

# WHY FOUR GOSPELS? THE FOUR-FOLD PORTRAIT OF CHRIST

in  
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

By

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE LAWS OF THE KINGDOM

Matthew 5:1-7:29

In chapters five, six and seven Matthew records that wonderful message of our Lord, which is generally known as "*The Sermon on the Mount*."

Perhaps more sermons have been preached from these three chapters than from any other portions of the Word of God, especially in the past generation. And yet many seem to fail to get its significance in relation to the entire Gospel According to Matthew.

**Many apply the spiritual and moral teachings of Christ, set forth in this sermon, missing the dispensational character of the whole message. There is, indeed, unlimited opportunity to draw spiritual and moral truths from these pages, truths which the believer in every age needs to know; yet we must not miss the Holy Spirit's purpose in this much-loved sermon that fell from the lips of the King of Israel.**

Therefore, before we consider it briefly for its many beautiful lessons for our own spiritual growth, let us seek God's purpose in placing "*The Sermon on the Mount*" just here in the book of Matthew.

In the first place, this complete sermon is found nowhere else in the Bible. Many truths stated in it are given elsewhere; but the entire message is found only in the fifth, sixth and seventh chapters of this first Gospel. The passage which is very much like it, in part, is recorded in Luke 6:20-49. It has been called "*The Sermon on the Plain*" (See Luke 6:17). However, it may well be that Luke simply omitted to mention Christ's having gone into the mountain with His disciples before speaking these searching words, and that the occasion for both sermons was the same. Both Matthew and Luke tell us that, just before He uttered this message, the multitudes had been following Him, to see His miracles, and to be healed.

**But the point we want to emphasize here is that the Holy Spirit, in Matthew, sets forth in these chapters the laws of the King; the constitution, as it were, that is to govern His earthly kingdom, when He rules through Israel over the whole earth.**

In the preceding chapters we have read of the genealogy and birth of the King; of His forerunner, predicted in the Old Testament and sent to Israel in the person of John the Baptist; of the preparation of the King for His public ministry, including His baptism, His anointing by the Holy Spirit, and His temptation in the wilderness; and of the beginning of His mighty works among men. And now, before He offered Himself officially to the nation of Israel as their rightful King. He set forth the laws that were to govern His kingdom.

Christ's very act of going up into the mountain to teach His disciples was significant; for a mountain in Scripture is often used to represent the Messiah's kingdom. It is the place of elevation, suggestive of His exaltation to the position of power and glory that He will one day take before the eyes of men and angels, Satan and demons.

It was Nebuchadnezzar who saw the **“stone cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet.”** Our study of the second chapter of Daniel has shown us that God plainly says there that the image represents the four, great, Gentile world empires; and that **“the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth”** (Daniel 2:34, 35).

The Holy Spirit's explanation of this prophecy teaches us that the smiting Stone is none other than Christ Jesus, Israel's Messiah and the Saviour of the world. He will smite the blasphemous Gentile world powers when He comes in glory to establish His millennial kingdom. The smiting Stone will become a mountain, as it were, even Messiah's kingdom, extending **“from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth”** (Psalm 72:8).

Moreover, the mountain has a prominent place in The Gospel According to Matthew — the portrait of Israel's King.

- It was on a mountain that the Lord Jesus was transfigured.
- It was on a mountain that He gave the Olivet discourse, also found in its entirety only in Matthew.

When we come to the study of it, in chapters twenty-four and twenty-five, we shall see how clearly it fits the prophetic picture of the end of this age, the great tribulation, and the return of Christ in glory. These prophecies are given in more detail in Daniel, Revelation, and related portions of the Scriptures.

- It was on a mountain that the King of the Jews was crucified.

Although Matthew does not mention His ascension into heaven, because the omission of this event is in keeping with the purpose of his Gospel; yet it was from the Mount of Olives that Christ went into the presence of the Father (Acts 1:12).

The reason it is in keeping with the purpose of the book of Matthew that there should be no reference to Christ's ascension into heaven, is that Matthew was emphasizing His Kingly character; and as King of Israel, He will reign over the earth.

- The closing scene of Matthew is that of the Lord Jesus on a mountain with His disciples.
- Upon the Mount of Olives His feet shall stand in that coming day when He returns to take the throne of David, and to be honored by all the world (See Zechariah 14:1). It was to this glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus that the Psalmist referred when, speaking for the Lord God, he said,

**“Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion”** (Psalm 2:6).

Yes; the mountain, in these and other Scriptures, refers to the Messiah's kingdom upon earth. And in the Sermon on the Mount we have a prophetic picture of the King, elevated to the place of power, enumerating the laws which are to govern the citizens of His kingdom. Again and again He refers to the Old Testament, in some such words as these, **“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time . . .”** Then he adds His own Word of authority — the authority of the King, **“. . . but I say unto you . . .”**

Fourteen times in this sermon He said to His disciples, **“I say unto you . . .”** In plain speech He told them He had come to **“fulfill the law and the prophets.”** That the disciples recognized His claim to authority, is clear from what we read in the verses immediately following this sermon:

**“And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes”** (Matthew 7:28, 29).

Here was the Heir to David's throne and to Abraham's land, speaking as the rightful and righteous King of Israel!

In that coming day the Word of the King will rule the nations; and it will be a reign of righteousness. Four times in *“The Sermon on the Mount”* the Holy Spirit uses the term **“righteousness”** — four times, not counting the instance when the word, in italics, was added by the translators to make the meaning clear. These laws have to do with the character of those who will enjoy the blessings of the millennial kingdom, the experiences they will pass through while being fitted for that kingdom, and the laws which will govern their conduct during the King's reign.

**For example, the beatitudes refer primarily to the Jewish remnant after the translation of the church, during the great tribulation period.**

Then Israel will face such bitter persecution as she has never seen! But the faithful and the humble and the meek and the merciful, all who suffer for their King's sake, will **“inherit the earth,”** entering into **“the kingdom of heaven.”** Believing Israel will then be persecuted **“for righteousness' sake.”** The Antichrist will endeavor to blot out all those who give allegiance to Christ. But **“great will be the reward”** of those who are true to their Messiah and King.

Of course, it is always true that, in every age, those who “**hunger and thirst after righteousness . . . shall be filled.**” It is always true that “**the pure in heart shall see God,**” and that many spiritual blessings promised here to the faithful are the portion of every child of God in every age. Yet it remains true that “*The Sermon on the Mount,*” as a whole, is applicable only to the tribulation and kingdom periods.

For example, such a statement as, “**Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth,**” certainly does not apply to this age or to any past dispensation. Some of the meekest of God’s children do not own a foot of land, and have little prospect of ever possessing temporal things. They have heavenly riches, indeed, but very little of that which pertains to the earth. The faithful remnant in Israel however, “**will inherit the earth**” in a literal sense, when Jesus reigns as their Messiah and King.

We see the same truth illustrated in the Lord’s Prayer, of Matthew 6:9-13. It is the prayer for Christ’s “**kingdom**” to come upon earth, for His will to be done “**in earth, as it is in heaven.**”

To the King are ascribed “**the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.**”

Now the Christian in this church age can pray this beautiful prayer — from an honest heart of worship and praise and longing for Israel’s King to come to sit upon His throne. But there is one verse in this prayer that, strictly speaking, is upon legal ground — not grace. It is this, “**And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.**”

“Under law forgiveness is conditioned upon a like spirit in us; under grace we are forgiven for Christ’s sake, and exhorted to forgive because we have been forgiven” (*Scofield Reference Bible*, footnote).

This does not minimize the related truth, that, as Christians, we must assuredly pray for forgiveness from daily sins, as well as forgive those who wrong us. But what we are trying to show is that “*The Sermon on the Mount*” is, in a very definite sense, dispensational, and sets forth the laws of Israel’s King, laws which will govern His millennial kingdom upon earth. And these laws will be obeyed! For He will rule with “**a rod of iron.**” Sin will be judged and put down. Christ’s will be a glorious, a peaceful, a righteous reign! How this war-torn, war-weary world needs the King of David’s line to sit upon David’s throne!

And now, having seen something of the Holy Spirit’s purpose in placing “*The Sermon on the Mount*” just here in Matthew, the Gospel of the King and His kingdom, we would not leave this portion of the book without at least a brief thanksgiving for the many beautiful promises it contains, promises and encouragements which have given hope and comfort and increased faith to millions of God’s children throughout this church age.

To say that we may not find blessing in these words from the lips of our Lord, to say that they belong only to Israel, is to rob ourselves of some of the most sublime assurances that ever fell from His lips. And “**all Scripture is . . . profitable . . .**” to the child of God in every age (See II Timothy 3:16).

Let us read the sermon again to receive the blessing it holds for our hearts:

- Blessing and reward for patiently enduring persecution for Christ's sake;
- The exhortation to faithfulness in giving a testimony for Christ before a darkened world;
- Assurance as set forth in the eternal Word of God — assurance that His Word will be literally and entirely fulfilled;
- Warning against hypocrisy and bitterness and impurity of life;
- Christ's teaching concerning marriage and divorce;
- Exhortation concerning love, stewardship of possessions, prayer, consecration, faith in God, sincerity of profession, the Golden Rule, eternal security against Satan and all His hosts when the floods "**beat upon**" the house established on the rock.

These are some of the profound and searching and comforting teachings spoken by Christ in this wonderful "*Sermon on the Mount.*"

In our limited time, we cannot enter upon a detailed discussion of the deep and spiritual truths they set forth. But today and tomorrow and until Jesus comes, or until He takes us home to heaven by death, we may read and read and read again this message spoken to the disciples on the mount, many centuries ago. The Holy Spirit will write the lessons on our hearts; and we shall be better Christians for having meditated upon them, more intelligent Christians, even as we pray to Israel's King and our Saviour, saying,

**"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven . . . For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."**

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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