

2008-05-10

Matthew 5:1, 2 The Sermon on the Mount

Jerry Arnold

I'd like to have a word of prayer as we open the Word of God here today. "Father in Heaven, these are Your people. They've come here; they've gathered in Your name, they want to hear a message from You. We have had such beautiful music today, our hearts have been moved. We've enjoyed the children's story and offering, and all of that. But Lord, now, we are about to open Your Word and we are asking for a dynamic, powerful experience in the Holy Spirit. We are praying for our lives to be changed and affected for eternity. We are praying Heavenly Father for miracles to take place. And we ask this in Jesus' name, Amen."

William Barkley is a Scottish, New Testament Scholar. He has done quite a bit of writing and in one of his books he tells a story about an incident that took place in England. There was a sailor that was sailing in the British Navy. I don't know what he did, but he did something that was against the rules. And he was severely punished for it. Somehow, that got to the press in England, and all the papers were carrying the story. It was the buzz of the country. And local papers had people writing to the editor, some for the punishment, some saying it was too severe. But it was all the talk.

One older gentleman wrote to a local paper that he felt that the punishment was okay. In fact, there needs to be punishment because you have to have discipline and obedience aboard the Navy ship. People's lives are at stake; not only other people's lives, but you as an individual. And then he told a story. He said that when he was in the British Navy there was a particular officer that the men really appreciated. You know, sometimes in the military people who have authority are abusive with that authority. They are bullies with it. But this officer was not that way. This officer was very kind towards his men. When he gave a command there was a reason for it. And they followed it and discovered overtime that he could be trusted. That he was somebody who didn't waste a lot of time. You did what he said to do, and it went well. It went well for the entire ship. He treated them with such respect that they actually had a great appreciation for him.

So the gentleman is writing the story and he tells about the time when their ship had to go out and tow another ship to shore. The ship they were towing to shore was much larger than the ship he was on, and it was very heavy ship. They had a steel cable that they were using for the towing hawser. Now on the fore deck of the ship, or the fore tail, that's the back of the ship, there were number of sailors there. And up on a deck, looking down upon what was going on was this officer. Now he is watching all that's taking place. The wind came up suddenly and the waves began to chop. And it was very rough. All of a sudden the officer hollered, "Down!" And every sailor hit the deck. Just after they hit the deck the cable broke. And when it broke it came snapping back and forth, and it would have killed anybody that had remained standing.

Now because of the relationship that had build up with these sailors and this officer - number one, they knew his voice, they recognized his voice, and they respected that man. The experiences that they had had with him is that when he said to do something, there was a reason. Not one of them turned and said, "Well, who is talking?" Not one of them turned to say, "Why?" Not one of them entered into a dialog or a debate or tried to correct the situation,

all of them obeyed and all of them lived. You see, they had such trust in that officer; they obeyed when he spoke, and their lives were saved. God is wanting us to develop a respect and trust in Him that leads us to obey Him when He speaks. And it, brothers and sisters, will save our lives. And that's what I'd like to study with you today.

Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 5. You will see the verse appear on the screen, it will be the New King James Version that is the version of the Bible I am preaching from. Today we begin a journey, a brand new journey through the Sermon on the Mount. It's going to take us a while to get through it, but we are not in a hurry. We want to understand God and we want to understand His word. And you know He is going to come back sometime; we have to be in the Bible somewhere, why not here?

Matthew 5: 1 and 2: "And seeing the multitudes, He..." that's Jesus, "...went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying..." Well here, it mentions disciples. Jesus had His disciples and He went up onto a mountain. You would get the impression that is just a few people that are with Him here. But it does mention multitudes in verse 1, "...seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain." And one could get the impression He is taking these disciples and fleeing from the multitude. But when we read the whole story, we get the picture that there are a lot people. Look at Mathew 7, verses 28 and 29. "And so it was when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as One having authority and not as the scribes."

So there are people there. A large group of people, in fact, we are told that by Luke when he gives his account. And in order for us to have a little background of what's going on, let's go to Luke. We'll go to Luke chapter 6; we'll begin with verse 12. This will give us some context, and help us to understand more clearly what is happening with the Sermon on the Mount. Verse 12: "Now it came to pass in those days, that He..." that's Jesus, "...went out to the Mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer to God." Jesus will be praying all night long. Verse 13 it says, "And when it was day, He called His disciples to Him and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles."

That must be the purpose of His praying all night. He's got more than twelve disciples. He's got a lot more than that. But from that group He is going to choose twelve whom He will call apostles, twelve men that will be the foundation for the Christian church, twelve men who will carry on His work in His name, and in His power; twelve men to build the church around. And so, He is praying all night and in the morning He makes the selection. We are told who they are, let's look at verse 14. "Simon whom He also called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew and Tomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot; Judas the son James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor."

It goes on to say, "And He came down with them and stood on a level place with a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear Him and be healed of their diseases." Now this is actually the same story as the Sermon on the Mount, but you may be wondering why does it say, "He came to a level place?" Well, it doesn't mean that it's a huge, flat valley or a plain; it means that somewhere on that mountain as He came down, He found a suitable place that was leveled

enough for His disciples to gather around Him and for others to gather around so they would hear what is going on.

We read in verse 18: "...as well as those who were tormented with unclean spirits, and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch Him for power went out from Him and healed them all. Then He lifted up His eyes toward his disciples and said, "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God."" So do you see the context? The context is Jesus has just chosen twelve men. He's prayed all night. He's chosen these twelve men and He is speaking to them the Kingdom of God. He is sharing, as some scholars call it, an ordination address for these newly ordained twelve men. It is the Magna Carta of the Kingdom of God. It is the essentials of what God wants His people to know and to understand.

Let's go back to Mathew 5 verse 1, it says, "And seeing the multitudes He went up on the mountain, and when He was seated, His disciples came to Him." Seated! Now, Rabbis back in Jesus' day would teach as they walked along, they would teach in many different situations. But when a Rabbi sat down, it was *pay attention*, this is *big time*, this is *extremely important*, "This is what we have got to hear and what we've got to know." In fact, in the realm of academia, they talk about a "professor's chair." In our sphere here in the church, we have many committees and there is "a chair person" for that committee, a chairman or a chairwoman. And it's a symbol of authority. It's a symbol of the leader. And Jesus is seated, He is the Leader.

In chapter 5 verse 2 it says, "And He opened His mouth." Now granted when we read that, we think, "Well of course, He is going to speak, I mean, how else can He speak?" But with a little bit of research we discover that the expression in the Greek is more than just opening the mouth. In the Greek it means "a solemn, grave, and dignified utterance, when a person is opening their heart and fully pouring out their mind to another individual." Jesus is pictured here with His twelve apostles, with a great multitude gathered around Him, and He is opening His heart to them. He is opening His mind to them. That means, brothers and sisters, that the Sermon on the Mount is the heart of God. It is the very essence of who God is and what He is like and what He is all about.

It says that "Jesus was teaching them." In the Greek it's not just that He taught them, it means that there were no barriers between Him and them. You see, in education many of you have had the opportunity to go to college, and maybe you've seen how there are some professors who think they are all it. And as a student you know you sit at their feet, and yet, there are other professors who, they don't feel that way when you get in the class with them. They are embracing. There is not a barrier, there are no walls. And some of you have been able to go on to graduate school and so forth and so on. You know, I've been in school forever. I am 53 years old and am just finishing school now. And I'll be honest with you, in that journey, there have been lots of teachers that I've been older than. It just happens. If it takes you a long time, like it's taken me that will happen.

But here is what I noticed. When I was in undergraduate, you know, there is kind of, the professors are up here and the students are down here. And you come to graduate school, depending on your age and who the teacher is, things begin to shift. Eventually over time, there is a collegial spirit. Most all of my education has been done from being a Pastor and going for a short time, and then doing work before and after, and all that. And eventually it evolved to a

place where there are no barriers. All the teachers and the pastors are on the first name bases and everything, and there is a mutual respect. That's what is describing here. God seated on earth, calling people to Him, opening His heart to them, sharing His essence, His being, what He is all about and there are no barriers. It is an incredible picture of the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

Well, let's look at something here. First of all, if we are going to understand the Sermon on the Mount, we got a little bit of a background, but we need to understand Mathew. Now Mathew is different than Luke. As you know, Luke is a Gentile physician. Mathew is Levi Mathew, he was a publican. He was hated by the Jews but he became a follower of Jesus. And he writes this Gospel with something in mind. And the something in mind is - he is trying to reach the Jewish people. The Jewish believers, he is trying to encourage them in their faith, those Jews who haven't believed, he is trying to win them.

Mathew is not very good with chronology. He does not even attempt to write things in the proper order. Mathew is a thematic writer. He takes the ideas and puts them together. Mathew is a teaching Gospel. Mathew has six sermons of Jesus, and some of the other Gospels don't even have some of those sermons, and yet Mathew spends a lot of time in those sermons. You will notice that the Sermon on the Mount is long. Most scholars believe that it is not an expression that took place in one sitting. In fact, it is so deep and so powerful that by the end of it, if it had been the one sermon, you would walk away, "What did He say?" It'd be information overload.

In fact, you would find bits and pieces of what Jesus teaches here in the Sermon on the Mount, scattered throughout Luke, and scattered throughout Mark, and scattered throughout John. But Mathew brought them all together, put them in order, and gave them to us. So we can praise God for Matthew today, we can stay right here and know and understand the major teachings of Jesus. But with this idea in mind that Mathew is writing for Jewish people, we begin to understand some of the things he is writing. The Jews believed in a Messiah to come. And there were types in the Old Testament. They had the sacrificial system, and they had different things all pointing to when Jesus would come. And Mathew's emphasis is to demonstrate that Jesus is the fulfillment of those types.

In fact, if we were raised a young Jewish person back in the day when Jesus walked, we'd be very familiar with a story. We call it, "The Exodus." And the story would be basically go like this: "Our fathers were in Egypt. They were enslaved there. And God delivered our fathers from Egypt. They went from Egypt to another miraculous deliverance, and that was at the Red Sea. They left Egypt, but before they could get out of the country, they are trapped by mountains and by the Red Sea. And God dried up the Red Sea, our fathers walked across on dried ground. And when Pharaoh and his soldiers came riding into that sea on the dried ground, the water came and swallowed them up."

"Then our fathers went into the wilderness. And they actually were in the wilderness for three months." Now some of you are saying, "Oh Pastor Arnold, it was forty years!" Now hold on, I am not talking about that. I'll prove it scripturally, you just trust me to this point. "Three months they are in the wilderness. And then they go to Mount Sinai. And when they get to Mount Sinai then they hear from God the covenant that God has with them, so that they can be

His people, He can be their God. After that, they would journey on their way to the land of Canaan where ultimately Jerusalem would be their capital.”

So you see the journey. They understood everything in that context. And Mathew writes in that context. I am going to show that to you today and it will help us to understand the Sermon on the Mount. First of all, let’s go to Mathew chapter 2. Mathew chapter 2 and we are looking at verses 13-15. This story takes place when Jesus is still a young, young child, perhaps even still a baby, but certainly not older than two or three years of age. The wise men have just come up to worship Him. In verse 13 it says: “Now when they had departed, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream saying, ‘Arise, take the young child and his mother, flee to Egypt and stay there until I bring you word for Herod will seek the young child to destroy Him.’”

“When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophets saying: “Out of Egypt I have called my Son.”” Jesus went to Egypt. Out of Egypt He would come. Now hold your hands here in Mathew, and those of you who know where it is, turn to Hosea 11 verse 1. If you are not quite familiar with where it is in your Bible, don’t worry about it, it will come up on the screen and you can read it there. It says this. This is what Mathew is referring to. “When Israel was a child, I loved Him.” That’s what God said. “And out of Egypt I called my Son.”

So Mathew, when he is teaching to Jewish people in Mathew chapter 2, he will say, “Jesus is the Son that is called out of Egypt. Jesus was in Egypt just like our fathers. Jesus experienced the exodus just like our fathers did.” In Mathew chapter 3 we come to Mathew 3 verses 13-17. It says, “Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him saying, ‘I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?’ But Jesus answered and said to him, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed Him. Then Jesus, when He had been baptized, came up immediately from the water and behold the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and a lighting upon Him.”

“And suddenly a voice came from heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”” Keep your hand here in Mathew, and turn to First Corinthians chapter 10 verses 1 and 2. The Apostle Paul is writing a letter to the believers back in the city of Corinth. Notice what he says. “Moreover brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses, in the cloud and in the sea.” Paul picks up on that Exodus theme when he is talking to the Corinthians. And here is what is happening. You have Egypt - deliverance from sin. You have the Red Sea - that is baptism.

So now we see in Mathew chapter 2, Jesus is in Egypt. In Mathew chapter 3, Jesus is baptized. What happens to Jesus in Mathew 4? Let’s turn there. Mathew 4 verse 1, we read this: “Then Jesus was lead up by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Keep your hand here in Mathew and turn to Exodus chapter 15. Exodus chapter 15, second book in the Bible, all the way back there, we are going to read just a verse. And this verse takes place after they have gone through the Red Sea, after they’ve celebrated, they are done dancing, and they are done singing. And here is what

happens, verse 22: “So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea, then they went out into the wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water.”

Okay, back to Mathew, notice this. Mathew chapter 2, you have Egypt. Mathew chapter 3, Jesus is baptized, the Red Sea. Then what happens to Jesus in Mathew 4? He goes into the wilderness. And that’s what happened to the children of Israel. What is next? Mathew 5 verse 1. Let’s go there. Mathew 5 verse 1: “And seeing the multitudes He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated, His disciples came to him, then He opened His mouth and taught them.” So you have Egypt, the Red Sea, the wilderness and now a mountain. All right, keep your hands here in Mathew, I should have told you to keep your hands in Exodus, sorry. Let’s go back to Exodus. First one there, stand up. We’ll have a little sore-drill.

Exodus 19 verses 1 and 2, it says: “In the third month, after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the wilderness of Sinai, for they had departed from Rephidim, had come to the desert of Sinai and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain.” All right, here is our story: Egypt, Red Sea, wilderness – how long in the wilderness? Three months! Right? We just read it. Exodus 19, verses 1 and 2. Three months, and then what? The mountain! The mount what? Mount Sinai! So Mathew says, “Jesus was in Egypt, Jesus was baptized, the Red Sea, Jesus went into the wilderness, and Jesus went up on the mountain to teach the people.”

Now what does it mean for us? Well, here is how it works for us. Egypt is symbolic of sin. The Passover was the night that the Israelites were delivered and that’s symbolic of Jesus dying on Calvary. So when we embrace Christ as our Savior, we’ve embraced His death on Calvary. We are delivered from sin. And wouldn’t that be nice if that was all that there was? But then there is the baptism, and that’s pleasant enough. I hope all of you have been baptized. If you haven’t been baptized, talk to me, I’d love to baptize you in the name of the Lord, and you will experience a wonderful sense of cleansing and wholeness before Him. And it’d be great. You are out of Egypt; you are baptized, it’d be great if that was over.

But here is what I am going to tell you. If you come to me, I tell every single person that I prepare for baptism, “After you are baptized, I guarantee that within the next six months at the longest, and probably within three months, you are going to be attacked by the devil. He is going to do everything he can to discourage you from serving God. But if you get through that, if you hold on to God through that experience, it’s almost like getting a flu shot, where they give you the flu, your body fights it off, and the next time it comes around it’s “Get out of here body!”” And that’s what happens to us spiritually. And it would be great if we just accepted Christ, and we are baptized, and we just had a little bit of time in the wilderness. But it doesn’t end there.

What happens next is God has a plan for our lives, and part of that plan is to learn of Him. And so He brings us to a mountain. And at that mountain He sits down with us. No barriers, He begins to talk with us and to develop an experience with us. Now it would be great if all we had to do is accept Christ, get baptized, all right, we have three to six months of trouble and then, you know, God is talking to us and everything is great. But the story really doesn’t end there. They have a long journey to go on before they get to the Promised Land, and they get to the place ultimately, that would be the capital of Jerusalem, right? (Or the capital Jerusalem)

What's that journey for? That journey is simply for this, brothers and sisters – that we would learn to walk with God. That we would learn that we can trust Him with our lives. We can have confidence in Him. We would learn His voice. We would learn by experience that things go wrong when we don't do what He says to do. And because of salvation and because of a loving relationship with Him, we become people who are obedient. And if He has to holler "Down," we all get down. We don't argue with Him, we don't debate it, we do it and it saves our lives. You see how it works?

Now let's go to Mathew 7. We are going to go to the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Mathew 7 verse 24, it says here: "Therefore who ever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, and it fell. And great was its fall."

You see, Jesus is applying a spiritual principle. If you want to turn there in your Bibles fine, but just note this on the screen. Please turn to Proverbs 10 verse 25. Jesus is very spiritual and He is applying the spiritual principle here. It says: "When the whirlwind passes by, the wicked is no more, but the righteous has an everlasting foundation." Some of your Bibles will say, "When a tempest comes the righteous are okay, but the wicked are swept away." Jesus is taking that spiritual principle and applying it in a very practical way to the building of a house.

You see, He was a carpenter. He was a laborer; He understood the trades. But He also understood the temptation of humanity, and the temptation of humanity was this – that back where Jesus lived in that part of the world, it rained during the winter but it was dry during the summer. And when it was dry in the summer, those sand beds in the wadies would be just nice and leveled, and nice and smooth. And that's really all a builder needs is to build on, is something fairly leveled, and you can start building. And if we are careless and we don't take time, that's what we do, we build on sand.

A good builder will take some time, dig down to the rock, and that rock obviously is Jesus Christ. It takes time to get a solid, good foundation. And you can build on Jesus. And then when the storms come, it doesn't matter. You are okay. And Jesus says the way you build on Him, is you take the lessons from the Sermon on the Mount, you listen to what He has to say and you apply them to your life. And in that process you will learn to walk with Him. Short sided people, He says, will have a terrible, terrible crash. Building for the long haul takes time, it takes thought. And here is the good news.

In our experience, in our journey, when we accept Christ as our Savior, and we begin our journey, we are baptized, we go through temptation in the wilderness, and we sit on the mount. And God is teaching us, and we are learning. And then we continue to walk with Him on the way to Canaan, all we have to do is keep in relationship with Him. We are saved all along the way. We are saved all along the way! And what God is doing in that process, is developing within us a respect and trust in Him that leads to obedience and ultimately our salvation.

Now, when I was a student at Andrews, a story was told by one of the deans of the men's dorm. I think I remember his last name, but I am not going to share it in case I am wrong. But I remember the story, so you know it had to be good, because that was a long time ago. I remember him describing how they left Southwestern Michigan where Andrews University is, and they drove the family down to the Smokey Mountains, somewhere in Tennessee. And I want you to know when I heard that back in 1978-79, somewhere around there; this part of the world was a mystery to me. You know, the Smokey Mountains in Tennessee, I always wondered if I'd ever see it, or if I ever wanted to see it? But I'll tell you, I just love it here. What a great place!

Well his family is on vacation in the Smokey Mountains down here somewhere. And you know, he is describing the normal dynamics of a vacation. You got the wife, and the kids in the back, and they are squalling and carrying on. (Not the wife, but the kids). And you are driving along, and really sometimes as family, I don't know if you've ever done it? But you wonder why we call it a vacation? You know, it only works when you drive at night when the kids are still. And then you are so exhausted the next day, you don't enjoy anything. But, you know, vacations! He is on vacation, drives the family down to the Smokey Mountains.

Now what I have to say next, I want to say in the kindness way possible. But it must be said to understand the dynamics of this. Every family has a photographer. And in order for a photographer to be good, they've got to be obnoxious, right? You know, they are always saying, "Hold it, hold it, got to get a picture." "Ah," you know, or, "Move it a little closer," or, "No, no that one didn't work." And rests of us are - we are ready to move on. Now truth be told, after, we absolutely love the photographer because of the record of the trip and of the experience, of the graduation, you know, or whatever it was they were taking pictures of. But during the process is, "Oh brother, take that camera and take it away," you know.

Well he is a photographer. And so, he is getting on his family's nerves a little bit. He identifies that. They come down to some place here in Tennessee and there is an overlook, beautiful, beautiful scenery. And there is a log there for people to sit on. So he places his wife and two children on the log. And he backs up. And when he looks through the viewfinder of the camera, he sees sleeping there next to his son, just under the log, a large rattlesnake. Now he can overreact, and in so doing, his family will panic. And it's likely that that snake instinctively will strike and maybe kill his son.

So what do you do? He says, "Okay, that's pretty good, but everybody shift to the left. Aha, pretty good, no, a little more. A little more, a little more..." "We are going to be off the log." "That'll be okay. All right, everybody stand up and walk over here." On that occasion, all three, mom and the two children, none of them remonstrated, none of them questioned, they all did what Dad said to do. And it saved at least one of their lives for doing it.

Really brothers and sisters, that's what God is trying to do for us. The Sermon on the Mount is all about God and how He is trying to keep us from getting bit by a snake with poisonous venom. And God's people will read this message from the Lord. They'll meditate on it. They'll struggle with it because, I'll be honest with you, there are sections in here that are difficult and we are going to have to wrestle with it. And we are going to have to try to understand it the best we can. But that's okay because in the process we will learn that there is a God in Heaven

who can be trusted. There is a God in Heaven who loves us so much, when He says: “Shift a little over to the left,” we will do it without question. And it will be our life.

Today, I want to ask you. Would you like to get on a journey? Would you like to join the exodus that the children of Israel were on, that Jesus was on, and in fact, all of God’s people? In Egypt, we realize we are in bondage. But we embrace Christ as our Savior. Then, we prepare and we are cleansed by being baptized. It’s true, there can be temptations and difficulties in the wilderness, but ultimately we find ourselves on a mountain where God is sharing His heart with no barriers to us. And then, with that information, we continue a journey all the way to the Promised Land. And for us, that Promised Land is Heaven and Jerusalem. And I just want to know, how many here want to go to Jerusalem?

Then I challenge you. Over the next few months and weeks, take a Bible and begin reading the Sermon on the Mount. Read it slowly. Maybe you want a journal. Maybe you want to read it with other versions of the Bible. In fact, I am begging you, when you do that, and you find a keen insight, share it with me because I believe that all of us mediating on this together can come up with more than I would come up with by myself during a particular week. So share with me, and let’s learn the heart of God together. And let’s go to Jerusalem!