

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

### A. Significance for Anabaptists and Mennonites

Howard Loewen wrote a book that analyzed 37 Mennonite and Anabaptist confessions of faith, going from the 1527 Schleithem Confession to the 1975 MB Confession of Faith.<sup>1</sup> Loewen discovered that the Gospel of Matthew was the most quoted scripture. In addition, he states:

“Chapter 5 (Sermon on the Mount) by far is the most extensively referred to; Chapter 25 (on eschatology), Chapter 28 (the great commission) and Chapter 18 (church discipline) follow Matthew 5 in that order in frequency.... Within Matthew 5 the section on love for one's enemies (vv. 38-48) receives the strongest emphasis by a margin of almost three to one. It is followed by the section on integrity and the oath (vv. 33-37).”<sup>2</sup>

### B. Various Approaches

#### 1. Impossible Ideal

#### 2. Absolutist View

#### 3. Modification View

**Matt 5:42** Give to everyone [every Christian] who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone [any Christian] who wants to borrow from you.

#### 4. Hyperbole view

#### 5. Attitudes-Not-Acts View

#### 6. Roman Catholic View

- Obedience to the precepts is necessary for salvation.
- Obedience to the counsels is only necessary for perfection.

*Didache* 6:2, “For if you are able to bear the entire yoke of the Lord, you will be perfect; but if you are not able to do this, do what you are able.”

#### 7. Two Kingdoms Approach

- In the private (spiritual) sphere, Christians must obey all the Sermon’s demands.
- In the public (civil) sphere, this is not so. Everything that pertains to the civil government—military, property, taxes, etc.—is not address by the SOM.

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<sup>1</sup>Howard J. Loewen, *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God, Mennonite Confessions of Faith* (Elkhart: The Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1985).

<sup>2</sup>Howard J. Loewen, *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God, Mennonite Confessions of Faith* (Elkhart: The Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1985) 31.

## 8. Dispensationalist View

- (1) Innocence; ended with expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden
- (2) Conscience; Gen. 3:23
- (3) Human government; Gen. 8:20
- (4) Promise; Gen. 12:1
- (5) Law; Ex. 18:8
- (6) Grace; Jn. 1:17
- (7) Future Kingdom; Eph. 1:10

## C. Allison's Exegetical Guidelines

### 1. SOM embodies parallel teaching

### 2. SOM coheres with OT

### 3. SOM must be read in context of Matthew's whole gospel

### 4. SOM offer principles and inspiration, rather than rules

### 5. SOM reflects Jewish eschatology

#### a. Jewish restoration eschatology

SOM has often been divorced from its historical Jewish context. SOM must be viewed in the context of first century Jewish hopes that God would forgive Israel and restore the kingdom to Israel.

For many Jews at that time, Israel's exile, from a theological point of view, continued even after the "post-exilic period," since Israel was still enslaved and sinful.<sup>3</sup> With that in mind, Jesus believed his preaching marked the dawn of God's forgiveness and restoration of Israel and that his followers represented the beginning of YHWH's restoration True or Restored Israel.<sup>4</sup>

That means that SOM is inextricably linked and embedded within Jesus' proclamation that God's Kingdom at hand, that Israel's exile was over for those who repent and follow him. Jesus believed that the exile, caused by centuries of Israel's sin and unfaithfulness,<sup>5</sup> was now over for those who repent and loyally follow him.

N.T. Wright says, "Jesus was offering the return from exile, the renewed covenant, the 'eschatological forgiveness of sin'—in other words, the kingdom of god. And he was offering this final eschatological blessing outside the official structures, to all the wrong people, and on his own authority. That was his real offence."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Ezra 9:6-15, Neh. 9:6-37, and Baruch 1:15-3:8. N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 271.

<sup>4</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 245-319.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., see Daniel's prayer in Dan. 9:16-19

<sup>6</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 272.

## b. Characteristics of the Kingdom (Reign) of God <sup>7</sup>

Seventeen passages in Isaiah proclaim the good news of the deliverance of God (9:1-7, 11; 24:14-25:12; 26; 31:1-33:20; 33; 35; 40:1-11; 42:1-44:8; 49; 51:1-51; 52:13-53:12; 54; 56; 60; 61; 62). From these passages, seven themes can be discerned.

### (1) God is presence as Spirit or Light

**Isaiah 60:1-2, 19.** <sup>1</sup> Arise, shine; for **your light has come**, and **the glory of the LORD** has risen upon you. <sup>2</sup> For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you.... <sup>19</sup> The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the **LORD will be your everlasting light**, and your God will be your glory. (NRSV)

### (2) Deliverance or salvation

**Isaiah 43:1-4.** <sup>1</sup> But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have **redeemed** you; I have called you by name, you are mine. <sup>2</sup> **When you pass through the waters, I will be with you**; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. <sup>3</sup> For I am the LORD your God, **the Holy One of Israel**, your **Savior**. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. <sup>4</sup> Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life.(NRSV)

### (3) Peace

**Isaiah 11:6-13.** <sup>6</sup> **The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.** <sup>7</sup> The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and **the lion shall eat straw like the ox.** <sup>8</sup> The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. <sup>9</sup> **They will not hurt or destroy** on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.... <sup>12</sup> He will raise a signal for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. <sup>13</sup> The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, the **hostility** of Judah shall be **cut off**; Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall **not be hostile** towards Ephraim. (NRSV)

**Isaiah 60:17-19.**<sup>17</sup> Instead of bronze I will bring gold, instead of iron I will bring silver; instead of wood, bronze, instead of stones, iron. I will appoint **Peace** as your overseer and **Righteousness** as your taskmaster. <sup>18</sup> **Violence** shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls **Salvation**, and your gates **Praise**. <sup>19</sup> The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. (NRSV)

### (4) Healing

**Isaiah 35:5-6.** <sup>5</sup> Then the **eyes of the blind shall be opened**, and the **ears of the deaf unstopped**; <sup>6</sup> then **the lame shall leap** like a deer, and the **tongue of the speechless sing for joy**. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert (NRSV)

### (5) Joy

**Isaiah 35:8-10.** <sup>8</sup> A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. <sup>9</sup> No lion shall

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<sup>7</sup> Glen H. Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006) 24-37.

be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. <sup>10</sup> And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and **come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;** they shall obtain **joy and gladness**, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.(NRSV)

## (6) Return from exile

**Isaiah 35:8-10.** <sup>8</sup> A highway shall be there, and it shall be called **the Holy Way**; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. <sup>9</sup> No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. <sup>10</sup> And **the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion** with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (NRSV)

## (7) Righteousness or justice

The Servant of YHWH. **Isaiah 42:1-7.** <sup>1</sup> Here is **my servant**, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; **I have put my spirit upon him**; he will bring forth justice to the nations. <sup>2</sup> He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; <sup>3</sup> a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; **he will faithfully bring forth justice** (מִשְׁפָּט; mishpat). <sup>4</sup> He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established **justice** in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching. <sup>5</sup> Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: <sup>6</sup> I am the LORD, I have called you in **righteousness** (צְדָקָה; tsedeq) I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, **a light to the nations**, <sup>7</sup> to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.(NRSV)

The Reign of God places justice and righteousness in parallel. The first word is *mishpat*, which is usually translated “justice.” It refers to “decisions of the authorities and practices of the markets that are fair to the poor and the powerless.”<sup>8</sup> The second word is *tsedeq*, which is usually translated “righteousness.” It refers to “the kind of justice that delivers from slavery and from oppression and restores community relationships.”<sup>9</sup>

Stassen argues the *mishpat* means “fairness justice” and *tsedeq* means “delivering justice”. Together they refer to “the kind of justice that is fairness to the powerless and therefore restores them from oppression and restores community.”<sup>10</sup>

## 6. SOM and “perfection”

“The ideal is necessary because, while it may not raise humanity to the heights it can lift us from the depths.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, the high ideals of SOM inspire and motivate us.

## 7. SOM and the person of Jesus

### a. Jesus as Isaiah’s eschatological prophet

Matthew’s Gospel presents Jesus as Isaiah’s eschatological prophet the Servant of YHWH. For example, when the followers of John the Baptists followers ask Jesus if he is the one to come (11:3), Jesus answers with a series of phrases that come from Isaiah (11:5):

<sup>8</sup> Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount*, 33.

<sup>9</sup> Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount*, 34.

<sup>10</sup> Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount*, 34.

<sup>11</sup> Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 15.

- The blind see (Isa. 61:1)
- The lame walk (Isa. 35:6)
- The deaf hear (Isa. 35:5)
- The dead are raised (Isa. 26:19)
- The poor have good news preached to them (Isa. 61:1)

**b. Jesus as the New Moses**

The beginning of SOM alludes to *Moses’ ascent to Mount Sinai*. Jesus goes up the mountain in 5:1, just as Moses went up Mount Sinai to receive the law (Exod. 19:3, 12-13). When Jesus sits down, it recalls Jewish tradition that spoke of Moses sitting on Sinai (*Exagōgē* of Ezekil; *b. Megillah* 21a).

The end of SOM recalls Moses’ *descent from Mount Sinai*. Matthew writes, “When Jesus had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed him” (8:1; NRSV), which is identical to Exod. 34:29 LXX A, which describes Moses coming down Mount Sinai.<sup>12</sup>

**Deut. 9:9.** When I went up the mountain to receive the stone tablets, the tablets of the covenant that the LORD made with you, I remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water. (NRSV)

Allison argues that “an extensive Moses typology runs throughout Matthew’s first few chapters”:<sup>13</sup>

	<b>Matthew</b>	<b>Jewish Tradition</b>
1	Joseph is told in a dream that Jesus will save his people (1:21)	Moses was called “savior” of his people (Josephus <i>Ant.</i> 2.228; <i>b. Sota</i> 12b; L.A.B. 9:10)
2	Birth of Jesus accompanied by Herod’s slaughter of infants (2:16-18)	Birth of Moses is accompanied by Pharaoh’s decision to kill male Hebrew babies (Exod. 1:22)
3	Herod learned about the coming savior from the chief priest and scribes (2:4-6)	Pharaoh learned about a future deliverer from the sacred scribes (Josephus <i>Ant.</i> 2.205, 234)
4	Jesus is providentially taken from the land of his birth because Herod wants to kill him (2:13-14)	Moses was forced to leave his homeland because Pharaoh sought to kill him (Exod. 2:15)
5	After Herod’s death, an angel told Josephus to return to Israel (2:19-20)	After the death of Pharaoh, Moses was commanded by God to return to Egypt (Exod. 4:19)
6	Matt. 2:15 quotes Hos. 11:1: “Out of Egypt I have called my son,” which is applied to Jesus.	Hos. 11:1: “Out of Egypt I have called my son,” which is applied to Israel.
7	Joseph took his wife and son and went back to Israel (2:21)	Moses took his wife and his sons and returned to Egypt (Exod. 4:2)

The sequence of events of Jesus’ life in Matthew 1-5 correspond to the sequence of events in Moses’ life in Exodus:<sup>14</sup>

Exod:	Slaughter of infants → Return of hero → Passage through Sea → Temptation → Mountain of Lawgiving
Matt:	Slaughter of infants → Return of hero → Baptism in Jordan → Temptation → Mountain of Lawgiving

**c. Jesus as moral exemplar**

**d. Jesus as Lord**

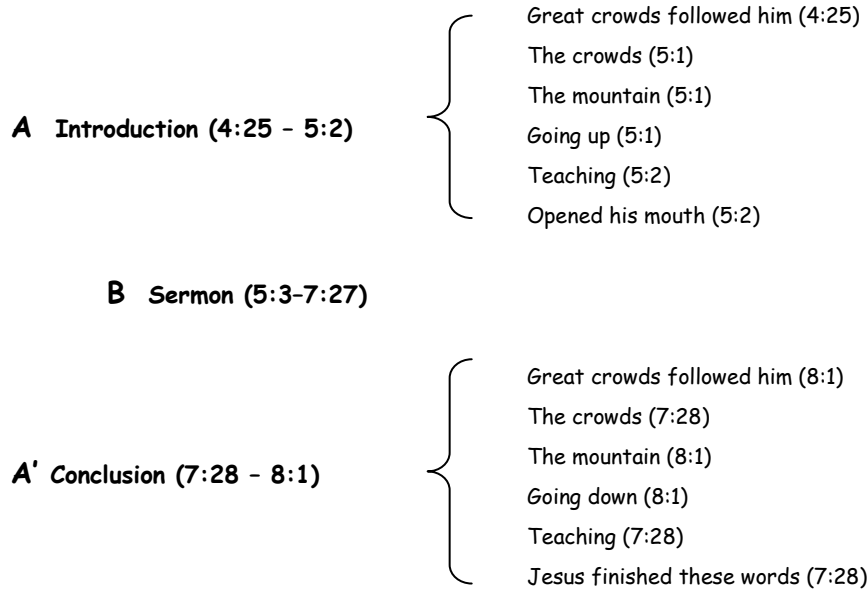
<sup>12</sup> Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 17.

<sup>14</sup> Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 19.

## D. Structure

### 1. Literary framework (4:25 – 5:2 and 7:28 – 8:1)



### 2. The Pattern of the Sermon

#### a. Nine eschatological blessings (5:3-12)

- 1) Blessed are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ (5:3-5)
- 2) Blessed are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ (5:6-8)
- 3) Blessed are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ (5:9-12)

#### b. Three tasks for the people of God (5:13 - 7:12)

- 1) In relation to the law: \_\_\_\_\_ (5:17-48)
- 2) In relation to God: \_\_\_\_\_ (6:1-18)
- 3) In relation to others: \_\_\_\_\_ (6:19-7:12)

#### c. Three eschatological warnings (7:13-27)

- 1) Two types of gates: \_\_\_\_\_ (7:13-14)
- 2) Two types of prophets: \_\_\_\_\_ (7:15-23)
- 3) Two types of builders: \_\_\_\_\_ (7:24-27)

### 3. Hermeneutical implications<sup>15</sup>

#### a. Uncompromising demands

#### b. Uncompromising grace

- (i) SOM refers to God's grace in the past.

**Matt 4:23-25.** Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him. (NRSV)

- (ii) SOM refers to God's grace in the future (5:5-12).

- (iii) SOM refers to God's grace in the present (6:25-34; 7:7-11).

### 4. Outline of SOM

Not only are many units within the SOM arranged in threes, but the overall structure is organized by three topics: Jesus and the Torah, Jesus and the cult, and Jesus and social issues (so Allison). See the outline.

This three-part structure may be more than compositional choice. It may also point to contact with and response to early rabbinic Judaism. In *Mishnah 'Abot* 1.1-18, we find 18 sayings from various rabbis. Almost all are grouped in triads. For example:

*m. 'Abot* 1.1. Moses received the Law from Sinai and committed it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the Prophets; and the Prophets committed it to the mean of the Great synagogue. They said three things: Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the Law.

*m. 'Abot* 1:2. Simeon the Just was of the remnants of the Great Synagogue. He used to say: By three things is the world sustained: by the Law, by the [Temple-] service, and by deeds of loving-kindness.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Much of the following is from Dale Allison, "The Structure of the Sermon on the Mount," *JBL* 106 (1987):441-5.

<sup>16</sup>*The Mishnah*, translated and edited by Herbert Danby (Oxford University, 1933) 446.