

The Sermon on the Mount as a Whole

Matt. 5 - 7.

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(B.T. Vol. N5, p. 7-8.)

As the different parts of our Lord's wondrous instructions have been before us from time to time, though not in the orderly form, it seems not without interest to survey it comprehensively. Also it is well to take note of the striking difference between the task assigned to the First Gospel as compared with the Third. In the latter we have various portions dealing with the persons or things to which the instruction applies; whereas the former presents all in an unbroken fulness. Hence if we had not Luke's Gospel, we should not have known the interruptions, which in fact did occur, on the occasions for drawing out the teaching applicable.

It is known that many excellent persons have tried to make out, for the clearing up of what enemies treat as discrepancies, that our Lord repeated the same or very similar instruction under different circumstances. Assuredly on the one hand no one would affirm that the same truth may not have been often reiterated in the course of His service here below. But on the other there is no proper ground for doubting that the Spirit of God has in a remarkable and deeply interesting way presented the same teaching in a differing connection and with distinguishable shades, according to the divine design of the books which incorporate it. Thus there is no need to conceive a new rehearsal, in order to reconcile (as it is called) the writings, or to vindicate the credit of the writers. It is on the contrary the wisdom of God in which the Holy Spirit acted when He thus directed the so called Evangelists. For we must not assume that Matthew and Luke entered fully into His reasons for so inspiring them. What is certain is that they were so led of Him as to give us the truth of God, the more perfectly to fulfil His purpose in each.

Take, as the first instance in fact, the account of Luke 6: 12-49, and compare it with the chapters of Matthew; as also Luke 11: 1-13. and 33-36. Quite aware that pious men have argued from "the plain" in Luke 6: 17, opposed to the "mountain" in Matt. 5: 1, one is constrained from the clear evidence of both to reject such a solution of the difficulty felt as to the identity of the discourse at the same place and time. For Luke's language does not mean "a plain," but rather a level place or plateau on the mountain, up to which the Lord went to pray all night, before calling the chosen twelve, and then coming down with them, so far as to meet a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of the people out of all Judea and Jerusalem. It was clearly the same discourse; but the Spirit acted, not as a mere reporter (which is not the manner of inspiration) but as an infallible editor, as it were, for the distinctive design of each Gospel.

Hence we may observe that Matthew does not relate here the apostolic institution, as Luke does at this time and place, like Mark, who omits the sermon as being occupied with His work rather than His words. Matthew was led to reserve that call as its fitting place to the mission to Israel in Matt. 10 which corresponds with the beginning of Luke 9. Ignorance or error is out of the question for the Evangelists, but too true of those who carp at what they do not understand, The first striking distinction in the discourse is, that in the briefer sketch Luke was given the address personal, "ye," not the abstract "the" as in Matthew before the final benediction of verse 11; while Matthew was led to reserve his far fuller woes till Matt. 23 which was a later time.

The Kingdom has no such place in Luke as in Matthew. It is those that gather to Christ and

follow Him truly who are blessed; and thus for man as he is, outside and despising Him. The contrast of what Messiah authoritatively said with what was said to the ancients is peculiar to Matthew. Luke gives fully the great and new morality of loving our enemies, being merciful as our Father also is, not judging or condemning, but remitting according to the divine pattern; as Matthew gives the pointed teaching on practical righteousness in acts and words, prayer and fasting as directed against hypocrisy; and the prayer for disciples comes in here in Matt. 6: 9-13. In Luke it is not only reserved for a moral connection with heeding the word as the appropriate exercise of life according to God, but we learn too that it was the Lord's answer to a disciple's request. To record this in Luke's Gospel was as suitable, as to leave it out in Matthew's who presents the Lord in all meekness but full of authority, without taking notice of any such human circumstances.

This too explains why the First Gospel gives it not only as an unbroken whole, but in immediate sequence of a very broad and general view of His service and the wide impression produced (Matt. 4: 23-25). In a similar way His teaching next follows, though historic detail was given later.

But not to see that these ways of the inspiring Spirit are perfect for the adequate revealing of Christ's various grace and glory, and in no less admirable adaptation to man's condition and wants to conceive that they are blemishes of human infirmity, is indeed to be dim-sighted if not blind. Such are those who, if they do not altogether deny God's word, "Just hint a fault and hesitate dislike; Willing to wound, but yet afraid to strike." But if we are to be kept in these difficult and dangerous times, if we are not to be carried away by superstition or by scepticism, we need uncompromising adherence to scripture and dependance on His guidance who inspired every word from God but through man, and to be now characteristically (I do not say absolutely) able to say, as could not be of old, "we know," as we read in the Epistles of Paul and John particularly, not said of themselves only but of Christians their brethren, who have God's Spirit dwelling in them.

As to the sermon, it is instruction in the righteousness proper to all that enter the Kingdom of the heavens. Those born of the Spirit alone can meet the state of soul blessed in the Lord's eyes. It is not a requirement as on Sinai, but Christ's description of such as suit the Kingdom. Not a word of grace to sinners is uttered. It is not the gospel of God's grace to the lost, but His words for His disciples; and personal obedience is the rock at its close. To misrepresent this is mere error; and it is evangelical men who find most difficulty. Others no doubt are wholly wrong; but we must not confound it with redemption or saving grace.

Matt. 5 is not only a sketch of what the blessed ones are, but with the authority of Law and Prophets fulfilled, not weakened, the higher conduct suited to the Kingdom, in contrast with what God of old forbore with, now that the Father's name is revealed, and relationship with Him.

Matt. 6 speaks of the inner life or ways as seen of the Father, distinct from the world, and its cares apt otherwise to be absorbing.

Matt. 7 shows their due attitude to others, saints or sinners, with counting on God encouraged, and avoidance of false prophets (no matter what their gifts), and practical submission to Christ's words.

Now, my reader, if you have not judged yourself as lost and found by grace, salvation in Christ and His work, how can you face the Sermon on the Mount? It is far more to be dreaded by you than the Ten Words of Sinai with all the terrific sights and sounds which accompanied them. Jesus invites and urges you to come to Him, and even assures that "him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." Have you ever so come? Come now. Delay here is most dangerous.