

Title: "On a Mountain"

Text: Matthew 5:1-2

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Today, we begin a new sermon series on the Sermon on the Mount, which begins in Matthew 5 and ends in Matthew 7:27. Jesus went up the mountain to teach the people. At the end of the sermon, Matthew 7:28–29 tells us that the crowds were astonished because Jesus taught with authority, unlike their scribes. Then Matthew 8:1 tells us that great crowds followed him as he came down from the mountain.

Before studying this sermon in detail, let me briefly introduce its main teachings. In Matthew 5, Jesus begins with the Beatitudes, calling his followers "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world." He teaches about the law, our relationships with others, turning the other cheek, and loving our enemies.

In Matthew 6, Jesus teaches about giving, prayer, and fasting without seeking recognition from others. He gives us the Lord's Prayer, warns us not to serve both God and wealth, and encourages us to seek first God's kingdom and righteousness rather than worry about our daily needs.

In Matthew 7, Jesus teaches us not to judge others unfairly, to treat others as we wish to be treated, and to enter through the narrow gate. He reminds us that good trees bear good fruit and that we must do our Father's will, not merely call on the Lord's name. Finally, he tells the story of two builders, one who builds on rock and the other on sand.

As you can see, the Sermon on the Mount teaches us not only what to believe but also how to live as followers of Jesus. My current plan is to spend about forty weeks studying this sermon. Including the special seasons of the church year, we may continue until around this time next year.

Why have I decided to spend so much time on this sermon? Let me share three reasons. **First, the Sermon on the Mount teaches us what Christianity is and how Christians should live.** Nowhere else in the Bible do we find such an extensive and systematic collection of Jesus' teachings in one place. Jesus taught through parables, brief sayings, and conversations with his disciples. But in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew brings many of these teachings together in a sustained and organized way. That is why I sometimes think of it as "the Bible within the Bible."

The Sermon on the Mount tells us what Christians are called to be and how we

should live. Jesus shows us how our attitudes, actions, and relationships should reflect the values of God's kingdom. This message is especially important today, when Christianity has lost some of its credibility and respect in society and often faces criticism. Instead of simply criticizing the world, we need to examine ourselves first. What have we, as Christians, done wrong? Where might the church have lost its way? Have our words and actions truly reflected the teachings of Jesus?

The Sermon on the Mount helps us ask these difficult but necessary questions. Being a Christian is not just about what we believe or say; it is also about how we live. Through this series, I hope we will examine our lives and learn more deeply what it means to follow Jesus.

Second, the Sermon on the Mount is one of the most challenging passages for a pastor to preach. Since these are the very words of Jesus, you might think pastors would be eager to preach them. In reality, however, many pastors hesitate to do so. I, too, have felt the burden of preaching the Sermon on the Mount for a long time. To me, it has been like an unfinished homework assignment that I kept putting off, much like a student who comes to class without having completed the assignment.

Why is it so difficult? Because the Sermon on the Mount is deeply practical. It speaks directly to how we should live, and it is not easy for a preacher to tell others how to live when he himself falls short of those teachings. If I am not living as salt and light myself, how can I stand in the pulpit and say, "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world"?

I know that I am not perfect and that I have many shortcomings. So I want to approach this series with humility and honesty, saying, "I, too, will try to live according to these teachings." As we listen to Jesus together, I hope we will encourage one another, strengthen one another, and learn how to live more faithfully as his followers.

Third, John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, also placed great importance on the Sermon on the Mount. Among his 150 Standard Sermons, Sermons 21 through 33—thirteen sermons in all—focus on the Sermon on the Mount. Wesley was not only a theologian but also a pastor who led a great revival movement. Through his preaching, he shared his understanding of the Christian faith and his convictions about how Christians should live.

Wesley devoted considerable attention to these teachings because he believed they were essential to the Christian life. His thirteen sermons on the Sermon on the Mount are also much longer than many of his other sermons. By today's preaching standards, they could provide material for more than fifty sermons. This shows how deeply Wesley explored these teachings. As Methodists, we have good reason to return to the Sermon on the Mount and learn from it.

Now, let us turn to today's Scripture, Matthew 5:1–2. It raises an important question: Who was listening to the Sermon on the Mount? In other words, to whom was Jesus speaking? Matthew 5:1–2 says: “When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he began to speak and taught them, saying.” Notice the order of events. Jesus saw the crowds before going up the mountain. After he sat down, his disciples came to him, and then he began to teach.

We do not need to imagine a very high mountain. It may have been more like a low hill where Jesus could sit and teach the people gathered around him. His disciples came closer, perhaps so they could hear him more clearly. But Jesus was not speaking only to his disciples. The crowds were there, too.

Matthew mentions the crowds several times. Matthew 4:25 says that great crowds followed Jesus. Near the end of the sermon, Matthew 7:28 tells us that the crowds were astonished at his teaching. Then Matthew 8:1 says that when Jesus came down from the mountain, great crowds continued to follow him. These passages remind us that the Sermon on the Mount was not simply a private lesson for the twelve disciples. It was taught in the presence of many ordinary people.

Some people have described the Sermon on the Mount as “hard teaching,” and we can understand why. Jesus tells us to love our enemies, seek God's kingdom first, and put our faith into practice. These teachings are not easy to follow. Sometimes, they may even seem impossible. Because of this, some scholars and preachers have argued that the sermon was intended mainly for Jesus' twelve disciples or a small group of especially devoted followers. They have questioned whether ordinary people could realistically live according to such demanding teachings.

However, John Wesley understood the Sermon on the Mount as practical teaching for ordinary Christians, not just for a select group of especially faithful people. Matthew's account also reminds us that the crowds were present as Jesus taught. This is an important point for us to remember: the Sermon on the Mount is not only for pastors, theologians, or people who have been Christians for many years.

It is a message for ordinary people like you and me.

There is one final point I want us to remember. In Matthew 6:8, Jesus says, "Do not be like them." In this passage, Jesus is teaching his disciples about prayer. He tells them not to pray as those who think they will be heard because of their many words. Instead, they should trust that God already knows what they need. Although these words appear in the teaching about prayer, they also remind us of a broader challenge throughout the Sermon on the Mount: we are called to live according to God's values rather than simply follow the ways of the world around us.

We are called to be different in our values, moral standards, understanding of faith, attitudes toward money and possessions, ambitions, and relationships with others. In every area of life, we need to ask whether we are following the way of Jesus or simply following the ways of the world. Being a Christian means more than calling ourselves Christians; we must allow Jesus' teachings to shape our hearts, our decisions, and our daily lives. We are called to become people whose lives reflect his love and character.

Today, we have begun our study of the Sermon on the Mount with Matthew 5:1–2. As we continue through these teachings, I hope we will honestly ask ourselves some important questions: Who am I as a follower of Jesus? How should I live? What should the true church look like? And what does it mean to be a true Christian? May God bless you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.