

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Matthew 5; 6; 7

The teacher should be sure the children know the answers to the suggested questions on the lesson at their grade level and any other points mentioned in their own notes. Then take up some of the practical lessons suggested in the Adult notes. The teacher should study these beforehand, picking out and marking the particular verse or verses in the text which express each point. Take these up with the children, having them read them if they are able. Spend more time on any which seem particularly to strike the pupils. You may not be able to get through all of them, as you should leave at least five minutes for the closing parable, but you will be able to do enough to show the children how much there is in the sermon on the mount, and to encourage them to study it for themselves. Be sure they know what is the famous passage in each of the three chapters.

Doctrinal Points

Character must be built on the Lord's truth.

The Blessings are the rules for happiness given by the Lord Himself.

Notes for Parents

We are told in Matthew 4:23 that the Lord in His ministry went about teaching, preaching, and healing; so no doubt He preached many sermons. We think of most of His discourses as teaching, and indeed our lesson for today says, "He opened his mouth and taught them, saying." But this lesson is always called "The Sermon on the Mount."

The mountain in Galilee pictures a spiritual outlook upon our life in the world. How different such an outlook is from our natural one is proved by the difference between our natural ideas of what is good for us and the teaching the Lord gives us in this

sermon. The sermon begins with the Blessings, and we remember that *blessed* means “happy.” Read through the Blessings and ask yourself if people in general would say that any of the conditions mentioned in them would be likely to make one happy. Yet this is the Lord speaking to us, and the Lord knows. Even the people who listened to the sermon from the Lord’s own lips so many hundreds of years ago realized that He was telling them what was unquestionably the truth, as we learn in the last verse of chapter 7. Each of us should ask himself very seriously, “Is it the part of wisdom for me to go on looking at my life and those of others from the point of view of this world when the Lord Himself has told me plainly that an entirely different point of view is the right one and the only one which can lead to eternal happiness?”

In each of the three chapters of the sermon there is one very famous passage. In chapter 5 it is the Blessings. In chapter 6 it is the Lord’s Prayer. In chapter 7 it is the Golden Rule. And in addition to these we have verse after verse of plain, practical instruction, covering all our common experiences and problems. We are told, for example, that it is useless to know what is right if we do not do it, that the ten commandments are the fundamental laws of a good life for all time regardless of changing conditions in the world, that a good external life is not enough—the heart must be right, that love which is given only to those who will return it is not true love at all but really self-love, that the ideal for which we should constantly strive must be nothing less than the perfect example given us in the Lord’s life, that we should not expect a reward in heaven for good we do to be seen of men, that we should not be disturbed if we do not have worldly success and that we should not worry about our future in the world, that we should be critical of ourselves rather than of other people, that we should be sincere in following the Lord and not excuse ourselves when we do what we know is wrong.

A minister could find enough material for many sermons in every verse of this one sermon of the Lord. And its final parable sums up in a very vivid picture all that the Lord is trying to do for

us in it—to show us the solid rock of divine truth on which we should build the house of our character, and to warn us and save us from the inevitable destruction that will come if we persist in building on the shifting sands of human opinion.

Primary

The younger children will like to think of the Lord sitting on the mountain with the people gathered around Him. Be sure they understand that *blessed* means “happy,” and that the Lord wants us to be happy and is telling us how in this sermon. After speaking of the sermon in general, read rapidly through your list of verses with just a word about each, and then discuss the parable at the end and its meaning.

When you go to church, the minister preaches a sermon, doesn't he? Often you cannot understand what he is saying because you are still a little child, but you will find that as you grow older, you will understand more and more. In his sermon the minister is trying to help people to understand what the Lord tells us in His Word.

When the Lord was on earth, He preached sermons, too. The longest of them that is written down for us in the Bible is called “The Sermon on the Mount.”

How does the sermon on the mount begin?

What does *blessed* mean?

In the Blessings the Lord is telling us the things which can really make us happy.

The sermon on the mount is full of beautiful, wise teachings.

It fills chapters 5, 6, and 7 of the Gospel of Matthew.

In chapter 6 we find the Lord's Prayer.

In chapter 7 we find the Golden Rule.

And the sermon on the mount ends with a wonderful parable. A parable is a story with another meaning inside of it. Let us read this one. [Read Matthew 7:24-27.] I wonder if you can see what the inside meaning of this story is. You know that each one of us lives in a house, but we didn't build this house, and sometimes we move out of one house and into another. But each of us has another kind of house to live in that he does build himself and

that he always stays in, although he makes changes in it from day to day. This house is called our character. You are always yourself, even though sometimes you like to play you are somebody else. The house of our character is built by what we feel and think and do from day to day. It is built on a firm rock if it is built on the truth as the Lord gives it to us in His Word. But if we build our character on our own ideas of what is good for us or on the ideas of the other children we play with, our house is built on the sand, because these ideas are changing all the time and are often wrong. Now do you remember our lesson about temptations? The storms that beat against the house of our character are our temptations. Can you see what the parable teaches?

When the Lord finished speaking, how did the people feel about what He said? Why were they surprised?

The Lord spoke with authority because He was God, but most of the people did not know this.

Junior

Discuss the sermon as a whole first, explaining the three parts and what is in each. Then speak of the Blessings as the key to the whole teaching of the Lord, the positive side of the commandments. The Juniors are coming into an age when a challenge to right feeling and conduct may be much more effective than prohibitions. They should understand that both are necessary, but that the really happy life is one which has the Lord's unselfish spirit at its heart. Then go through the specific lessons and end with the parable.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 of the Gospel of Matthew are called the sermon on the mount. Why?

In the Scriptures many other wonderful things happened on mountains. The commandments were given from Mount Sinai. Jesus went up into a mountain to pray. He took His three closest disciples up into a mountain to see Him transfigured. And you remember that the test Elijah proposed and carried through was performed on Mount Carmel. This is because a mountain top is a picture of a high state of thought and feeling, a state when we are near the Lord and can look down on our everyday life and see it in

its true proportions. So when the Lord saw how much the people needed His teaching, He took them up with Him into a mountain. For when the Lord saw the multitudes, He saw not only their bodies but also their souls.

The sermon on the mount is not long, but there is so much in it that it would take a whole year's lessons to study its teachings one by one. You will want to do that for yourselves. But you should know and remember that in each of its three chapters there is one especially well-known passage: in chapter 5 it is the Blessings, in chapter 6 the Lord's Prayer, and in chapter 7 the Golden Rule.

The sermon begins with the Blessings. *Blessed*, as we learned in our lesson on the first Psalm, means "happy." Many people may not think that the states the Lord in this sermon calls blessed would really make them happy. They think happiness comes from pleasures, success in their occupations, popularity, wealth, and influence. But we know that people may have all these worldly things and yet not be happy. Happiness comes from the Lord; it is His unselfish spirit felt in our own hearts. When we think about ourselves all the time and want other people to be doing things for us, we are never happy because we are always wanting more, and often wanting things we cannot have. Only forgetting ourselves and loving to help others brings real happiness. This is what the Blessings teach us.

The sermon gives us many examples of what we must do if we wish to develop the qualities which bring happiness. We must prove that we really want to serve the Lord by doing what He says is right, by keeping the commandments. We must not let resentment or anger stay in our hearts. We must be kind and forgiving when people injure us. We must not praise ourselves for the good we do or try to tell other people about it so that they will praise us. We must think more of being good than of being successful in the world. We must trust the Lord for our future and not worry about what may happen to us. We must not find fault with other people without first looking for our own faults.

What parable do we find near the end of the sermon?

What is a parable?

In this parable the house is our character. The rock on which we should build it is the Lord's truth. The sand is our own opinions or the opinions of others who do not study the Lord's truth to find the way of life. The rain and the floods and the wind are all the temptations and trials which come to us in our lives. These come to the good and the evil alike.

What happened to the house built on the rock when the storm came?

What happened to the house built on the sand?

Why were the people astonished at the Lord's teaching?

The Lord could speak with authority because He was God Himself.

Intermediate

The emphasis should be on the necessity of looking to the Lord for guidance instead of to self. The verses listed may be studied with this thought in mind, ending with the parable and the thought that the Lord is the only one who can speak "with authority."

A mountain represents a high plane of thought and feeling, near to the Lord, and Galilee represents our everyday life in the world. If we are to see our life in its true proportions, we must lift our minds above the level of worldly efforts and ambitions. Unless we can do this we cannot understand the Lord's teaching in this sermon on the mount.

The sermon begins with the statement of the qualities of life which lead to happiness. *Blessed*, as we may remember from our lesson on the first Psalm, means "happy." These are not the qualities which most people think will bring happiness. We are likely to think that we would be happy if we had physical beauty, unusual strength, self-confidence, business ability, money, or genius of some kind. Such things seem to us the best things to be born with and to strive for. These may indeed bring what the world calls success, but we find that the people who have them are by no means always happy. In the Blessings the Lord gives us the only sure rules for happiness. Read verse 17. The Blessings fulfill the

commandments; the qualities they describe are the result of keeping the commandments because we wish to serve the Lord. Isaiah says: “Cease to do evil; learn to do well.”

All the other teachings of the sermon are practical examples illustrating the working out in daily life of the qualities described in the Blessings. Read the rest of the sermon, noting how the Lord continually points out the need of making the inner life right. The sermon must be studied a little at a time because there is so much in it. But we need to remember that there is one especially well-known passage in each of the three chapters: the Blessings in chapter 5, the Lord’s Prayer in chapter 6, and the Golden Rule in chapter 7. Almost every verse in the whole sermon is probably familiar to us because we have heard it quoted or used as a sermon text. Each teaching in the sermon challenges our thought and leads us to examine ourselves. Sometimes we, like the people who heard the sermon, are astonished at the Lord’s teaching. We say immediately, for example, “how can the ‘poor in spirit’ be happy?” This is because we identify “poor in spirit” with “poor-spirited” or cowardly. This is not what the Lord means. The poor in spirit are simply those who do not think too much of themselves and so are willing to look to the Lord for guidance, the people who realize how weak they really are and how much they need the Lord’s help. The same is meant by “the poor” all through the Word. In the same way, “they that mourn” are those who truly regret their own evils and are trying to improve, and the “meek” are those who would rather be injured themselves than be the cause of injury to others. We might go through the whole sermon in this way, trying to see what the Lord means instead of putting our own ideas into His words.

The parable of the house on the rock and the house on the sand is a fitting close to the sermon. The house is our character. The rock is the Lord’s truth. The sand is the opinions of men. The rain and floods and wind are the temptations and trials which come in the life of everyone, good and bad alike. If we build our character on belief in the Lord and His Word, trying always to feel as He

tells us to feel, think as He tells us to think, and act as He tells us to act, we shall be able to meet trial and temptation, bereavement and disappointment with unshaken trust, knowing that whatever the Lord permits to come to us He permits for our eternal good, and we shall be happy all along the way because the Lord will be dwelling in our house, and His unselfish love, which is happiness, will be in our hearts. Try always to remember that happiness is a quality of feeling, and that it comes from within, never from outside.

The Lord could speak as “one having authority” because He had the authority. He was God. He knew.

Basic Correspondences

sand = the opinions of men
storms = trials and temptations

Senior

After a general statement about the sermon as a whole and the best known passages in it, take up your list of verses, stopping on any passage which the class seems inclined to discuss. The important thing is to lead the young people to realize how much is in the sermon and to arouse in them a desire to study it for themselves.

The sermon on the mount occupies three chapters in the Gospel of Matthew. A much shorter form is found in the sixth chapter of Luke. In Matthew it begins with the Blessings and contains also the Lord’s Prayer and the Golden Rule. It is so packed with lessons that one might write endlessly upon it, and we can touch on only a few points. Each one of us must study the sermon all his life, and will always find in it new food for thought.

“And seeing the multitudes He went up into a mountain.” The Lord saw more than the bodies of the throng of people. He saw their souls and their spiritual weaknesses and needs. So He took them up with Him onto a mountain. Going up on a mountain pictures lifting our thoughts above the plane of worldly ideas to a spiritual level.

First the Lord gave the rules for happiness, the qualities which must be cultivated if we are to know “that peace which the world cannot give.” No wonder the people were astonished! These were certainly not the qualities which the people themselves would have named as the essentials of happiness, nor those most of us today would name. In fact, we naturally think of many of them as qualities which are connected with unhappiness. But the people who went up to the mountain with the Lord were willing to be taught. He called them “the salt of the earth.” Salt, whose chemical property is to combine different elements, represents the desire to unite truth and good in life. These people wanted to be good, but they had lost the way of life and so were not walking in the way which would lead them to heaven. The salt had “lost its savor.”

So Jesus pointed them steadily toward God as the only source of truth and goodness. He told them that the commandments must be kept literally, that not one jot or tittle of the Law could fail—and this is equally true today—but He also showed them that it is not enough merely to keep the Law outwardly.

Then He rehearsed some of the commandments as they were interpreted and twisted by the scribes and Pharisees, and in each case He added the new teaching that the spirit or motive must be made pure. He sought to change people’s hearts from self-seeking, covetousness, revenge, lust, and hatred to gentleness, mercy, forgiveness, purity, and humility. Only in this way could the virtues named in the Beatitudes be developed.

The last verse of chapter 5 is often questioned. “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” Can any finite person be perfect? Does the Lord expect it of us? The Word itself gives the answer: “He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.” But He sets before us an ideal which is the only adequate ideal to strive for. The moment we say to ourselves, “I can’t be perfect; so it is of no use to try,” or fall into the habit of excusing our known faults by saying, “Well, nobody is perfect,” we stop progressing spiritually. If our goal were an attainable ideal, we might attain it and have nothing left to work for or

to look forward to. But if we take the perfect divine life as our pattern, we may progress to eternity. The Lord is the only one who can speak with authority, whose teaching is unalterably true. It is He and not our neighbors to whom we should look for guidance.

The closing parable of the house on the rock and the house on the sand sums up the whole teaching of the sermon in a very vivid picture. The house stands for our character. The rock on which it should be built is the Lord's truth as He gives it to us in His Word. The sand is the shifting and unstable opinions of men. The storms are our temptations and trials, which come to good and bad alike. We individually have to make the decision, but the Lord tells us what the wise decision is. As you go to college and out into the world, the opinions of men will often be presented to you in very forceful and persuasive terms. You may even be ridiculed for believing in the Lord instead of in "modern scholarship." But remember what the Psalmist says: "I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation."

Adult

Begin by reading the first verse of chapter 5 and commenting on its meaning. Then suggest that the sermon presents us with a real challenge and take up as many of its statements as you have time for.

Although the sermon on the mount is shorter in actual reading time than most modern sermons, it is so packed with lessons both natural and spiritual that it affords material for many sermons. To the people who listened to it, its teaching was absolutely new; even those of them who knew something of the Scriptures had lost the perception that they taught such things as these. It is a curious fact that although centuries have passed since this sermon was given and although men have read and studied it throughout those centuries, its lessons still seem new when we examine them honestly in comparison with our current thought and practice. For example, most of us doubtless know the Blessings; we acknowledge them as the Lord's rules of life and repeat them often. But have they ever

become accepted principles in our own lives? Do we really believe that the humble-minded, the mourning, the meek, the persecuted are the happy people? Yet the Lord tells us that this is true. It is so opposite to the commonly accepted methods of seeking happiness that it is startling even after centuries of familiarity with the words.

The same is true of every lesson in the sermon on the mount: each one is diametrically opposed to what we tend naturally to believe and to practice. Perhaps nothing shows us so clearly as this how perverted our natural heredity is. This is what the first verse of the fifth chapter tells us: the Lord, “seeing the multitudes,” went up into a mountain and taught them. The Lord saw the multitudes not as we see them but as they were in their hearts and minds. He saw their evils and their ignorance which were leading them to destruction. He saw their dire need of knowledge of the true way of life and of divine help in leading it. He went up into a mountain as a symbol of the fact that their thoughts must be lifted above the level on which they were accustomed to think. Then He proceeded to give them definite practical instruction as to how they must change their lives, how they must learn to act, to think, and to feel if they wished to be really happy or “blessed.” He did not hesitate to be specific, to be dogmatic. He did not quibble or compromise or suggest. He told them plainly what was so.

And we read that the people were “astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority.” We are all among the multitude to whom the Lord preached the sermon on the mount. We need to follow Him up into the mountain of spiritual thinking and to learn the way of life from the only one having authority. It may seem to us that self-seeking, self-confidence, force, ruthlessness will bring success in life, but it is not so; they will bring unrest, confusion, pain, disappointment, destruction. The Lord Himself tells us so. True and lasting happiness comes only to those who are humble, pure, peace-loving, and steadfast in righteousness.

Let us see if we can list some of the practical lessons in the sermon:

Knowledge of the truth is useless unless we live according to it. It is like salt which has lost its savor or like a light which is hidden.

The commandments are eternally true and necessary. No changing conditions, no special circumstances make it right to break them. The Lord Himself was not superior to them: He fulfilled them in every detail.

It is not enough to keep the letter of the law: we must keep its spirit in our hearts. Hatred is the real sin—murder is only one of its effects.

Love which goes out only to those who return it is self-love. The test of true love is the ability to will and to do good to those who do evil to us.

The Lord should be our ideal of perfection, and we should not take any less perfect life as our pattern.

If we do good for the sake of being praised or admired or rewarded, we should not expect a spiritual reward too; such good does not benefit our souls.

We should not be disturbed if we do not have worldly success; our concern should be to make ourselves more and more what the Lord wishes us to be.

We should not think that we can compromise with evil. We cannot love the Lord and self at the same time.

We should not worry about the future; our business is to do right in the present and trust our future to the Lord.

We should not be critical of other people, but we should be critical of ourselves.

We should try persistently to find out the Lord's will and do it, recognizing that the easy way is not necessarily the right way. There are many wrong ways of doing anything; we should seek the right way.

In thus trying to summarize the lessons taught in the three chapters, we learn to appreciate more than ever the power of the

letter of the Word. For there is no substitute for the actual words of the text, no simpler or more striking way of expressing the thought. We need to read and reread the sermon itself.

The closing parable of the sermon is familiar to us all. The rock is the same rock upon which the Lord told Peter He would found His church, the “cornerstone which the builders rejected,” the truth that the Lord Jesus Christ is “God with us.” This belief alone gives His words compelling authority in our lives. Our house is our character. We build our house on rock when we form our character according to the Lord’s teachings, rejecting our own ideas when they differ from His. Sand is pulverized rock, truth broken up because it has no unifying element to keep it together. We build our house on the sand when we form our character according to the ideas of men, ever-shifting, multitudinous like the sand, giving no promise of permanence or security. The storm beat upon both houses alike. Trials and temptations come to the believer and to the unbeliever. These are the rain and floods and winds which beat upon the two houses. Great worldly prosperity is nowhere promised to the good. But those whose lives are based upon belief in the Lord will weather the storm, while those who rely only on themselves or on other human beings are crushed. Take bereavement as an example. If we believe in the Lord, we know that there is a spiritual world to which our loved ones have immediately gone, the world for which we are all created and where alone we can be safe and happy forever; we know that the Lord loves each one of us and guides all things for our highest good, so that however hard the loss may be for us, it is only temporary and it is somehow necessary; we know that we still have uses to perform in this world or we should not be left here. So, in spite of our natural sorrow, we can go on with our life here cheerfully and hopefully. But the man who does not believe in the Lord has no assurance of any other life than this. What he loses out of this world seems to him gone forever. He sees no use, no wisdom in his bereavement; he wastes his energies bemoaning his loss; his character, having no solid foundation, is further undermined. “And it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 9207: “‘Ye are the salt of the earth . . .’ These words the Lord says to the disciples and to the people. By ‘the salt of the earth’ is meant the truth of the church which longs for good; by ‘the salt has lost its savor’ is meant truth without any longing for good; that such truth is profitable for nothing is described by ‘the salt that hath lost its savor being thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot.’ To long for good is to long to do what is good, and in this way to be conjoined with good.”

Apocalypse Explained, n. 1193: “When man loves uses by doing them in the first place, the former constitutes his spiritual and the latter his natural; and the spiritual rules, and the natural serves. This is the meaning of the Lord’s words in Matthew: ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of the heavens and its justice, and all things shall be added unto you’ (6:33). ‘The kingdom of the heavens’ means the Lord and His church, and ‘justice’ means spiritual, moral, and civil good; and every good that is done from the love of these is a use. Then ‘all things shall be added,’ because when use is in the first place, the Lord, from whom is all good, is in the first place and rules, and gives whatever contributes to eternal life and happiness; for, as has been said, all things of the Lord’s Divine providence pertaining to man look to what is eternal. ‘All things that shall be added’ refer to food and raiment, because food means everything internal that nourishes the soul, and raiment everything external that like the body clothes it. Everything internal has reference to love and wisdom, and everything external to wealth and eminence. All this makes clear what is meant by loving uses for the sake of uses, and what the uses are from which man has wisdom, from which and according to which wisdom everyone has eminence and wealth in heaven.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. Where did the Lord go after His baptism? *wilderness*
- J. What happened to Him there? *tempted*
- J. How did He answer the devil each time? *“It is written . . .”*
- P. What is our lesson today about? *sermon on the mount*
- P. With what does the sermon on the mount begin? *Blessings (Beatitudes)*
- P. What does *blessed* mean? *happy*
- J. Are the things the Lord calls blessed just what we would expect? *no*
- J. What do they teach is the source of happiness? *the Lord*
- P. How many chapters does the sermon on the mount take up? *three*
- P. What very well-known passage is in the second chapter? *the Lord’s prayer*
- P. What one is in the third? *the Golden Rule*

- P. Can you repeat the Golden Rule?
- J. With what parable does the sermon on the mount end? *house built on rock/sand*
- P. What is meant by our “house”? *our character*
- P. What is the “rock” on which it is safe to build? *truth from the Word*
- I. Why are the opinions of men like sand? *shifting, unstable, no unifying element*
- S. Why could the Lord speak with authority? *He had authority*