

## APPROACHES TO THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

1. **Interim Ethic**--Because Jesus expected the "consummation of the end of the age" to come very soon, He advocated this radical/revolutionary ethic (Albert Schweitzer, Johannes Weiss). Problem: Jesus was wrong!
2. **Existential (Demythological) Approach**--Jesus' words (if indeed they do belong to Him), are not intended to formulate a specific code of ethics but are intended to create a tension in each believer between what "ought to be" and what "actually is." This is great for creating individual moral change. The problem, however, is that it ignores the historical content of Jesus' message and opens Pandora's box of pluralism.
3. **Legalistic Approach**--This sermon is the Constitution of the Kingdom of God. We should, therefore take each statement literally and at face value. Problem: this seems to be an impossible task.
4. **Preparation for the Gospel**--The Sermon, by its impossibly high demands, shows men their sin and thus their need for the redemptive work of Christ (this is the Lutheran position). Problem: these words aren't intended to merely make us feel bad, they are intended to be obeyed and implemented.
5. **Liberal Approach**--This sermon is the means by which mankind can save civilization. Problem: These words appear to be for kingdom citizens, not for society at large. Furthermore, the world will be saved through Jesus' atoning sacrifice, not our admirable ethical achievements.
6. **Dispensationalist Approach**--Jesus outlines the constitution for the Millennial Kingdom (Darby & Scofield). That makes these words virtually irrelevant for Jesus' audience as well as for us today.
7. **Christological Approach** -- Only Jesus has or will ever live out this text. Thus it is more an autobiography of Jesus than a constitution of the kingdom. This is a wonderful observation. However, it does not help us implement the character of Jesus in our own lives.

## **PRINCIPLES FOR APPROACHING THE SERMON:**

- i) This sermon is kingdom talk. It is a literal code of Christian Ethics. It beckons the church.
- ii) This sermon is eschatological--it was given under the dispensation of the law, but it has the end in sight. In addition, the citizens of the kingdom are in development--conformity to the image of Christ. It points to heaven.
- iii) This sermon penetrates to the heart and attitude. It calls to your soul.
- iv) This sermon creates tension between what ought to be and what is. It cries for Calvary.
- v) This sermon is radical and is often hyperbolic. It demands reality and common sense.

## **INTRODUCTORY ISSUES:**

- i) What we actually have is only a bare-bones summary of the sermon. When Jesus first preached it, it likely took several hours. For us to read it only takes about 15 minutes.
- ii) Context--The book of Matthew revolves around five speeches, each of which end with the phrase, "When Jesus had finished these sayings" (7:28-29; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). This sermon then, marks the end of the first section of Matthew's book.
- iii) There are obvious similarities between the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7) and the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17-49), (cf. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 139-140):
  - (1) Both begin with "Beatitudes"
  - (2) Both end with the wise and foolish builder
  - (3) Both contain the golden rule, commands to love our enemy and turn the other cheek, prohibition against judging, and the illustrations of a log/speck in the eye and a tree and its fruit.
  - (4) After both sermons, Jesus went into Capernaum.

At the same time, there are marked differences:

- a. Both contain information that the other does not have.
  - b. Matthew contains 107 vv. whereas Luke only has 30.
  - c. Luke's beatitudes are strictly physical whereas Matthew's are spiritual.
  - d. Matthew's was delivered on a Mountain, Luke's on a plain.
- iv) Textual introduction--"And when He saw the multitudes, He went up on the mountain." He had to; the crowds were too thick to deal with in town. Not only did Jesus preach "Good News," He also healed their diseases (4:23). As a result, His fame spread and people came from all over Syria, Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and Perea (4:24-25).
  - v) "After He sat down, His disciples came to Him." Jesus, in the culture of the Jews, used many Rabbinic methods of teaching. When a Rabbi sat down, it was an indication to his students that the formal teaching was about to start.