

MATTHEW 5

Overview of Matthew 5–7

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), Matthew presents teachings that Jesus had given to His faithful followers. While the word *sermon* may not be the most accurate word to describe Jesus’s amazingly inspired presentation with its twenty-five stages of ascent, it is the name by which these three chapters have become widely known.

From 3 Nephi 11–18, one learns that the Sermon on the Mount was used in the context of making very holy covenants. The Book of Mormon version of the sermon makes it helpfully clear that Jesus gave its words by way of commandment, not just as good advice (3 Nephi 12:20). That Nephite text has become known as the Sermon at the Temple. It is like the Sermon on the Mount in most ways, but it makes appropriate adjustments for the benefit of members of that audience who had recently survived the destruction at the time of Jesus’s Crucifixion. For example, speaking of the old law, Jesus referred not only to what they had “heard” of old but also to what was “written” before them (3 Nephi 12:21, 27, 33, 38).

In both foundational texts, Jesus presents the laws, obligations, rites, principles, rewards, and consequences connected with the ordinances of baptism and of the temple. Following the Sermon at the Temple, the righteous few who had gathered at the temple in Bountiful received healings and blessings (in 3 Nephi 17) and then partook of the sacrament of bread and wine (in 3 Nephi 18), expressing their willingness to keep the very commandments that Jesus had just given them (in 3 Nephi 12–14).

The Sermon on the Mount and Sermon at the Temple are organized into three steps of progression. The first chapter deals with improving the behavior of righteous people toward all other people (stages 1–10 below). The second chapter instructs the individual in refining the self through righteous personal practices of prayer, consecration, and having an eye single to the glory of God (stages 11–17). The third chapter prepares the individual to enter the presence of God (stages 18–24).

This three-fold structure is reflected in the Sermon on the Mount, which is divided into three chapters that focus on loving and dealing with others (Matthew 5), mastering righteous routines and holy habits (Matthew 6), and relating to God and preparing for His judgment and entering His presence (Matthew 7).

These three chapters, thus understood, help people to love their neighbor as themselves and above all to love God, covering the two great commandments.

This three-fold division also mirrors the three-part floor plan of the ancient tabernacle and temple, with (1) its outer court of the altar of sacrifice; (2) its holy place, a room of prayer and personal priestly preparations; and finally (3) its Holy of Holies, which was entered through a narrow opening in the veil, allowing those of the high priesthood admission into the presence of the Lord.

In addition, many dominant vocabulary words give the Sermon on the Mount much the same tone as is found in the hymns (or psalms) that were sung especially in the temple in Jerusalem. For example, the sermon's opening nine lines all begin with the word *makarioi* ("blessed"), which is the very first word in Psalm 1, a word that appears twenty-six times throughout the Psalms. Several other key words in the Sermon on the Mount can also be found in the Psalms, including "mercy" (171 times), "love" (*agapaō*, 50 times), "prayer" (37 times), "trodden under foot" (6 times), as well as "meek," "filled," "serve," "enemies," "righteousness," and "glory."

The Sermon on the Mount's extensive use of temple vocabulary from the Psalms is noteworthy. It invites thoughtful listeners to take note of many connections between the Sermon on the Mount and the Psalms, which are rewarding to notice in connection with temple holiness.

5:1. Jesus and His disciples go up "into the Mountain" (Greek *eis to oros*). This phrase means much more than simply going out onto a grassy hillside. These precise words, "into the mountain," are found in the Septuagint of Exodus 19:20 and 24:13, at the times when Moses received the Ten Commandments and then went up into Mount Sinai with Aaron and his sons and seventy of the leading men of Israel to receive further laws. This same phrase also appears in Psalm 24:3, a hymn sung of faithful people going up "into the hill of the Lord," meaning the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was known as "the mountain of the Lord" and as "the house of the God of Jacob," where He teaches us His ways so we can walk in His paths (Isaiah 2:3). This mountain-temple connection is most strongly reinforced as the resurrected Jesus Christ appears at the temple in Bountiful (3 Nephi 11:1) and delivers there the Sermon at the Temple.

Matthew 5:3–12. Stage 1: Initiatory Promises of Celestial Blessings, Called Beatitudes, Are Given

The English word *beatitude* comes from the Latin word *beatus*, which means "to be elevated to sainthood and to exalted holiness." The Greek word *makarios*, translated as "blessed," refers predominantly to the final state of complete joy and goodness in the afterlife.

Each of the Beatitudes in the King James Version begins with “Blessed *are* the . . .” Each time, the word “are” is italicized to signal that the Greek *to be* verb is not literally present in the text. This is normal in Greek; it leaves the listener to infer from the context the tense (whether past, present, or future) of the unstated verb of being. In the second half of six of these beatitudes, the promises are of *future* celestial glory, and thus their opening clauses should also be understood as saying, “Blessed *will be* the . . . , for they *shall*” be comforted, be filled, see God, and so forth. Thus, these beatitudes give assurances primarily of future blessings in the heavenly world yet to come, to the degree that those blessings are righteously sought here and now. While the fullness of these blessings will come in the next stage of our eternal progression, we receive clear foreshadowing of all these blessings in this life as the veil of mortality is parted especially in the temple.

The Book of Mormon precedes its presentation of these initially promised blessings with two important unique preparatory beatitudes: “Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen,” and “Blessed are they who shall believe in your words, and come down into the depths of humility and be baptized, for they shall be visited with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and shall receive a remission of their sins” (3 Nephi 12:1–2). Consistent with the proven worthiness of all in the audience at the temple in Bountiful, Jesus also uniquely adds on that occasion the word “all” to five of the beatitudes, promising blessings to “all they that mourn,” “all they who do hunger,” “all the pure in heart,” “all the peacemakers,” and “all they who are persecuted for Christ’s sake.”

Similarly, the presentation of the Sermon on the Mount in the Old World was given to a group of selected disciples away from the multitudes (Matthew 5:1), which presupposed that the small audience in Matthew 5–7 was composed of people who were already believers and experienced followers of Jesus (Matthew 4:22–23). For example, one of the two main followers of John the Baptist was Andrew, Peter’s brother (John 1:35, 40). The Sermon on the Mount (or at the Temple) then introduces these people into their next level of covenant making.

5:3. Beatitude 1: “Blessed are the humble, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”

This first Beatitude is usually expressed in English as “blessed are the poor in spirit,” which gives verbally a literal rendition, but it leaves open the question to ponder what “poor in spirit” might mean. One possibility is that it means “blessed are the humble,” and so we render it that way here. The present nature of this blessing is indicated here by the presence of the verb “is” in the second half of this beatitude.

Humility is a very fertile starting point for spiritual progression, as Alma 32:16 makes clear: “Blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble.” Significantly, the words in this beatitude relate back to Psalm 69:32–33, connecting these “poor” with those who seek God: “Let the poor see and rejoice; seek God, and find. For the Lord listens to the poor.” Thus, the type of poverty praised here in Matthew 5:3 is the humble piety of beggars with respect to the Holy Spirit. In a temple context, the beggar comes into the house of the Lord and approaches God with a “broken and contrite heart” (Psalm 51:17).

There, the Lord blesses those who have bowed their heads before Him, seeking eternal blessings through priesthood ordinances, submissive sacrifices, and solemn prayers. There, the kingdom of God's heavenly glories is extended to them. There, they praise God and "speak of the glory of thy kingdom," even "the glorious splendor of thy kingdom," which is a kingdom "of all eternal beings" whose "dominion endures throughout all generations" (see Psalm 145:11–13).

5:4. Beatitude 2: "Blessed will be those who mourn, for they shall be comforted"

The words for "mourn" in Hebrew and Greek can mean "to be sad or to mourn for a deceased relative or friend." Those who mourn the death of a loved one are comforted to know that death has been conquered through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. This blessing extends beyond this mortal life and into the future kingdom of heaven, where all pains and sufferings can be cured by the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

This word also covers not only ordinary sadness but especially weeping and sorrowing over sin. Thus, this second beatitude is strongly connected with repentance and the second article of faith. Notably, Ezra "mourned because of the covenant-breaking of the exile" and took the confession of his people, thereby averting the wrath of God (Ezra 10:6–14). Those who come to the temple seek, above all, divine forgiveness for sin. Those who repent and are forgiven of sin likewise receive joy and are comforted.

The meanings of the Greek word for "comfort" (*paraklēsis*) include "encouragement, exhortation, assurance, acceptance, and consolation"; one who gives comfort is a comforter (*paraklētos*), "a helper, mediator, intercessor, advocate, or adviser." Those who mourn in God's temple shall be helped, encouraged, and accepted. Christ as mediator or intercessor will cover all sins. The righteous shall enjoy unspeakable joy in the house of the Lord (Psalm 94:19). Joyous hymns and expressions of love supplant tears of sorrow: "Those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy!" (Psalm 126:5). While the blessing of all those who thus mourn will take full effect in heaven, it also is found in this life amid the greatest blessings of the temple, prefiguring that celestial realm yet to come.

5:5. Beatitude 3: "Blessed will be the meek, for they shall inherit the earth"

This beatitude connects the words "meek" and "inherit," as does Psalm 37:9: "For evil doers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth." The blessing of the meek is a theme found in many of the psalms sung in the temple. These hymns promise that when God stands "in his dwelling-place" on the "everlasting mountains" to judge the world, He will save all those who are "meek [*praiēis*] in heart" and endow them with divine peace and joy.¹

As one of the key virtues that characterize the true greatness of the soul, meekness is deeply rooted in patiently waiting on the Lord. In classical Greek, the word "meek" (*praiūs*) means "to be mild, soft, gentle, friendly, pleasant, quiet, or (of a horse) tame." In Jewish thought, it takes on the meaning of being in the position of a servant and accepting hardships without objection. Perhaps ironically, this word becomes one of the ideal qualities of the righteous biblical leader, famously used in reference to Moses (Numbers 12:3).

Thus, inheriting the earth according to God’s promise is based on holy conduct, tamed submission to the will of the Lord, leading others with mildness and gentleness, and patiently promoting the fulfillment of God’s covenant to bless people everywhere on earth.

5:6. Beatitude 4: “Blessed will be they who hunger and thirst after righteousness”

Here again Jesus draws upon temple-related vocabulary from the Psalms: “But I shall appear in righteousness before thy face: I shall be filled in beholding thy glory” (Psalm 17:15). “The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied” (Psalm 22:26). Likewise in Psalm 63:1, the person who “has thirsted for” God, finds the Lord at the temple. In all these cases, being filled and satisfied epitomizes the overflowing fullness of joy in beholding the Lord in His holy temple. Hungering, thirsting, and seeking after righteousness is a theme continued throughout the Sermon on the Mount. To be fully blessed by God, the faithful must diligently seek for His kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33; 7:8). In the Book of Mormon, this fourth beatitude inspiringly concludes, “For they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 12:6), the gift of the Holy Ghost being the fourth principle of the gospel in the fourth article of faith.

5:7. Beatitude 5: “Blessed will be the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy”

In order to obtain mercy, one must be merciful. Receiving mercy is one of the most common yearnings expressed in the Psalms. In connection with this beatitude, see Psalms 86:15–16; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 116:5; 145:8. One of the dominant qualities of the temple has always been its role as the primary source of mercy: “But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy” (Psalm 5:7); “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever” (Psalm 23:6). The temple has everything to do with obtaining mercy; it was seen as the wellspring of God’s waters of mercy because it was the enshrinement of the covenant between God and His people, inviting people to love their neighbors and to do good unto them. Thus, the fifth beatitude—that number often signifying kindness and generosity—is beneficially understood in terms of the covenant relationship between God and His people.

5:8. Beatitude 6: “Blessed will be the pure in heart, for they shall see God”

This beatitude draws directly on Psalm 24:4, which answers the question of worthiness to enter the temple: “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands, and a pure heart” (Psalm 24:3–4). The words *clean* and *pure* have important temple connections. Those who are pure in heart are upstanding and morally correct, being purged of all uncleanness.

The promise that “they shall see God” (Psalm 24:6) also has temple bearings. Seeking and seeing the face of God was an experience connected with the tabernacle and the temple on several occasions: “I have looked upon thee in the sanctuary, beholding thy power and glory” (Psalm 63:2). And again, “As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness” (Psalm 17:15). The famous Priestly Blessing extended to the

righteous the prospect that the Lord would “lift up his countenance upon” them (Numbers 6:26) and that they would see His face.

These and other such texts reveal the Beatitudes as entrance requirements for the kingdom of God, both on earth and as it is in heaven. Through the cultivation of the heavenly virtues set forth in the Beatitudes, traits of divinity are established and faithful followers can see and become like God (compare 1 John 3:2).

5:9. Beatitude 7: “Blessed will be the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God”

No word is more prominent in biblical vocabulary than *shalom*, or “peace.” This word has several meanings, including “friendliness, submission, safety, well-being, proper order, wholeness, settlement, restitution, satisfaction of a debt, the gift of God, eternal peace, love, and peace with God as well as with all people.” Making peace, being a peacemaker in all respects, is a high and holy calling that operates at several levels, including within family, neighbors, social groups, communities, and among nations. The peacemakers of Matthew 5:9 proclaim peace by serving as intercessors of reconciliation between God and humans and between people of all kinds and in various stations of life.

The promised blessing in this beatitude accentuates its temple connections: “They will be called children of God.” This language has a rich history in Jewish literature and is affirmed throughout the Sermon on the Mount.² This invitation brings to mind the heavenly beings whose train filled the Holy of Holies and all shouted for joy at the Creation (Job 38:7). It also echoes the language of kingship, adoption, and deification (see Psalms 2:6–7; 89:3–4, 7). And it looks back to the covenant-making in Sinai.³ Maintaining this relationship with God has always depended upon the covenant of peace, also called the everlasting covenant. In performing and announcing covenant renewals, in reestablishing and proclaiming peace, the feet of God’s messengers become beautiful upon the holy mountains (Isaiah 52:7).

Thus, the seventh beatitude promises that “peacemakers”—who can especially be understood as including those who make and maintain the covenant of peace with God—will truly become the sons and daughters of God. That covenant of peace was effectuated through the sacrifice of the atoning blood of the new high priest, Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:19–22). Christian disciples accept that covenant by manifesting their faith in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26). By following this path, they become sons and daughters of God (Romans 8:14–15).

While this relationship may only be fully realized in the next stage of human life, the conduct necessary to make that ultimate blessing possible begins in this life, with a pure eye looking toward the world to come. This sacred status, which was reserved in earlier temple eras for the king alone (Psalm 2:7), is now transcendently extended by Jesus to His faithful.

5:10–11. Beatitudes 8 and 9: “Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness sake,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when you are reviled and have evil spoken against you falsely because of me. Your reward will be great in heaven”

Here in these two final beatitudes, the focus shifts from the previous emphasis on individual righteousness to the proper response of the initiate to the problematical social reactions and persecutions that are sure to follow in the wake of the transformation that the Sermon on the Mount will require in the lives of faithful disciples. Clearly, suffering and being persecuted will be part of the life of the righteous in this world.

The Psalms frequently encourage the righteous to offer prayers asking and hoping to be rescued from those who pursue or persecute them. For example, “Save me from all them that persecute me” (Psalm 7:1 LXX). “Deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors!” (Psalm 31:15). “Stop the way against them that persecute me: say to my soul, ‘I am thy salvation”” (Psalm 35:3 LXX; see also 69:4). In the temple, which also served as a place of refuge for those who were being persecuted, the righteous could find deliverance from their persecutors. Thus, when the Sermon on the Mount promises the blessings of heaven to the righteous who are persecuted, it fills a vindicating role served by the temple.

It would not have been uncommon for people to expect to be persecuted after they had received some higher level of instruction or had attained a higher status than ordinary people. The godless are said to lie in wait to test and torture the righteous because they profess “to have knowledge of God, and call themselves a child of the Lord” (Wisdom of Solomon 2:13, 16). The cause of such persecution is mainly the claim to have received some special sacred knowledge about God, as is indeed conveyed to people through the ordinances of the temple. After hearing the first seven beatitudes, all disciples would have heard enough to know that the teachings already revealed, along with the demands imposed and the relationships created by these words of Jesus, set them apart from the rest of society and would set them up for inevitable persecution.

At yet a deeper level, Jesus makes it clear that this persecution will not be because of anything the disciples had done but will literally be “because of me” (Matthew 5:11). The meaning of “for righteousness’ sake” can pertain to the disciple’s righteousness but even more to Jesus’s, as He is “the Righteous One.” Indeed, the parallel beatitude in Luke traces the source of persecution to the disciples’ connections with the Son of Man: “Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man” (Luke 6:22). This understanding is consistent with Isaiah’s reference to the Servant of the Lord as “the Righteous One” (Isaiah 53:11). Thus, the connections between Jesus and His disciples will likely spawn hatred and strong rejection.

This certainly was the case in the first century of Christianity in the Roman Empire, as it also was in the early days of the Restoration with the severe persecutions of the Saints in Missouri and Illinois, resulting in the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith and others. Accordingly, the relationship between Jesus and the disciple is not to be taken as a casual one; it is more than just one of master-teacher. The relationship entails complete service by the disciple to the Lord and open identification with Him. This is the kind of relationship that is ultimately created and maintained in the temple by the new and everlasting covenant.

5:12. An invitation to rejoice in following the Lord: “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad”

Matthew’s set of Beatitudes ends with a call for great celebration. The word *hallelujah* appears in the Bible almost exclusively either in the Psalms (fifty-three times) or in Isaiah (eleven times). In Psalm 32:11, ancient Israelites sang out, “Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!” Here, on this occasion, the Lord invites the disciples to rejoice and be exceeding glad—a doubled effort. This is to say, Shout Hallelujah, Hallelujah, or Hosannah, Hosannah! This verse thus calls to mind temple dedications and other times of great joy and gratitude experienced in the completion of difficult tasks of service unto the Lord.

A great reward is also promised. The promise of receiving a great reward in heaven is a dominant theme in the Sermon on the Mount, appearing six times.⁴ It also reappears in Matthew 10:41–42, where God promises the Apostles and missionaries “a prophet’s reward” and a secure reward, and finally in Matthew 20:8, in the parable about the laborers in the harvest field being paid their reward at the end of the day.

Matthew 5:13. Stage 2: Becoming the Salt of the Earth

After these initial blessings and promises, Jesus offers His faithful followers a special status, with a serious caution. He declares, “You are the salt of the earth,” and at the same time warns that if salt loses its saltiness, it will lack strength, no longer be of any use, and will be thrown out to be trodden underfoot. This text contains more than a declaration that these people are the salt of the earth, for this new status carries with it serious responsibilities and consequences if its duties are not carried out. It issues a solemn warning that those who violate their covenant will lose that which is most essential to their very nature and will be rejected as useless. This calling is a gift, as the wording in 3 Nephi 12:13 makes clear: “I *give unto you to be* the salt of the earth” (emphasis added). Such a calling, of course, must be accepted to be effective.

Salt. Compare “salt of the covenant” and “with all your offerings you shall offer salt” in Leviticus 2:13. Perhaps the preservative qualities of salt made it a symbol of the durability of the idea of covenant, both in Israel and throughout the ancient Near East. Loyalty to a king is equated with tasting “the salt of the palace” (Ezra 4:14). In Arabic, *to salt* means “to make a treaty,” and in Israel it is likely that salt played a ceremonial function at the covenant meal that consummated the making of a covenant.⁵ Salt may also symbolize purification (Exodus 30:35; 2 Kings 2:19–23). The use of salt as an image here implies that sacrifice, suffering, and purification will be required of the true disciple. At the same time, it is possible, as Jesus warns, for this “salt of the earth” to lose its savor, or in other words, to become useless, dull, insipid, or foolish (*mōranthei*), losing the might or strength to do anything useful.

Cast out. This expression (*ballein exō*) is equivalent to *ekballein*, literally “to throw away,” which in the context of a covenant community means to be expelled from fellowship and banned from entering sacred places. In the Psalms, this word is used in reference to Israel casting the Canaanites out of the land

and in cursing an opponent with having his family expelled from their property.⁶ The word is used several times in the Gospel of John in the sense of excommunication or disfellowshipping.⁷ Notably it appears in 3 John 1:10, in which a local church leader named Diotrephes refused to receive the Apostle John and his brethren; he even cast out (excommunicated, *ekballei*) anyone who received them. Significantly, just as Jesus mentions excommunication here at the outset of His great Sermon (and see also 3 Nephi 12:13), the Savior concludes His first covenant-filled day among the Nephites with compassionate instructions that people who are cast out must still be ministered to, in hopes that they will repent, reform, and return (3 Nephi 18:32).

Trodden underfoot. This fate suited the wrong that had been done because the offenders themselves had effectively trodden underfoot the holy things of the gospel, the temple, and the laws of God. This punishment applied to people who desecrate the Sabbath (2 Esdras 23:15) or who have trampled God’s commandments underfoot (Isaiah 28:3; Hosea 5:11 LXX). David, the Psalmist, deeply feared that he would be trodden underfoot by the evil forces of darkness.⁸ There is hope, however, if the Lord is the one who does the treading: “He will again have compassion upon us, he will tread our iniquities underfoot. Thou wilt cast our sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19).

Matthew 5:14–16. Stage 3: A Calling Is Given to Be a Light unto All

One is to let his or her light shine forth in such a way that when people see their good works, they will glorify *not them* but their Father in Heaven.

5:14. Light. Jesus’s audience must have been stunned by the words, “You are the light of the world.” The common Jewish culture saw God as the light of the world, a strong theme in the Psalms: “The Lord is my light” (Psalm 27:1, see also 104:1–2). Jesus Himself will say, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). Thus, it may well have seemed shocking, almost blasphemous, to say that mortals can be the light of the world. How is it possible that human beings can become a source of divine light? This would only be possible if the mortals are understood to have within them a spark of pre-existent divinity, which the Lord can then cause to glow even more brightly. Through faithfulness along His covenant path, we can become “like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). Anciently, the temple was understood as the principal place where this transmission of light occurred.

5:14. City on a hill. Conspicuously, the temple was the house of light that had been placed by God on His holy mountain, a beacon to the world. This city refers to the Holy Temple City, which has been consciously placed on the very top (*epanō*) of a significant “mountain” (*orous*), not just a hill. Jesus’s words bring to mind lines from the song that Moses and all Israel sang to Jehovah in the wilderness: “Thou wilt bring them in, and plant them on thy own mountain, the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thy abode, the sanctuary, Lord, which thy hands have established” (Exodus 15:17). Jesus’s statement draws extraordinary strength by understanding that this mountain was not an ordinary hill. Many commentators,

both ancient and modern, have concluded that this is a reference to the ideal city of Jerusalem, which prefigures the heavenly temple-city foreseen by John in Revelation 21:22, drawing upon ancient imagery of the house of God situated on the summit of the cosmic mountain.

5:15. Candle. Jesus speaks here of a small clay lamp with a wick, not of what we think of as a wax candle. In the parable of the ten virgins, this familiar household implement will play an important role, admonishing the faithful to have plenty of oil in their lamps and a jar of extra oil as well (“in their vessels with their lamps”). See Matthew 25:4.

5:14. Bushel. This temple-city is not to be hidden. God does not want it to be placed under a Roman (or worldly) bushel. The Greek word for bushel, *modios*, is a direct loan word from Latin, *modius*, which was sacred to one of the Roman gods of grain. Extra offensive would thus be hiding one’s Light of Christ under a basket of worldly desires or false gods.

5:14. Lampstand. This may, of course, be any indefinite lamp or candlestick, but it is not insignificant that Jesus speaks of placing the lamp “upon *the* lampstand [*epi tēn luchnian*].” The word *luchnia* is the term used for the seven-branched lampstand of pure gold called the Menorah (Exodus 25:31–37 LXX). It also is used for the golden candlestick holding the lamps of the seven churches in Revelation 1:12, 13, 20; 2:1, 5. Use of this term by Josephus confirms that this word was ordinarily understood in Jesus’s day as, first and foremost, the menorah of the temple.⁹ Adding one’s lamp to the illumination of the holy place inside the temple, or providing spiritual light in the dwelling of one’s family home, or helping the light of God’s city upon any temple mount to shine also come to mind as important ways to bring the Light of Christ into the world. The divine light should not remain secluded within the temple, but its effects should be seen throughout all the world.

5:16. Shine. In the temple, particularly in the Holy of Holies, certain people became exalted as shining beings of light. Moses and the elders in the holy mountain were transformed by the divine light (see Numbers 6:24–6; Psalm 31:16). When Jesus, therefore, tells His followers to let their light shine upon others so that they too may be brought to the Father, He employs an image pertinent to the temple and to all true disciples who reflect the glory of the Lord as they keep His laws and covenants. His words give new meaning to several old images pertaining to the creation of the earth. What was said in the beginning as “let there be light” (Genesis 1:3) inspiringly now becomes “let your light so shine.”

5:16. In such a way. The daily walk of the righteous should not be aimed at currying favor among humankind, but the qualities of their deeds should shine before people “in such a way” (*houtōs*) that when others see those deeds they will glorify not the doers but their Father in the heavens (Matthew 5:16). Understood in this way, there is no tension between what is a positive instruction in Matthew 5:14–16 and what is a negative prohibition against wanting to be seen of men in Matthew 6:2, 5, 16 for self-promotional purposes.

5:16. Good works. Just as the Creator of the world pronounced those works (*erga*, Genesis 2:2) to be good and beautiful (*kalon* or *kala*, Genesis 1:4, 8, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and even “very good” (*kala lian* in

Genesis 1:31), Jesus now invites each disciple to become in his or her own way a creator of “good works,” using the same two terms, *kala erga*. The glorification of God thus radiates especially from keeping temple covenants made with God and doing works of holy righteousness.

Matthew 5:17–20. Stage 4: Renewing Commitments to Obey the Law and Teach the Scriptures

Next, Jesus teaches the duty of His followers to abide by and proclaim the fullness of the law and prophets as fulfilled by Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount requires an unwavering commitment to keep the law of God as that law was fully intended to be lived, even in its most minute details. But rather than setting forth a detailed commentary on the law, the Sermon on the Mount serves instrumentally in establishing a covenant relationship between God and those who choose to come unto Him. This text presupposes the full power and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ to articulate and exemplify the full meaning of the law—to fulfill the law, every jot (every iota, the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet) and tittle (each scribal flourish in its written presentation). Given by way of covenant, this text fulfills the vision of the prophet Jeremiah that a “new covenant,” or a new testament, would be forthcoming someday and that it would write the law upon the hearts of God’s people and all would know the Lord (Jeremiah 31:31, 33).

In these verses, Jesus sets up His relationship with the law of Moses. The meaning of “fulfill” (Greek, *plēroō*) offers some possibilities: it can mean “to make the true meaning apparent” as well as “to make complete” or “to put an end to,” and it is likely that this full range of meaning is captured in verse 17. Above all, Jesus does not “destroy” the law, setting it aside recklessly or dismissing it as having no value.

Indeed, the Ten Commandments and the laws in Leviticus served important roles within the Israelite temple. The ten “thou shalt not” statements served as worthiness requirements for entering the temple. The Decalogue was read aloud at ceremonial times of covenant renewal and close to the time of the priests’ daily offering.

Jesus begins by restating three of the Ten Commandments, the foundation of the law of Moses, which was administered anciently by the Aaronic Priesthood. Jesus explains that this law has not been destroyed. In its fulfilled form, it still has an essential place in the righteous life: Jesus has not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill the purposes for which the law was given and the words of the prophets spoken. Not one jot nor one tittle will pass away from the law, but in Christ it will all see fulfillment. Each person should strive to teach and do every commandment of the Lord, whether great or small.

In His post-Resurrection speech in the Book of Mormon, Jesus goes on here to require the people to exercise faith, repentance, and obedience, which constitutes coming unto Him “with a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 12:19). The offering of a broken heart and a contrite spirit is the new law of sacrifice (see 3 Nephi 9:19–20). This new law of obedience and sacrifice fulfilled and superseded the practices of sacrifice under the law of Moses and, particularly, put an end to “the shedding of blood” (3 Nephi 9:19).

Matthew 5:21–22. Stage 5: “Thou Shalt Not Kill” Is Reformulated as a Disallowance of Anger, Evil-Speaking, Mocking, and Ridiculing

This new understanding of this law expands the old rule against murder by reaching into the heart of brotherly love. Jesus here introduces a higher and more foundational command against becoming angry or speaking derisively about another. Especially in the brotherhood and full fellowship of a priesthood setting, this prohibits all manner of evil or unholy speaking against any Church member and, thus, even more so against anyone who has been anointed and made holy in the eyes of the Lord. Accordingly, anyone who is angry with a brother, sister, wife, or husband is said to be in danger of God’s judgment. Thus, anyone who says to a fellow worker something like “raca” is in danger of being brought before “the council”—that is, the elders in charge of administering the kingdom or perhaps the heavenly council. Those who persist in such misconduct are in danger of hellfire.

There is certainly a place for righteous anger, for zeal in defending God and His cause, but anger “without a cause” is only a destructive force. Even under such conditions, anger is to be bridled. Indeed, 3 Nephi 12:22 lacks the words “without a cause,” as do the strongest early Christian manuscripts of Matthew, which makes good sense since no one is ever, in reality, angry without some cause.

Since the word *raca* means roughly “stupid” or “empty-headed,” the thrust of this injunction is that scorning or mocking other people is prohibited. *Raca* is an Aramaic term of contempt, and while, as Jesus observes, publicly insulting another could land one in legal trouble, we ought rather to fear the judgment of God for unmerited anger and scorn.

This provision and its disciplinary procedures are especially pertinent to a community of covenanters. Some have noted that one of the rules in the Dead Sea Scrolls (Manual of Discipline 7:8) says that anger against a fellow member of the society cannot be tolerated, and a punishment was exacted like those mentioned here (see Manual of Discipline 1:16–2:18). Such feelings undermine the vitality of any holy covenant relationship.

Matthew 5:23–26. Stage 6: Disputes and Animosities Are to Be Settled before Proceeding Further

If there are problems or conflicts, they should be settled before proceeding further. Holy prayers and petitions at the temple altar can then be offered to God in righteousness. In effect, Jesus requires here that if anyone desires to come unto Him, they should have no hard feelings against any brother or sister. No disciples can fully come unto Christ or enter His presence without first being reconciled with their brothers and sisters. One first achieves atonement with one’s brothers and sisters, and then one can come with “full purpose of heart” to be received by Christ and thereby be reconciled or atoned with God.

Some scholars have seen this passage as an intrusive interruption in the flow of thought in the sermon. However, while this requirement breaks up the rhythm of the antitheses distinguishing the old law from

the new, this prerequisite is important in the context of introducing all of the law and ensuring that the listeners are in the proper state of mind to step forward toward the holy altar. Disciples are told to leave their sacrifice on the altar and go and reconcile themselves with others before proceeding. Thus, to facilitate repentance and reconciliation, Jesus next admonishes His people to settle all their controversies quickly and especially to avoid the entangling and drawn-out complications of going to court. The faithful can instead look forward to the day of divine judgment, which will be far more important than any earthly day in court.

Here in Matthew, the text speaks of leaving one's *sacrifice* on the altar because Jesus's words on that occasion were directed toward audiences in Galilee and Judea prior to the fulfillment of the old law of sacrifice. In 3 Nephi, however, Christ's voice had been previously heard speaking from heaven after His Resurrection, instructing His people that the new sacrifice was now to be a "broken heart and a contrite spirit" (see 3 Nephi 9:20). Jesus Christ thus fulfilled the purposes of the old altar as the place of reconciliation; He does not destroy or eliminate that purpose. He stands behind the altar where all broken laws and broken relationships are atoned for and reconciled.

Matthew 5:27–32. Stage 7: Sexual Infidelity, Including Lust, Is Prohibited

The next subject addressed is the law of chastity: a married man and woman are to have sexual relations only with each other, and divorce is not to be taken lightly.

The new law imposes a strict prohibition against sexual intercourse outside of marriage (consonant with the old law in Leviticus 18 and 20). The new commandment here intensifies the rules that prevailed under the old law, requiring purity of heart and denial of immorality. The sanctity of God-ordained marriage leaves no room for lust, for "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Purity in a ritual sense is also at stake here. In committing to live by this new law, the righteous take up a heavy responsibility, "wherein ye will take up your cross" (3 Nephi 12:30). Jesus here strengthens the commandment with a prohibition of any act motivated by lust. If all human lust were so restrained, sexual sin would cease entirely.

Jesus's chosen illustration is striking. While the loss of an eye or hand was possible as prescribed punishment in Jesus's day, clearly He is not making a literal point. Instead, He is telling us that any impetus to sexual temptation must be eliminated from our lives. Even so, the point holds true—it certainly would be better to lose a limb than to enter eternal condemnation for that limb's sake (Matthew 5:29).

Unlike the Sermon on the Mount, the Sermon at the Temple mentions no penalty concerning the unchaste eye that should be cast out if it offends. This difficult saying in the New Testament text has been troublesome to many commentators. Indeed, most Jewish attitudes around the time of Jesus were strongly set against any punishment that took the form of bodily mutilation. Thus, it is highly unlikely that Jesus ever demanded any actual self-mutilation of His disciples. Indeed, the Sermon at the Temple

in 3 Nephi speaks in no way of bodily mutilation, and the expression appears to be figurative. The Joseph Smith Translation of Matthew 5:34 reads, “Now this I speak [as] a parable concerning your sins.”

Instead, the Sermon at the Temple speaks, at this point, of a total commitment of the disciple taking up a symbolic cross, which requires the strict exercise of self-control. It also warns that violations of the law of chastity, which is of grave importance, will involve consequences (see Deuteronomy 22:22; Alma 39:5). Disciples must be willing to deny themselves these things and, in so doing, “cross” themselves or, in Jesus’s words, “take up your cross” (Alma 39:9; 3 Nephi 12:30).

Jesus goes on to require that covenant marriages are not to be dissolved except on grounds of fornication. The old law had allowed divorce by simply giving the wife “a bill of divorcement” (Deuteronomy 24:1). The new and higher covenant of marriage provides that except in cases of fornication, a simple divorce does not terminate the covenant nature of that marriage and, therefore, if either party were to remarry without authoritative priesthood cancellation of the previous marriage, the subsequent remarriage would be an additional case of adultery. For centuries, Bible scholars have struggled to understand the intended meaning of this prohibition against divorce. But considering the righteousness of the audiences to whom Jesus was speaking, either up in the holy mountain in Galilee or at the temple in Bountiful, this restriction on simple remarriage may have to do with the eternal nature of the marriage covenant that had bound those husbands and wives together. Thus, the strictness of the rule: for eternally sealed marriages can be dissolved only by proper authority on justifiable grounds. See further Matthew 19:3–12.

Matthew 5:33–37. Stage 8: Bearing False Witness Is Prohibited and Integrity Is Required

All kinds of oaths, especially vows to God, are to be sworn by saying “yes, yes” or “no, no.” Instructions are given here regarding the swearing of oaths. This next provision makes sense as it gives instructions on how covenant commitments are to be made: The swearing of oaths (which often accompanied the making of covenants) should be made simply by bowing one’s head and saying “yes” or “no.” Any more is superfluous, unnecessary, and to be avoided. What Jesus objects to are arguments over whether one is bound if one swears by the gold in the temple, by the altar of the temple, or by something else.

In Matthew 23, Jesus taught that one should swear to the living God who stands behind the temple and in the heavens. He sanctifies them all. Some have read the Greek in Matthew 5:34 and James 5:12 as forbidding all oaths or promises of any kind (“swear not at all,” “swear no other oath”), but this does not capture intent of Jesus as reflected in Matthew 23. The text in James 5:12 tells Christians not to swear any *such* oath, not ruling out any oath of any proper kind. As Jesus does here in Matthew 5, James admonishes his followers to let their yes really be a yes and their no really be a no and to keep their solemn promises so that they not fall under the judgment of the Lord. The double “yes, yes,” or “no, no” (Matthew

5:37) can either be an emphatic duplication of certitude, or it can reflect the yes of the first party followed by the yes of the second party in an eternally binding ordinance.

Matthew 5:38–44. Stage 9: Disciples Are Bound to Do Good to All People

Members of the covenant community are obligated to bless and pray for all people, including their enemies, for all are children of God and are potential fellow citizens among the Saints. The well-known rules and encouragements of loving one’s neighbor, turning the other cheek, suffering humiliation, going the extra mile, giving up one’s time and personal belongings, giving the poor more than is asked, loving one’s enemies, and doing good to all people are given next in the covenant sermon.

While the injunction “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” sounds harsh to the modern reader, the original intent seems to have been to fix a limit upon punishment: the offended party could exact *no more* than the value of the damages. But Jesus calls for an even stricter limit: do not seek revenge at all.

Instead of returning blow for blow when struck, we are to submit. Fire is not fought with fire, and evil cannot be defeated by evil. The image of turning the other cheek to the one who has hit you is poignant. It lays bare the injustice and forces evil to confront itself. Evil can consider itself justified when met with retaliation; when met with submission and meekness, it is exposed for what it is.

Although the term “law of the gospel” is never expressly defined in scripture, it can be understood here as the law of love and generosity, which is the essence of the two great commandments: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. . . . And thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”¹⁰ The only place in scripture where the phrase “law of [the] gospel” appears is in the Doctrine and Covenants, where it is connected with caring for the poor and needy: “If any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment” (Doctrine and Covenants 104:18).

Matthew 5:45–47. Stage 10: Disciples Are Obligated to Be Generous and Kind to All to Be like God

Jesus’s followers see all people as Heavenly Father does. He provides sun and rain to all: the evil and the good, the just and the unjust. In all dispensations, covenant people have been required to give to the poor and to lend to those who ask. Generosity was required of the children of Israel and of King Benjamin’s people (see Deuteronomy 15:7–11; Mosiah 4:16–26). Several Old Testament passages prescribe the good treatment of enemies,¹¹ but the commandment to love an enemy is new. Loving and doing good unto others is a condition of this new covenant, qualifying members to then receive in abundance God’s generosity.

More than good behavior toward friends is presupposed by the covenantal relationship with God (see Matthew 5:46–47), in which our Father in Heaven invites us to become like Him by acting as He does. Jesus’s commandment that one must “give to him that asketh . . . and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away” (Matthew 5:42) not only captures the essence of the law of the gospel regarding love and generosity but also incorporates the essence of the covenantal condition. In order to expect God to grant what we might request, we must impart that which we have and which we can give unto people who stand in need (Mosiah 4:21).

Matthew 5:48. Stage 11: Disciples of God Are Invited to Progress into the Next Higher Order

The desired goal, ultimately and with His infinite help, is for us to become as God is. He does not command us to be perfect, but He would like us to become, as much as possible, as He is. In miraculous ways, He and His Holy Son, Jesus, make this possible for us.

At this point in the sermon, the disciples have reached a plateau: “Be ye therefore perfect” (Matthew 5:48). This text should not be understood as an imperative command requiring people to be perfect on their own. The subject in this sentence, “be ye thus” (*esesthe oun hymeis*), is a plural, speaking to the congregation as a whole. It can also be read as standing for a future state, “ye shall be perfect.” Or, as it reads in the Sermon at the Temple, “Therefore I would that ye should be perfect, even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect” (3 Nephi 12:48).

The word “therefore” marks an important transition here: On the one hand, it looks back over the instruction given thus far about the law of Moses. On the other, it looks forward to a higher order required if people are to become “perfect.” Although the word *perfect* has, on one important level, a straightforward ethical or religious meaning here—reflecting perfect mercy, undivided obedience to God, and unsurpassed love—the word also carries a ceremonial connotation. It expresses the desire and invitation that disciples are now to advance from one level to the next, to go on to become perfect in the sense of “finished, completed” in their instruction and endowment.

In the ancient world, the word *perfect* (Greek *teleios*) referred to a person who was fully initiated. Other forms of this word are used in Hebrews 5:14–6:1 to distinguish between the initial teachings and the full instruction (“full age,” “perfection”); in Hebrews 9:11 it refers to the heavenly temple. Additionally in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the word *teleios* means to be in such a state that one can stand before God through priesthood blessings and powers. Early Christians used this word in connection with their sacraments and ordinances. But they did not divulge the things not to be uttered, so we know little about what they meant in this regard.

In Hebrew, the word *shalom*, as used in Numbers 6:26, in certain Psalms, or in connection with the temple of Solomon, can refer to a gift or endowment of God that is received in God’s presence. This ultimate blessing produces complete or perfect harmony with God.

Thus, in this context the word *perfect* does not mean personally, physically, or socially perfect. It deals more with integrity and completeness than with the absence of mistakes. We are to become sound and whole and to fill the measure of our creation, which is used to invite us into the wholeness of being consecrated to God. Accordingly, by inviting the people to become perfect or complete, Jesus may well have had several things in mind besides perfection as we usually think of it. It involved particularly the idea of becoming like God (“even as I or your Father who is in heaven”), which occurs by seeing God and knowing God (see 1 John 3:2; John 17:3). As Joseph Smith revealed, it is through the ordinances of the temple that we are instructed in doctrine more perfectly.

Notes

- 1 Psalm 76:2, 4, 9; see also 25:9; 34:2; 45:4; 90:10; 132:1.
- 2 Matthew 5:9, 45; 6:9; 7:9–11.
- 3 See Deuteronomy 14:1; 32:19; Isaiah 43:6; 45:11.
- 4 Matthew 5:12, 46; 6:1, 2, 5, 16.
- 5 Genesis 26:30; 31:54; Exodus 24:11.
- 6 Psalms 44:2 LXX; 78:55; 80:8; 109:10.
- 7 John 6:37; 9:22, 34; 15:6.
- 8 Psalms 7:5; 55:1–2; 56:3; 138:11.
- 9 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 14.72.
- 10 Matthew 22:37–39, quoting Deuteronomy 6:5; see also Doctrine and Covenants 59:5–6.
- 11 Exodus 23:4–5; Proverbs 25:21–22; 2 Kings 6:18–23.

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