purpose of fasting? Why should Christians not make a public display of their fasting practices?

VIII. The First Priority

Matthew 6: 25-34

1. Name two things that are the greatest causes of stress in your life.
2. What healthy things do you do to relieve stress? Unhealthy things?

READ MATTHEW 7: 25-34

3. What word that Jesus has not yet used in the Sermon on the Mount is repeated in this passage six times?
4. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much thought and energy do you devote to deciding what to wear on a given day, getting dressed, and looking good when you leave the house and throughout the day? (1 = sometimes I leave the house with only one sock on...10 = I'm seriously obsessed with clothes)
5. Why are many people preoccupied with their clothing and appearance?
6. Jesus says, "If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you?" [v. 30]. What does this mean? Will my next pair of Adidas drop from heaven?
7. What does Jesus mean by "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness"? [v. 33].
8. Think of the absolute coolest thing that you bought recently. Describe when you first started thinking about buying it; when you made the decision to buy it; how you felt at the store (or on-line) as you were selecting it and buying it; how you felt when you got it home; how you felt the next day; how you felt a week later; a month later.
9. What are "all these things" that shall be ours if we seek first God's kingdom? [v. 33]. Maybe God really *will* send the Adidas...?
10. So what about the stress or "anxiety" in our lives? How does Jesus tell us to deal with these?