



The Greatest Sermon EVER!

Devotional Thoughts for the
Week of September 6, 2020
by Ed Green

As we journey through Jesus' Sermon on the Mount this fall, we invite you to read it (Matthew 5-7) once each week for the duration of

our series (it should only take about fifteen minutes, so put it on your personal calendar early in the week). We also invite you to use these reflections to further guide you as we dig into Jesus' teaching this fall. This week we want to lay a foundation of sorts by looking at the historical and literary context of Jesus' famous sermon...

Day 1: Really? Matthew?

Benjamin Franklin once said that “in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.” That’s why we don’t like the IRS. Take a few moments to read Matthew 9:9-13 about Jesus calling a particular tax collector to be his follower. [*Go ahead. Stop now and read it. We’ll wait...*] While it is technically anonymous, church tradition suggests that Matthew (aka Levi) was the author of the first book in our New Testament. We can’t know for sure, but it’s the only name that has ever been attached to the first Gospel.

You are probably familiar with how tax collectors in Jesus’ day were universally reviled by their fellow Jews. They were viewed as traitors, collecting taxes from their fellow countrymen and turning it over to the Romans (typically after taking a more-than-healthy cut; most were considered dishonest). What do you think Jesus’ other disciples thought about his choice of Matthew to join his roving band of followers? You can’t help but wonder if Jesus’ words to the Pharisees in vss. 12-13 were just as much for his other disciples



as well. What is also interesting is that in this first Gospel, Matthew’s call is placed in the larger context of chapters 8 and 9, which highlight the miraculous healings of Jesus. In light of this, how do you think Matthew may have understood his call to follow Jesus? What about you? Look back on your own call by Jesus. How do you remember it, and what significance does it hold for you?



Day 2: One Gospel, Four Books

The first four books of the New Testament are called “Gospels.” The word in the original Greek language in which they were written means “good news.” They tell

the story of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. But there is actually only one gospel, and each of these books offer a different perspective on that gospel story. In fact, each of the four Gospels are simply titled “According to...” (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John).

Take a few minutes (*it’s under six minutes long*) to watch this video from the folks at The Bible Project as they talk about “How to Read the Bible: The Gospel,” <https://bibleproject.com/videos/how-to-read-gospel/>. Share with someone today something you learn from the video.

Day 3: A New Moses

From the earliest centuries of the Church, the first Gospel was used as a sort of catechism, or teaching tool, for new Christians to learn the teachings of Jesus. Take a moment to read these five verses: Matthew 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; and 26:1. What do you notice? Matthew structures his Gospel around five major blocks of Jesus' teaching (5:1-7:27; 10:1-42; 13:1-52; 18:1-35; and 24:1-25:46). It is widely agreed that Matthew's Gospel presents Jesus as the "new Moses," and just as Moses was believed to have written the first five books of the Bible (called "the Torah"), so Matthew presents Jesus as giving us a new Torah. (The word *torah* is often translated "law", but actually means more of "instruction," which may include laws, regulations, etc.) Beyond the beard, can you think of some ways that Jesus was like Moses?

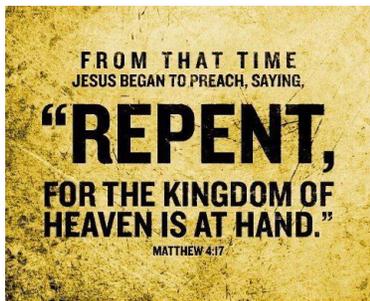


further from the truth. The first recorded words of both John and Jesus was a *political* statement: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near!" (Please understand: the Kingdom of God/heaven is political, but not partisan.) Matthew, more than the other Gospel-writers, presents Jesus as the promised messiah/king. And as king, Jesus invites people to participate in his kingdom, where what he says, goes. But more significant than that, he invites people to himself. And that, friends is key to understanding all that Jesus teaches in his sermon on the mount. So, then what challenges do we face today, as both citizens of God's kingdom, and citizens of our country? Let's put a finer point on it: What makes it hard for you?

Day 5: Jesus our Rabbi

In the last part of Matthew 4 we see that Jesus' "star is on the rise" (4:23-25). He is becoming popular with the crowds, not only because of his preaching and teaching, but because of the power he has to heal. News about him was spreading fast and crowds were coming to him from everywhere. Rabbis in Jesus' day were a dime a dozen (well, not really, but they could be found all over the place). If you wanted to learn from a particular rabbi (teacher), you would go to him and ask him to disciple you—so you could learn what he knows, and become like him, so you could do what he does.

In the Gospels, we see Jesus doing the asking, and he begins to invite potential disciples to leave everything behind and follow him (4:18-22). In 5:1-2 we find Jesus going up on a mountain (like Moses?) and beginning to teach and give his disciples a reality check: what it looks like to live as a part of the kingdom of God. And the crowds come close enough to "listen in." As fellow disciples we, too, get to hear Jesus' sermon this fall. What do you want to get from your engagement with it? Take a few moments to reflect on this question and put your words into a prayer.



Day 4: Politics as (Un)Usual

We have an election coming up in just under two months. In our constitutional republic, citizens of the United States have the privilege and responsibility to elect representatives to govern our country. People in the first century could not have conceived of what we have today. They understood

their daily life as part of a kingdom (or even broader, an *empire*). And in a kingdom, what the king says, goes. Period. Remember that in Jesus' day, there was an emperor in Rome whose name was Caesar, and he was lord.

Then along comes Jesus (following John), proclaiming a new kingdom (4:12-17). And with a new kingdom comes a new king. Some would say that Christianity is not political. Nothing could be