

# *The* Sermon on the Mount

AND THE KEY TO  
ITS DIFFICULTIES

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# The Sermon on the Mount

## *And the Key to Its Difficulties*

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**T**HERE are few passages of any writings that have come down to us from the past, as to which there is both greater unanimity and greater diversity, than what has become known as "The Sermon on the Mount." *Unanimity*; for the sober and thoughtful man has yet to be found, let him be Christian or infidel, who does not esteem as beyond compare its pure ethics, its lofty morality, the marvelous beauty of its diction, conveying, in the sweetest simplicity of words, the most profound truths that ever fell on human ears, and to which (strangely new as they were to those first listeners) the heart and conscience of mankind have ever responded; and all coming from a Speaker who, while to outward appearance but a workman, a carpenter of Galilee, yet spoke with a conscious authority and dignity as of a more than human King demanding unqualified submission.

Yet, on the other hand, what *diversity* has there ever been as to its interpretation and application! The man of the world looks upon it simply as a code of morals, combined with the most gracious words, and applicable to the whole race at any time or place. Nor is it unusual to hear such exclaim with enthusiasm, "Give me the Sermon on the Mount, and you can have all the rest of the Bible."

Another esteems it altogether *Jewish*, as being alone found in that Gospel so considered, and as being ad-

dressed to a Jewish company, applicable thus to that nation alone, whether at that time or in the future.

A third insists that it is exclusively *Christian* teaching, and reaches to the height, as we may say, of Christian truth, having its full (if not only) application to the present time, and providing what may be called a rule of life for the Lord's people composing the Body of Christ.

To one, it is the proclamation of the gospel; to another, the insistence on law; and so we might go on.

Could divergence go further? Oh, that the divine goodness that originally gave it may now give us, in our present need, that truth which shall indeed not waken further discord, but approve itself to every Spirit-taught conscience!

For it was the Lord who spoke it, and who, some time after speaking it, gave Himself on the cross for us, and to whom therefore we now confess that we do owe unlimited submission. God forbid that we should divert it, either by our wilfulness or our ignorance, from His intention, or weaken in the slightest one jot or tittle of what He spoke.

### The care needed

But that involves the most scrupulous attention to every detail: *Where* it was spoken; *when* it was spoken; *to whom* it was spoken; in what book it is alone recorded in its complete form; its *context* in that book; the striking peculiarity of its *structure*. None of these must be ignored. We may safely say, too, in a broad way, that any teaching that does not make for a holier intimacy with the Lord Jesus, casting down every high thought that would exalt itself against that knowledge—for true holiness of life and separation from this present evil world; not merely pressing responsibility, but giving us the secret of power for fulfilling that responsibility—any interpretation that leads in the way of legality, on the one hand, or of laxity on the

other, must be dismissed as worse than defective, and lacks the true key to unlock its treasures. Let us tentatively start with the assumption that that key is the *Person, place, and work* of the divine Speaker.

### The Speaker

As to the Person, let us weigh carefully that it is the Lord who speaks—the very same One who of old had spoken from heaven; or, invisible, indeed, had come down in a thick cloud with every token of awe-inspiring majesty. But in that day of Sinai His people must keep “afar off;” but here, like that “Voice,” small and still, yet so powerful in its effects, that the prophet heard on Horeb, He speaks with no terrifying external portent, but sits as a very Man, with royal dignity indeed, with His people listening as disciples all about Him on a mountain.

### The place from which it was spoken

But is this position on a “mount” of no value? Why then are we told of it? Of what interest is it to us to know whether He spoke on a “mount” or on a “plain;” from the “sea” or from the “land;” from a “boat” or in a “house?” It is one of the marks of divine revelation that, in these cases, *where* the words are spoken has its direct bearing on the application of those words. Most of our readers are well aware that when He left the land and “went into a ship” (Matt. 13 : 1, 2), He was, in a figure, leaving the Jew (the land) and going to the Gentiles, who are ever pictured by the waters. When He goes back “into the house” (Matt. 13 : 36), the very movement is intended to tell us that He is about to disclose the more intimate truths connected with the internal character of His kingdom, as seen from a divine standpoint; for the “house” speaks of such intimacy. What beauty is in this, that in Luke so many of the same words that are here spoken on the “mount” are there spoken

on a "plain" (Luke 6 : 17), for in that Gospel it is not as *King* He comes, but in the most gracious intimacy, very close to us, with "*the face of a Man*," as a perfect Man among sinful men. Is not the "plain" when He is thus come, in His grace, to the *same level* of "flesh blood" as ourselves, in perfect accord with such a presentation?

But in Matthew's Gospel the "mount" must also speak to us, unless our ears are altogether closed; and as it lifts its head above the surrounding plain, it shall tell clearly of the corresponding place of sovereignty and exaltation that the divine Speaker is now taking. We greatly lose by ignoring this.

This is strongly confirmed by the following: In this Gospel there are three mountains that are very prominent, and all speaking, as we may say, the same language. First, the "holy mount" of the Transfiguration, on which we see a perfect picture of the *millennial kingdom* in miniature, including three disciples representing the redeemed from among men on the *earth*; two *heavenly* visitants, representing the raised saints in Moses, and the "changed" in Elijah; the Lord Himself, the Light of the whole scene; and finally, God the Father, unseen, but His voice heard; every component of the *kingdom*—earthly, heavenly, divine, in the *seven* persons who are there.

Again, after the Lord's resurrection, this Gospel sees Him not ascended to heaven at all, but from the "*mount*" to which He "had appointed them," sending forth His messengers to bring under His sway all the nations of the earth. It is still on a "mount" He stands as *King*, for a mount accords with that dignity. Surely we are great losers if we hear no voice, learn nothing from these mountains. So here the "mount" of Matthew 5 must speak equally of the *authority*, the *royalty* in which He is presenting Himself. It is as *King* that He is here speaking, and proclaiming the holy principles of His kingdom.

## A usurper is on the throne of His kingdom

But here we must consider another important, but sorrowful truth. While Jesus here stood as the true King, the devil was (and is still, as a matter of fact, Rev. 2:13) upon the throne of the earth, and the words of the sermon are in view of that sad truth. The Lord is not enthroned; His kingdom is "at hand," but not yet manifested; nor is it possible to understand the discourse correctly apart from this consideration. "*Great is your reward in heaven*" takes the application of the whole sermon from the millennial day, for *this* will never be said when our Lord is actually *reigning upon the earth*. Nor when the meek are actually possessing the earth can the promise of that still be in the future: "*shall inherit.*" It is because the Lord is announcing His kingdom in a world in which the usurper is still reigning that He can say: "*Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake*" (Matt. 5:11). Such words cannot possibly apply to the time when the Lord is on His own throne and the devil is bound and imprisoned in the bottomless pit; but there is no time since the death of Abel up to that day, when they may *not* apply. Ever the footprints of the flock have been marked by some form of this persecution: "*For thy sake we are killed all the day long, we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter*" is but the echo of an old cry, even from the height of the Christian's standing in grace (Rom. 8:36).

### The first audience

Let us consider, too, the listeners. They were *Jews*; and we can but account it destructive to all right apprehension of truth to ignore so prominent a fact. The "Sermon" has in it words and references so purely Jewish, that to this day most people outside of Judaism are ignorant of their meaning and bearing.

How many who read the word *raca* know its meaning? It is not interpreted for the readers, as is so frequently the case in the next Gospel. (See Mark 5 : 41 ; 15 : 22, 34.) It is intended, then, for those who are assumed to *know* its meaning. To how many does the threatened judgment of the "Council" (literally "Sanhedrim") convey any clear or definite idea? For the Gentiles have no Sanhedrim. Those "ancients" to\* whom the words were spoken in the past, were not Gentiles, but Jews, and none but Jews. By what rule, then, can the direct application be to those who had never heard the former words with which these are in contrast, or of which they are an expansion or intensification? Yet it was *our* Lord who spoke, and shall *we* take no account? Shall *we* be debarred from listening to, absorbing, feeding upon His words wherever or whenever He may speak? Or shall we (as is usually the case) take to ourselves all the sweet, simple and gracious parts, and leave the more stern and less comprehensible verses to the Jew? Surely not. If we have the true Key, it will fit every intricate chamber of the lock ; and if not, we must discard it as not having been given us of God.

### The book in which recorded

We may not ignore as of no significance the fact that in its entirety it is only recorded in one book. And again we say that we are well assured that there is no single feature of the Word of God without significance ; and that we are but losers ourselves, and, unhappily, occasion loss to others, if we assert, as some do, that it matters little whether it be found in the Gospel of Matthew or the epistle to the Ephesians.

We note, then, that it is recorded in its complete form in the Gospel that presents our Lord as Son of

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\* The correct reading is "*to*," not "*by* them of old time."  
(Chap. 5 : 21, etc.)

David, the divinely-elect King of Israel, and as Son of Abraham, the father of the one elect Jewish nation. Surely this Gospel is well placed, then, at the beginning of the New Testament, forming a link with the Old, picking up the threads of prophecy of the coming kingdom, that had been broken off abruptly, and attaching them to their fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth—*He* is the King; and *His kingdom* is that foretold.

### The purpose of the discourse

It is equally clear that the purpose of the Holy Spirit is to bring the readers of the first Gospel to a deep sense of a need far greater, and of quite a different character, than deliverance from the Roman yoke. For this end the King here proclaims the principles that shall govern His kingdom which is of heaven when it is established in the earth. It shall be a kingdom in which all the subjects are delivered from the yoke of *sin*, and brought back to God. But for this they must be made to *feel* the reality of that more galling yoke, and their utter helplessness to escape from it; that is, they must be brought to a sense of being ungodly and without strength. This, then, is the end of the Sermon on the Mount: it is primarily to lead to a sense of sin, by the enunciation of such holy principles as are absolutely unattainable by any of those listening to Him—by any of *us*, apart from what has been subsequently revealed.

This is, I am assured, of the most vital importance. The truth of it is proclaimed by feature after feature peculiar to this Gospel, beginning with that genealogy in which the four women's names appear: *Tamar*, in whose sad history we read of grace to the sinner, simply *as such*; *Rahab*, grace to the sinner through *faith* as the channel of it; *Ruth*, the outcast, grace triumphant over *law*; the *wife of Urias*, grace even to the sinning *saint*; all owing everything to grace, by



which alone they have come into the direct line of the Messiah.

Even His name, "Jesus," is here to tell aloud to *Jews*, who could alone read its meaning, the same story, so sweet to the penitent sinner's ears. It is not then as a mere rival to Cæsar that He comes. His kingdom then is not "earthly" in that sense—is not thus "of this world;" does not derive its authority from the world, or its prince; is not governed by the same evil principles that characterize this earthly kingdom of Cæsar. Yet, immediately after disclaiming this, He does claim, even before Pilate, to be indeed a King; but with Him it is not only a question of authority but of *Truth*: "*Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice*" (John 18 : 37); He is Truth's King: His kingdom is one of *Truth*, and that brings every moral question and relationship to God into prominence. How fittingly then are the principles of such a kingdom told out to "disciples"—"*learners*" of truth—"those that are taught," as the word means. Well may we take our place among them; well may we too listen as *disciples*, even if not *Jews*, to what our Lord would here teach; well does this fully justify the inclusion of this book with its inspired record of the Sermon on the Mount, even for *our* learning; for we shall find that we *too* need Him in quite another character than that of a rival to Cæsar, although none the less a King, with all the authority and claims that belong to that supreme position. The very recognition of this will teach us that we too need Him as a Saviour from sin, and it is this deep need, common to us all, that must be, and is pressed upon His people, both at the beginning and the end of this Gospel—and that is the end and aim of the "Sermon;" but it is by pressing *the holy principles of His kingdom of truth*, and pressing these *as the King*, that this is effected.

There are divine principles in God's ways with men of a fundamental character that run unchanged and unchanging through all dispensations, linking them all together as other truths separate from them. For instance, new birth was absolutely needed for men of all time, by Abraham as much as by Nicodemus. So discipleship is distinctive of neither Judaism nor Christianity, but is common to both; and they are "disciples" who, we again note, are about Him on the Mount.

As to the characteristic truths of this present day, as for instance, a Man seated in the highest glory of God, and God the Holy Spirit dwelling upon the earth (*with all that follows from that wondrous truth*) that was a secret hid from all of old, even during the time that the Lord was speaking on the mount. Yet there is a sense in which even Christianity is a continuation of Judaism. In one—and that the most radical sense—it is as distinct as can possibly be. Judaism is native to the earth, has its home upon it; Christianity is a heavenly exotic, is a stranger and pilgrim here; yet we are told of the olive-tree of testimony, into which the wild olive, the Gentile, has been grafted in the place of the natural branches, the Jew; the Gentile thus continuing the witness for God *upon the earth* in the place of the natural branches that have been cut off. There is then this, too, in common: both are "witnesses," and have that responsibility; and this is true of the Kingdom of Heaven as going on to-day; it is the sphere of *discipleship*, and of *witnessing* to an absent King.

Nor do the truths as to the Church and its heavenly calling weaken, far less make void, the truths propounded to those first listeners; but (and this is what we are in danger of forgetting) go far beyond those truths, since alone rendering practical obedience to them possible. Look at what is called "The Lord's Prayer": is there one of its seven petitions that the

most spiritually intelligent Christian does not heartily desire? and desiring, may give voice to, while still not being limited by it, recognizing its peculiar adaptability to the specific time in which, and the people to whom, it was taught, and thus not pledged to its use at any other?

"Hallowed be Thy name," is surely not opposed to the Spirit of Christ in a believer to-day.

"Thy kingdom come;" "Thy will be done." Who does not long for the day in which that kingdom shall replace the devil's reign over this sin-scarred earth—yes, in which everlasting peace shall rule, for God's holy will shall be done on the earth as by those mighty creatures who "do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His word," and *that* even though our distinctive calling be heavenly—for then the "tabernacle of God shall be with men, and He shall dwell with them?" That all daily need may be supplied is surely not negated by any later truth.

But then we come to what some strongly assert could never come from a Christian's lips: "*Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*;" and who can deny that if this be the *limit* of revelation, and so of the Christian's experience, if he is never to be assured of eternal forgiveness (and *if* eternal, then never to be rescinded) of his sins, since the very basis of divine forgiveness is his own forgiveness of others, then indeed Christianity is nullified altogether, Christ has died in vain, the greatest dishonor is done to His atoning sufferings, to the value of His blood, and this short life is passed in the bondage of an awful uncertainty.

But, since He spoke those words, that blood has been shed, and by its unlimited value in God's sight, we learn that every penitent believer in its virtues is forgiven eternally; and that, and that alone, is the power for his forgiveness of others. Since eternally forgiven at such a cost, we must, can, and do heartily forgive others; and thus, being under the government of God

our Father as we are, we may seek His forgiveness of our *daily* errors on that ground. This is surely not inconsistent with the clearest gospel. But if there be a harsh, unforgiving spirit, if there be not readiness to meet the repentance of an offender against ourselves, it is evidence, so far, that we have not learned the lesson of our own far greater debt, the cost of our own forgiveness, and are still *unforgiven*.

It is in this very Gospel that the servant who had been forgiven his debt of 10,000 talents, had that forgiveness absolutely revoked when he refused leniency to his fellow-servant for a trifling obligation (chap. 18); and, let us ponder it well, this solemn word was added, even to some of those very same listeners as on the mount: "So shall my heavenly Father do also unto *you*, if *ye*, from your hearts, forgive not every one his brother his trespasses" (Matt. 18: 35). Has that no application to us? May the Christian disciple harbor that same harsh, implacable spirit, and be free of its awful penalty? Does his greater privilege *lessen* his responsibility? Must the Jew go to *torments everlasting*, while the professing Christian, evidencing the same spirit, by the same conduct, goes to *heaven*? Most surely not; profession counts not; greater privilege means greater responsibility, not less; and far more severe penalty awaits the unforgiving "Christian" than the Jew.

The later revelation gives power for the fulfilment of the requirements of the earlier, does not make it void. The disciples listening on the mount lacked that revelation, and so lacked the power that alone came with the later one; and it is then altogether impossible to call those listeners, as some do, "saints of this dispensation," and deduce consequently that "the sermon was directly addressed to saints of this dispensation." This, if it refers to the present dispensation, of which Paul writes in Eph. chap. 3, goes much too far on the other side; for if that were true, then

were these disciples on the mount members of that Body of Christ which, at that time, had *actually no existence at all*, since it was only formed by the descent of the Holy Spirit as a consequence of Christ being glorified.

### Its numerical structure

Again, the perfection of the form in which it has been given us must be pondered. I speak with no irreverence when I say that that form evidences the same artificial structure as does the genealogy of the first chapter. There, those "fourteen generations" are evidently artificial, in the sense of being arranged by art: that is, the Spirit of God had His own profound purpose in the omission of several, by which three equal parts, of exactly fourteen generations each, were obtained. So here, the Sermon was not all actually delivered at one time, but on different occasions, when the teaching was induced by some incident, and all are brought together here for some profound, divine purpose. A comparison with the Gospel of Luke will show that many parts of this Sermon were spoken on other and special occasions, and actually based on incidents that called them out.\*

But while we say that the form under which the Sermon has been given us is artificial, we would admire the divine perfection of the art (remembering that divine art must mean the most profound design), for in few books are the intended divisions so clearly

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\* Compare Matt. 5 : 1-12 with Luke 6 : 17-25.

"	"	15	"	"	11 : 33.
"	"	43-48	"	"	6 : 27-36.
"	"	6 : 9-13	"	"	11 : 1-4.
"	"	22, 23	"	"	34, 35.
"	"	25-33	"	"	12 : 22-31.
"	"	7 : 1	"	"	6 : 37.
"	"	7-11	"	"	11 : 9-13.
"	"	13, 14	"	"	13 : 24.
"	"	17-27	"	"	6 : 43-49.

marked. The ignoring this imprint of the finger of God has, I am assured, been one cause of the many divergencies of opinions as to its application. It has been assumed to be all of one tenor all through, say as one book of the old Testament: thus it may be proved to be *law* all through by one verse (if this one verse be assumed to represent the whole), and "grace from beginning to end" by another, whereas it is of more diverse bearing and more comprehensive than any one book of the Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi. A consideration of the striking correspondences between the position of each section, and the numerical significance of that position goes far to confirm the conviction of a divinely-intended numerical structure of *all* Scripture. This will be made plainer by noting the sections:

- \*1: Signifying "auth- Chap. 5: 1-16 (answering to Gene-  
ority." sis, the book of God's counsels).  
The King's authoritative announce-  
ment of the characters that are  
blessed according to the principles  
of His kingdom.
- 2: Signifying "ad- Chap. 5: 17-48 (answering to Ex-  
dition, confirma-odus, the book of the law). The  
tion, contrast, or King expanding, establishing the  
opposition." law, with authority greater than  
that of old time.
- 3: Signifying "God Chap. 6: 1-18 (answering to Leviti-  
manifested, as in-cus, the book of the Sanctuary)—  
the sanctuary." all for the Father's eye.
- 4: Signifying "test- Chap. 6: 19-34 (answering to Num-  
ing, or experi-bers, the book of the testings of the  
ence." wilderness journeyings). The walk  
of the King's subjects through the  
world, without coveting or care.
- 5: "Government." Chap. 7: 1-14 (answering to Deut-  
eronomy, the book that rehearses

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\*I have given these meanings to the numerals in a very brief, and therefore unsatisfactory way, condensing from the careful analysis given by the late Mr. F. W. Grant in his *Numerical Bible*.

God's governmental ways). The government of the kingdom.

6: (3 x 2) Signifying Chap. 7 : 15-20. The power and the manifestation subtlety of the enemy exposed— (3) of the enemy's false prophets. opposition (2).

7: Signifying "com- Chap. 7 : 21-27. Perfect obedience pleteness." the test of genuineness, and the only basis of admission to the kingdom of heaven.

A little meditation on the above shows us that in the first five sections we have a very clear parallel to the five books of Moses, and in the same order as in our Bibles; and if the exposure of the false prophets enables us to discern the true, we may justly say that we have in this one Sermon a kind of compendium of the law and the prophets, to which reference is made more than once. It, of course, goes far beyond the Old Testament, but there is a parallel. And as both law and prophets ever lead to a deep sense of sin, helplessness, and so for something more; so here, as already said, the severe penalty threatened for the infringement of the slightest of these requirements that goes far beyond this life—the Gehenna of fire; the infinitely spiritual and heart-searching nature of the requirements of the Lord's words, even the very blessedness in the sweet revelation of God as Father, all must have combined to make those primal listeners only to thirst the more for some further revelation that should enable them to avoid the penalty, and with child-like spontaneity to cry, "Abba, Father;" for *that* they could not yet do.

### Listening with the first hearers

Let us then take our stand in spirit with that company listening to the Lord; or, to be more specific, let us think of Simon, the son of Jonas, he who later became the most prominent of them, hearing a word like

this: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Would *that* cause great joy to Simon, who, at his first introduction to the Lord, had to cry, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord;" and, at the end, could so easily slip back into the old profane language of the fisherman, as with cursings and oaths he denied that he even knew the Man? Would this blessing be, as one writes, "grace, pure grace, nothing but grace" in his ears? Would Simon (or we, had we been there) have said, "That blessing belongs to *me*, for I am pure in heart?" Nay, would not his spirit (our spirits) so conscious of anything but purity in heart, droop in despair of ever enjoying this blessing? We should *never* see God if that be the condition of doing so. I am assured that I speak but the experience of all my readers when I say that I have never met a fellow-believer who would stake his eternal lot on being "pure in heart." The more people are true, the deeper appears this conviction. A few self-deceived ones will alone be found to make such a claim (1 John 1: 8-10).

Or again, we are Jews, let us remember, and have from our infancy been brought up to look up to the religious teachers of our nation as the very highest expressions of practical righteousness, that is, of all that is *right* in men; and as we sit on this mountain-side, we hear to our amazement, and indeed consternation, that except *our* righteousness exceed the righteousness of those very teachers, the Scribes and Pharisees, we "shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." Consider it well: all who shall find admittance into that kingdom of heaven, then "at hand," must have a practical righteousness that shall conform to their environment in that kingdom—they must measure up to the standard of its requirements; and that standard is so worded as inevitably to lead all who hear it to the deepest conviction of their own inability to find entrance on those terms: all are left outside



the Kingdom of Heaven ; and, apart from some further revelation of "pure grace," hopelessly outside forever !\*

Still again, as we sit there we find that the light shines, not merely on the outward conduct—for we will assume that no practical impurity can be alleged against us—but down into the dark chambers of the heart, where lusts have their birth without asking permission of the will—would that light expose *nothing* there? Will that word that so sternly condemns even a "look," sound like gospel or "pure grace"? or rather the seventh commandment of the law of Sinai, "filled full," intensified, and inevitably bringing to all who heard, the deepest conviction of impurity in the very heart that must be quite pure to see God? What Jew had hitherto thought that the command so applied?

Surely then we shall err greatly if we ignore *where* this Sermon as here recorded was spoken; *to whom* it was spoken, and *when* it was spoken; nor would that indicate true reverence to Him who spoke it: it is just such treatment that diverts it from its original intent.

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\* We must bear in mind that while the Kingdom of Heaven is always the same, as having *earth* for its sphere and Jesus for its King, yet it assumes different forms, dependent on the place in which the King may be—this should surely be self-evident. In the earlier part of our Gospel He is *presented* as King, and in that character announces the principles of His kingdom. When rejected, but still here, He prophetically speaks of the kingdom in quite another form during His absence, when it shall include true and false, wheat and tares, wise and foolish, and having in it not only His true subjects but those who "offend and do iniquity," who surely have not come in by a righteousness exceeding that of the Scribes and Pharisees.

But in the day in which the King shall be revealed in great glory, and all these have been eliminated from His kingdom, then shall His people be "all righteous" (Isa. 60: 21); the form of the kingdom changes in conformity with the position of the King ; and it is this manifested glory that is in view from the beginning, and in which we all have our grace-given part; Israel on the earth, and the Church in heaven.

Everything that our Lord said and taught was absolutely perfect *for the time and place in which it was spoken*; but, on that very account, it is marred grievously if taken out of that time for which He intended it.

The law of Sinai was by no means "established" by the people taking their place under it, and undertaking to fulfil its conditions; on the contrary, it was thus rather "made void," in so far as getting righteousness from man went. It was established by the recognition of its inflexible demands for absolute (not relative) obedience, and the inevitable penalty of death and the curse for the slightest infringement of one of the least of its commandments. It was thus the Jew's school-master (that is, he was placed under its tutelage to learn those lessons of ungodliness and helplessness it was intended to teach) up to Christ—till Christ came; and now in Matthew He *is* come, but precisely the same lessons must be enforced, as they are in this Sermon.

Any other use of the law than to shut every mouth was, and ever will be, unlawful. But who can estimate the hunger for relief from its penalty that there must have been in the heart of every regenerate Jew who recognized that the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sins, and so with burdened conscience cried, "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it" (Ps. 51 : 16).

### The law fulfilled in it

But it is denied that there is any element of law at all in this Sermon. One writer insists most solemnly that it is all "the purest grace from beginning to end," and spoken to those whose "sins had been forgiven for Christ's sake," and this he believes to be evidenced since "forgiveness is its supreme law, resistance is forbidden, enemies are to be loved, those who curse we are to bless." It is a strange way of proving Matt. 5: 17-48 to be "the purest grace," because it so stringently *insists* on grace being shown that if one

only say to an offender, "Thou fool," one is "in danger of hell-fire!" The very law from Sinai might, in that way, be equally proved to be "pure grace," since it is summed up in one word: "*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*" (Lev. 19:18). Is not this a *demand* for grace to be shown? So that, save that the demands of the Sermon being far more stringent and heart-searching than the ancient law, it may, on that ground, be claimed to be even more *gracious*! That is, there is no distinction whatever between law and grace! This we may surely leave, as requiring no other refutation than is afforded by itself.

How vain, how utterly vain and misplaced is the confidence of men, who, before the knowledge of redemption by the blood of Christ (and *this* beyond controversy was the condition of those listening to Him; they could not possibly know the virtues of the Cross, they *could* not know their sins forgiven in virtue of a redemptive work not yet accomplished) would, in the flesh, take their stand under this mount; better, far better to stand even before the mount that "burned with fire" than before this: it is possible that *there* one might claim to be, "touching the righteousness that is in the law, blameless" (Phil. 3:6), but would that be possible here? Would even Saul of Tarsus be able to say that he was, "touching the righteousness that is in *the Sermon on the Mount*, blameless?"

But, surely, again I say, this was the very intent of these heart-searching applications of the law. It was thus He came not to destroy, but to fulfil\* the law and the prophets. As the law was not given to stop the offence, but that it might even *abound* (Rom. 5:20) for the very sake of turning what was before "sin" into

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\* The word rendered "fulfil" does not refer to the personal obedience of the Lord Jesus, but bears the sense of filling up to the full what was only partially suggested by the law.

“transgression” (Rom. 4: 15; Gal. 3: 19); so, this part of the Sermon.

### The grace in it

But, as we have seen, it is not all of the same tenor. If chap. 5: 17-48 is the law “filled up to the full,” chap. 6 is filled with the most attractive expressions of divine care and solicitude. If the former pierces down deep into the dark cloisters of man’s wicked and deceitful heart, the latter reveals much of the heart of God, as filled with care for the “disciple” as he walks through the world.

Yet it does *not* reveal how God, full of this tender solicitude as He is, can go on with us in view of *sin*. Not one word is there as to forgiveness, or any way of blotting out all the evil of the past save as by forgiving others, and that means a forgiveness as conditional on, and as temporary as, our own. Not a hint as to atonement. Not a suggestion as to the *power*—for people with the principle of sin still in them—for a different line of conduct for the future, even if the past were blotted out—*not one letter!*

Nor should we, in order to get the direct and primary application of the Sermon, listen to it with all the light and truth that has subsequently been given us. Those first listeners did not have that light and truth; and who can, with any loyalty to Scripture, deny that those to whom it was *first* spoken must be those to whom it must have its *first* application? Who will question that He who spoke it intended it for those to whom it was spoken? We must then listen with *their* intelligence, and as we hear, for instance, the gracious words, “*Your Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things*”—words that surely were never heard from Sinai, while the tenderness in them must have fallen as dew on parched grass, yet there was also that in them which would fill the listeners with infinite astonishment, and indeed a kind of terror. Terror at

the very thought of Jehovah, the great and terrible God (Deut. 10: 17; Neh. 1: 5; Ps. 68: 35, etc.), whose very Name they dare not mention, "*glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders*" (Exod. 15: 11), "*who sitteth upon the circle of the earth*" (Isa. 40: 22), whom "*the heaven of heavens cannot contain*" (1 Kings 8: 27): yea, "*the heavens are not clean in His sight*" (Job 15: 15): "*who dwelleth in thick darkness*" (1 Kings 8: 12) since the very light about Him is but darkness as compared with Himself—think of such an One as Jehovah, clothed with every token of limitless unapproachable majesty, being approached as "*Father!*"

Do you remember how the three disciples, Peter, James and John, *feared* as they saw Moses and Elias\* enter into the cloud—the shekinah—the dwelling of God? Well, the same disciples hear One whom they have but recently followed, telling them to go calmly into that shekinah, as it were, to God who dwelt there as their *Father!* Would they have dared to go thus? Could they say "*Abba, Father?*" Did not that await the coming of the Comforter? (Rom. 8: 15; Gal. 4: 6).

Surely, most surely, sweet and tender as were the words, they would have left those primal listeners thirsting for *more*. They were still but as wanderers in a dark cold night, looking through a window and seeing a home-scene with its comforts and cheerful fireside, but with no way of entrance, or of taking advantage of the welcome invitation that they heard extended to them. They could see no door, for "*the way into the holiest was not yet made manifest.*" Oh, how strangely new it must have been! They may well have known their own holy writings from Genesis to Malachi, and of not one of the holiest of their fathers—not of Abraham, Isaac nor Jacob, not of Moses nor Aaron, not of those exemplary three, Noah, Daniel

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\* The form of words used implies this: *they feared as those entered the cloud.*

or Job (Ezek. 14 : 14, 20)—is it recorded that they ever said, or could say to God, "My Father;" and are *they* so to address Him? Isaiah did indeed say, but with no cheerful filial spirit, but rather in the way of plaint, speaking of the nation owing its national being to Jehovah, "Doubtless thou art our Father" (Isa. 63 : 16). So too, Moses (Deut. 32 : 6); but that is by no means the same thing as going into the closet alone, and there as a child saying, "Father," as this Teacher directed.

I say again, where is there any evidence of these disciples—even granting that they were children of God by new birth (although that is not said at all, nor should it therefore be forced into the question)—knowing the only possible way of coming to God as Father at that time? If the previous section intensified the law, this intensified all the grace of the Old Testament, it is true; but so intensified that dim light as to give it a brilliance that would dazzle and confound them. Long after this, Philip must still confess his ignorance of the Father: "Show us the Father, and it suffices us;" (John 14 : 8); and could these poor Galileans at the very beginning of His teaching enter into the reality of that relationship? Did they, *could they*, or *any*, enter experimentally into that Fatherhood of God till God had "sent forth the Spirit of His Son into their hearts, with the cry of Abba Father?" The words surely *encouraged* such filial confidence, it is true, but they did not give the Spirit of adoption. He is encouraging them to this trial of the wings of their faith, as eagles encourage their young to fly, even before they are able to do so; and that very inability must have pressed heavily upon them, *precisely as it was intended to do*.

The Sermon then marks a long and important step in the ways of God, but whether the words be as those of the law, or of grace, it is a step in the same direction as the Old Testament, leading up, even in pre-

senting the Kingdom of Heaven, by an ever-deepening sense of sin and helplessness, *to the Cross!*

**The context: a picture of the practical  
result of the Sermon**

It can not be without significance, then, that the very first incident after this is that of a poor leper, who comes with no claim of purity or of any possibility of entering into the Kingdom of Heaven as he is, but with a plea for grace, pure grace, in the cry: "*Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.*" Was there any provision for *him*, and such as him, in the Sermon? Search it from beginning to end and see if you can find it. He was banished forever from the congregation of the Lord's people: his clothes rent, his head bare, his lip covered—that cover raised from the lip only to emit the cry, "Unclean, unclean!" "*He is unclean, unclean he is.*"\* He must dwell alone; without the camp must his habitation be, as long as that plague is in him (Lev. 13: 45, 46).

May I speak for others, and again assume that I was one of those who had heard the Sermon, I should say: "Alas, I am only conscious that I have *not* built on the rock; nor, if implicit obedience to these authoritative demands be that building, do I see any hope of ever doing so; nor do I see what shall atone for failure to have done so, and for the sins of the past; nor what shall meet the defilement that these very words have made me more keenly to realize as being ever within me; a law of sin and death is working within me; I know only too well that I cannot meet these thrice-holy requirements for entrance into the kingdom. My righteousness does *not* exceed, or even approach, the righteousness of, let me say, that Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus. Where then can I take my place but by the

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\* This repetition is in the original, and is very forceful.

side of that poor leper, conscious of a need even far deeper than his. And I too, do, from the depth of my heart cry: 'Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.' " Blessed be His Name, I hear the instantaneous response, "*I will—I want to—it is the desire of my heart; it is the very food of my soul; the meat of which others know not; it is the very purpose of my being here; as thou needest Me, so do I need thee; for all the love of the heart of God could never be told out were it not for such deep need as thine. I will, I will indeed; be thou clean.*" Ah, that is "grace, pure grace, grace from beginning to end;" but *it is not the Sermon on the Mount!*

But *how* I am clean, whether absolutely, as the cleansed leper, or relatively; or both, in different points of view: whether by the eradication of all sin, or by the introduction of a new sinless life—all this must still await a *further* revelation. But now I have learned far more than that poor leper. Shall I (still venturing to speak for others) be oblivious to what has since transpired, ignore the Cross and all its profound lessons? Shall I not see this Mount leading to Calvary, and the cost of the simple words, "I will; be thou clean" being there paid by the Speaker? That Speaker is dying, not only under man's injustice, but under God's justice, *for me*. Then, surely, I am His; He has bought me. Nay more, given me a life in His resurrection, as clean, as pure, as free from sin and all its defilement as the flesh of the poor leper *after* he had been made clean; for I am "quickened together with Christ" with a life as sinless as its Source.

Well, shall I now go back to Sinai, and in the power of that new life that "delights in the law of God," endeavor to fulfil that law, and meet the added responsibilities that such infinite grace has laid upon me? I do try. Alas, sorrow intensifying into a renewed despair, I only learn that while now "to *will* is present with me, how to perform I find not." Still the nature



of the life I have received from Adam courses as with my very blood through my veins, and it is still as vile as the leper *before* cleansing: "The good that I would I do not, but the evil that I would not, that I do." Welling up from some dark source are evils that are beyond my control, and yet coming from *me*! And again I utter a bitter cry, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

Will it perhaps be easier to try the other Mount, with its higher standards, its deeper piercing thrusts—sweet and gracious as is so much of it—yet, even to get to that grace, I must first pass through that part that "fills" the law to the "full." Most surely I shall suffer more, not less, as I feel the increasing sense of impossibility of answering to those requirements, for motions of sin that stir with all demands of law, ask no permission of that better "will." "O *still more* wretched man that I am" will be the cry here, as that uncontrollable evil within still presses itself upon me.

I give up! As I did as a sinner, so now as a saint; and thus despairing of self, the Spirit bids me lift up my eyes, not now to the cross, but to the very same One who loved me and died for me there, and from whom that new life is never separated, on whom it is ever dependent for its continued flow: "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." I learn now that all the ability to perform the good "will" of the new life is not within me, but in Christ Jesus, who is not in Joseph's tomb but in the highest height of heaven; and it is by the life that could only *be* lived because He is there, that *we* too now can "with great power give witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." This is surely an advance—an immeasurable advance—on the *perfect* teachings of the Sermon on the Mount.

I must not then go back to Mount Sinai for any power for holiness of life. I must not even go to this other mount of the Sermon for *power* to carry out its divine principles. I must go to no mount on earth;

but, by the law of the Spirit (Rom. 8 : 2), I must go far higher, even to heaven itself, for now *He* is there, and I shall find that in Christ alone—in confidence in His present power and willingness, lies my freedom from the law of sin and death in my members that are still upon the earth (Col. 3 : 5).

Thus unconsciously (for I am not now occupied with my attainments, my love, my holiness—that would spoil everything—but with the Lord Jesus alone), as I abide in Him, so, and only so, are the righteous requirements of the holy law fulfilled; so, and only so, are the holy principles of the Sermon fulfilled too; whether of the law of chap. 5, the gracious encouragements of chap. 6, or the warnings of chapter 7.

Only by the way of the Cross—my own death thereon with Christ, the empty tomb, and my own resurrection with Christ, and my abiding in dependence in His love *now*—can either the “requirements” of the one or the other be fulfilled. I am not under either as a rule of life. If I take that place with either, I am at once under the curse of the one, and what answers to that curse—as figured by the ruined house—by the other. Yet every conscious contravention of the spirit of either requirement leads me to judge myself as still abiding some self-confidence, and so not truly abiding in Him; it sends me back to Him in more humble confession and still deeper self-judgment. Alas, if one may still speak for others, how constantly that is the case!

This expels a slavish legality: the forcing myself by the power of my will to carry out the *letter*. We know perfectly well, for instance, that it is quite possible for one to force oneself to turn the other cheek when smitten, and yet not fulfil the intent and *spirit* of the Lord's words at all. On the other hand, it is quite possible *not* to do so, and yet fulfil them, for He Himself did not literally so act when He was so smitten, but rather in His wise and perfect grace brought con-

viction of wrong (and so leading in the only way of blessing) to the smiter, by the calm words: "*If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; if well, why smitest thou Me?*"

One can but feel the strongest sympathy with any who aim to bring back the Lord's people to practical holiness of life, and one can well believe that it is this motive that has governed our brethren in their recent teaching as to the Kingdom and the Sermon. The truths that divine grace has given us in these last days are so weighty, the conduct of many of those who have professedly received them has become so deplorably light and inconsistent with those truths—the very scattering into parties and "circles" witnessing to both the sin and His hand upon us for it—that I, for one, do greatly fear that still further divine judgment impends over this Laodicean combination of high truth and low life, to be diverted alone by genuine repentance and a true turning of heart to the Lord.

But it will not be remedied by any mistaken exegesis of Scripture. No untruth can result in truth. We—the writer and the present reader of this line—do indeed need to press upon ourselves, individually, our most weighty responsibility under the truths granted us; the shameful failure under that responsibility; the stumbling-blocks that inconsistency has placed before the feet of others, and yet the mercy that ever waits on sincere confession, and the limitless provision for power for the future, not in human resolve nor in any subtle form of self-confidence or legation, but alone in our Lord Jesus Christ risen from the dead.

**"Non-resistance to evil"—coat and cloke gone!**

But while I have no thought of attempting any detailed exposition of the Sermon, there are some parts of that second section that I must not pass over without comment, for they form to some, and I think I may say to most minds, the greatest difficulty; and yet

they have in them, I believe, like most difficulties in the Scripture, the richest blessing.

Take then the following : "*Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth : but I say unto you that ye resist not evil : but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.*"

Infidels have delighted to dwell on the utter impracticability of this ; and, of course, make it the basis of an attack on the whole system of Christianity.

Christians have, in their zeal, sought to minimize or dilute the unwelcome words as much as possible ; or still better, apply them solely to "the Jew" or put off their application to "the millennium !"

But have we not learned that we must never apologize for anything in the Word of God ? *That* was Uzzah's sin in presuming that the Ark needed *his* feeble hand to save it from falling—an insult to the Ark that cost him his life. Nay, whether we can understand it or not, let it stand in all its unwelcome "impracticability," if you will so call it. Let us freely admit that were this carried out by a few in a world where injustice, fraud, and robbery abound—in this present condition of things—it would result in the elimination of all justice and really destroy all government.

But if thus a hard saying for us Gentiles, how would it have affected those Jewish hearers ? Again, in the light of the Scriptures, throw yourself back into their thoughts and hopes. They had no revelation of heaven ; their characteristic blessing was an abundance in "basket and store" (Deut. 28 : 5), their national hopes lay in an *earth* basking under the smile of Jehovah, and perfect righteousness ruling, which should fittingly express His righteous government in the stern repression of all evil, and this carried out in and through their Messiah : and here is One who takes the

place of *being* that Messiah, teaching that they must not resist any attempt to strip them of all they have! A thief might accuse one of them of having stolen the coat he was then wearing, and sue him at law for it. He must not even defend the suit; practically confess to the false charge by letting him have what he demanded; nay more, even put a premium on his crime, by adding to the coat another garment that the man had not even claimed at all. Little would be left to such an one in a world like this. The thief would pose as the honest man; the honest man become as a thief. Not only would the "purse" be stolen but the "good name" be filched too!

But two points strike one at once: First, no fraudulent system would thus have weighted its claims with such an incubus as would be, it might well be thought, quite enough to destroy them. This would never have been spoken or written by an intended impostor.

Next, it is equally sure that it can by no possibility have any reference to the millennial reign of the Lord when evil shall not only be resisted but eliminated from that beloved land altogether. That reign shall be introduced by gathering out of His kingdom all things that offend; and in the long lives that shall be normal in that day, the man who dies at a hundred years old shall be recognized as a "sinner" and "accursed" (Isa. 65: 20)—so firm will then be the repression of all exhibits of evil that there will be none to resist. The command then not to resist evil cannot apply to such a time.

### **"Hand, foot and eye" gone**

It must, as all the rest of the Sermon, apply in the first place, to the time in which it was spoken. But this certainly forbids that we ignore the preceding context. The disciples had just heard: "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out;" if foot or hand, cut them off. Did they then obediently mutilate themselves?

Has any one ever done so? Do Christians who insist that these injunctions apply directly to them, and that their love for their Lord is shown by their obedience to these commands, do *they* cut off any member of their body that has "offended?" Surely not. There is no man that can be called sane, but that would think twice before he would *thus* obey. He would say, as those first hearers must have said to themselves (for they were not of unsound mind), "Cut off the hand that has struck in anger?" Would *that* touch the root of the evil? Would the anger that induced the unconscious hand to strike be cut off in that way? The other hand would still be left for the same evil use. "Tear out the eye that has strayed in forbidden paths?" Would that eliminate the lust behind the unconscious eye? Nay, that which really offended would still remain to continue offending. It means then, *can* only mean, that if *once, just once*, the eye lusts, the hand strikes, or does any evil work, the foot strays from the path of righteousness, it tells, all too plainly, of *some evil root-principle within myself*, and *I* (not the unconscious and irresponsible member, but *I*), the conscious, responsible *I*, am to be cut off altogether. *Then I am a dead man!*

Now this must not be passed over lightly. Our "key" must help us here if it be the God-given key we believe it to be. Not until the *source* of the evil is "cut off," can, by any possibility, the evil that flows from the source cease; and that source is *myself*! This holy word puts me under a divine sentence of death and judgment, so sure that I again say: "*I am a dead man*," and only await the awful pouring out of divine wrath—not on foot, hand or eye, but on my own innermost self against whom that wrath of God must burn as long as the evil against which it is opposed exists—that is, *as long as I have my being!*

Now we must remember that it was (according to that divinely-given record of Matthew) *after* they

had heard these fatal words, that they hear: "If any would sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also!" "Coat! cloke!" such an one would exclaim, "I am myself but a criminal under sentence of death, awaiting execution, and stripped of all claims to my very *life*; these words add to my perplexity, to the weight of my despair. I fail utterly to measure up to the demands of this Teacher; holy, just and good as my inmost being confesses those demands to be. Never, *never* in all the history of my people has any man spoken like this Man."

Would not those primal hearers have been well prepared to listen then with all their ears to the sweetest gospel that divine Love could send them, whereby God, the very God against whom they *in every member* had offended, so loved them as to give His one beloved Son to be Himself "*cut off*" in their stead?

But how does this apply to Christians *now*? Allow me to speak in the first person for the sake of clearness. I have been executed! I have been "*cut off*." I have died, and my true life is hid with Christ in God. I, through this law, have died to it, nevertheless I do as yet breathe, move, and think here. Hence I live; yet in as far as I do really "*live*," in the truest sense, it is not the old I, but Christ who lives in me. Then I will not perplex myself as to literal obedience as to cutting off hand or foot; nor as to giving up of coat or cloke—all that is past. The whole of that old life has been forfeited and is gone. I have no real claim, as before God, to anything at all here; my business is to abide where my true life is—where my own true *property*, or treasure, is—in Him, and so He in me; and thus shall I walk in the *spirit* of obedience to all these holy words. This might not mean their literal carrying out. It might be anything but love or in accord with the Spirit of Christ to "*give to every one that asketh*;"—"the sword to the madman, the alms to the impostor, the criminal request to the temptress,"—*that* would

surely be disobedience under the cloke of obedience. I could very easily walk another mile with a man who compelled me to go with him one; I could do that altogether apart from Christ being raised from the dead. His body might be still in the tomb of Joseph for all that such a walk would witness. It would not glorify Him; it would not, then, please God. I might suffer myself to be stripped of everything—cloke, coat, and everything I possessed—yes, not even be *forced* at law, but *voluntarily* give all my goods, and that with no unworthy object—not as a premium on crime, but even “to feed the poor” (1 Cor. 13), and yet, even this might be utterly rejected as vain, and of no profit, since Jesus (the Lord Jesus), God’s well-beloved Son, might not be glorified thereby.

And still, as one of those primal listeners who had sat with Him on the Mount continued to meditate on His words in the glory of the afterglow that would fall upon them from the Cross, would not he (and why should we not put ourselves beside him?) say, “Now do I get indeed a lovely and affecting beam, as of sunshine, on what my Lord said about “coat and cloke,” for that is exactly what He went through for sinful me. He was stripped of everything, because so poor that His executioners divided His garments among them. Nay more, even *His* good name was taken away; He was considered a criminal! He was numbered with transgressors, and (oh, infinite climax of poverty!) when thus as numbered with the thieves on either side of Him, He, *the Holy One of God who knew no sin*, was forsaken of His God, made sin for me! Is it possible? *For me!* He was treated as if He were dishonest, in my stead, and was even smitten of God and afflicted! What do I not owe Him? In view of the weight of that mighty debt, what a failure my life has been! In that light can I do aught else than “abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42: 6). But that was evidence of Job’s *restoration*; and I



am persuaded that the same repentance will even to-day meet with the same tender acceptance as did that of the afflicted patriarch.

To our Lord Jesus Christ, to Him alone, be all glory, all praise! As to ourselves, beloved, we have to this very hour, and shall have as long as we live here, nothing in which to glory save our infirmities, for these alone give us a plea on His inexhaustible grace, and permit all that His love would do for His poor people to be displayed.

Have we not then found "*The Key?*" Is not the Lord Jesus—His Person, place and work—the true key to the Sermon on the Mount, to solve all its difficulties? This Key avoids legality on the one hand and laxity on the other, and, as opposed to both, it leads us to abide in Him, ever watchful and prayerful, ever growing (not in the recognition of our own graciousness, but of our need, and) in His grace, and so growing in what is so sadly lacking among us in this day, in knowing Him with that holy intimacy that shall make us long to be with Him.

Amen, and again Amen!

F. C. J.