

SLOW FOOD: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT (Matthew 5-7) (44 studies)

The Sermon on the Mount is too familiar to need much comment. At the same time it may be a section of the Bible we have avoided studying simply because it seems too well-worn. It has sometimes been viewed as Jesus' new Law for his new Israel; or as a manual for discipleship. A key to its real purpose may lie in the presence of the little band of disciples at the beginning, swelling to the crowds at the end: is it perhaps intended as a gospel 'menu' for the whole world, setting the heart free from superficial or formal religion and (like Matthew 11:28-30) offering the way of Jesus to those humble or desperate enough to accept his authority?

Recommended commentaries include John Stott *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (original title *Christian Counter-Culture*, BST 1978); R T France *Matthew* (Tyndale NTC 1985); Tom Wright *Matthew for Everyone* (SPCK 2004) Part 1, pp34-81.

- 5:1-2** Putting the opening and closing (7:28-29) verses together, to what groups does the 'Sermon on the Mount' seem to be addressed? Which group would I have belonged to if I had been there? *Mt 13:2, 11; Isa 50:4; Isa 55:1-3.*
- 5:3** Where am I in the 'poverty of spirit' index? Why does Jesus start with this in his description of kingdom characteristics? *Isa 57:15; Mt 11:28-30; Jas 2:5.*
- 5:4** Do I feel a sense of personal loss or failure? Should I just snap out of it? *Isa 61:2-3; Ps 30:5; 2 Cor 1:3-4.*
- 5:5** How far should I insist upon my rights? *Ps 37:11; Mic 6:6-8; Lk 1:52; Acts 16:37.*
- 5:6** How passionate am I for good to triumph? Do we have to wait for some distant utopia? *Ps 36:8; Isa 61:8; 2 Pet 3:13.*
- 5:7** If I expect God's forgiveness towards me, am I prepared to extend it to others? How far should I stand on principle? *Mt 6:12; 18:21, 33; Eph 4:31-5:2.*
- 5:8** Do I have a singleminded longing for God, or do I keep a secret shrine for my idols? *Ps 24:3-4; Prov 20:9; Jer 17:10; Phil 3:19.*
- 5:9** What can I do today to calm people down, rather than stirring them up? *Mt 5:48; 2 Cor 5:18; Jas 3:17-18.*
- 5:10-12** If I encounter unpopularity or criticism, how can I avoid being discouraged? *Isa 49:15; Acts 14:22; 1 Pet 4:15-16.*
- 5:13** How can I be 'salt' in the world where God has sprinkled me? *2 Ki 2:19-21; 2 Cor 2:14-16; Col 4:5-6.*
- 5:14-16** How can I and my fellow-Christians witness to Christ in such a way that we draw attention to God rather than to our own piety? *Jer 29:7; Acts 26:26; 1 Pet 2:9.*
- 5:17-20** If I teach God's word, am I tempted to blunt its force or adjust its requirements to make it seem more 'reasonable'? *Acts 20:20, 27; 2 Tim 4:1-6.*
- 5:21-22** Do I use my tongue to bully people or even to assassinate them? *Jas 1:26, 3:1-12.*
- 5:23-24** Do I consider my religious commitments to be more important than maintaining good relationships? *Mt 23:23; 1 Tim 5:8; Jas 3:13-18.*
- 5:25-26** Should I admit I'm in the wrong even if I don't think I am? What is Jesus on about here? *Mt 9:13; Jas 2:12-13; 1 Pet 2:22-23.*
- 5:27-30** Whether or not I'm currently experiencing sexual temptation, how seriously do I take this warning of Jesus? *Gen 39:9; Exod 20:14, 17; Job 31:1-12; Prov 6:25; Mk 7:20-23; 1 Th 4:3-8.*
- 5:31-32** Is Jesus being utterly unreasonable here? Is divorce never the right way to go? *Mal 2:13-16; Mt 19:3-9; Jn 8:31-36.*

- 5:33-37** Do I use God's name (or equivalent) lightly? *Eccl 5:2, 4; Mt 12:36-37; Jas 1:26.*
- 5:38-42** In my everyday relationships, do I operate on the principle of like-for-like retaliation? How is Jesus' way different? *Dt 15:7-8; Ps 37:26; 1 Pet 2:23-24.*
- 5:43-48** Do I ration my generosity according to whether people come up to my standards? Do I come up to God's standards in this regard? *Exod 23:4-5; Lk 23:34; Rom 12:2.*
- 6:1** If I am responsible for organising some form of 'good works', do I use it to advertise my own virtue? *Lk 16:15; 20:45-47; 1 Cor 13:3 (reading 'so that I may boast'); 1 Tim 2:9-10.*
- 6:2-4** Do I help the disadvantaged? Why (or why not)? *Mt 5:16; 10:42; Heb 6:10.*
- 6:5-8** What is prayer for, as far as I am concerned? *1 Ki 18:20-38; Lk 18:9-14.*
- 6:9-13** Does God mind if we ask him for things? What kind of items does Jesus suggest should be on our 'shopping-list'? *Mt 18:19-20; Mk 11:22-25; Jas 4:1-10.*
- 6:14-15** What if I can't forgive someone for what they've done? *Gen 50:15-21; Mt 18:21-35.*
- 6:16-18** Is fasting just for Lent? What's the point of it? *1 Ki 21:27-29; Neh 1:4; Zech 7:2-5; Acts 13:1-3.*
- 6:19-21** If I don't think I'm making an idol of anything in particular right now, are my thoughts as heavenly as they ought to be? *Isa 2:7-8; Col 3:1-4; 1 Tim 6:17-19; Jas 5:2-3.*
- 6:22-23** How can I guide others if my own inner vision is unsound? *Jn 9:41; Rom 2:19; Rev 3:14-22.*
- 6:24** Can I be singleminded for Christ and still insist on being comfortably off? *Lk 12:32-33; 19:8-10; Rev 3:17-18.*
- 6:25-26** What do I worry about? *Ps 55:22; 2 Cor 9:8; 1 Pet 5:7.*
- 6:27-30** Am I comfortable with myself? Do I need to be? *Ps 139:1-8, 23-24.*
- 6:31-34** Have I got my priorities straight for today? *Ps 63:1-8; Phil 4:19; Jas 1:6-8.*
- 7:1-5** Do I need to clean up my own act before I try to sort other people out? *Lk 6:37-38; Rom 14:4, 10; 1 Tim 4:12, 16.*
- 7:6** Should I seek to share my faith with all and sundry? *Ps 137:1-6; Jn 2:23-25; Acts 26:19-23; Heb 12:14.*
- 7:7-8** Do I privately consider prayer to be a waste of time? *Ps 50:14-15; Prov 16:3; Phil 4:6-7.*
- 7:9-11** How many marks out of ten would I give God for being a good Father? *Ps 103:13-14; Isa 63:15-19; Mt 26:42; Lk 15:20; 2 Cor 1:3; Heb 12:7.*
- 7:12** How unselfish am I? *Mic 6:8; 1 Cor 10:24; Phil 2:20-21.*
- 7:13-14** Is Christ's way too hard? *Mk 8:34-35; 2 Tim 2:3-11; Rev 2:10.*
- 7:15-20** Am I tempted by plausible alternatives to Christ's discipling? *Prov 16:25; Jn 10:3-5; 3:1-17.*
- 7:21-23** How well do I know the Lord Jesus Christ? *Song 5:16; Jn 17:3; 1 Cor 13:12; Phil 3:7-10; 2 Tim 2:19.*
- 7:24-25** When life gets pressurised, where do I rest my hope? *Ps 46:1-3; Lk 10:38-42; Col 2:6-7.*
- 7:26-27** Do I value the wisdom of the world more highly than the promises of God? *Ps 14:1; 2 Pet 1:3-4; 1 Jn 2:15-17.*
- 7:28-29** What is Christ's authority, as far as I am concerned? *Mt 28:18-20; Jn 6:63; Phil 2:9-11.*
- Review** The idea that we are children of a heavenly Father occurs again and again throughout these chapters. What does this tell me about the primary emphasis of Jesus' teaching?