

January 8, 2012
 First Baptist Church

Text: Matthew 5-7
 Title: "The Greatest Sermon Ever Preached"
 (Introduction to a series in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount)
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I am so glad that you are able to be here today. For you are going to hear the greatest sermon ever preached. You are going to hear the greatest Preacher Who ever lived preach the greatest sermon ever preached. By "greatest" I mean "most influential." You are going to hear the most influential Preacher Who ever lived preach the most influential sermon ever preached. You are going to hear Jesus of Nazareth preach what over the centuries has been called "The Sermon on the Mount." The Sermon is recorded for us by one of Jesus' first followers, Matthew the tax-collector, in chapters 5, 6, and 7 of the gospel that bears his name. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Who enabled Matthew to remember Jesus' words, the Living Jesus is going to speak the words of those chapters today, to us, in this city. Whenever the most influential Preacher preaches His most influential sermon, something happens. Something always happens. Something transformative happens. The Sermon challenges us to the core. The Sermon cleanses us to the core. The Sermon renews us to the very core of our being. No one will leave this place today the same. We will all be changed ... in one way or another. Matthew tells us that the first people to hear Jesus preach His sermon were "amazed." Matthew 7:28 – "The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching;" Why? Matthew 7:29 – "for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." Matthew is not putting down the scribes. The scribes were the scholar-leaders of the day. They were very bright people: well-educated, eager students of the Scriptures, articulate theologians. Matthew is not putting them down. The scribes did their very best to open up the true nature of reality. It is just that they did not speak "with authority." They often spoke "authoritatively," claiming Divine support for what they taught. But when they spoke "authoritatively" they did not speak "with authority." The word Matthew uses is *exousia*. It is made up of two words: *ek* and *ousia*. *Ek* – out of. *Ousia* – the feminine participle of the verb to be; being. *Ek-ousia* – out of being.

Jesus speaks 'out of being.' Jesus speaks out of the centre of being, out of the centre of reality. The people who first heard the Preacher preach His Sermon were stunned by what He said. He had challenged their socks off. He went against the grain of nearly everything they thought they knew. And yet they took it. They did not walk away. Because the Preacher spoke *exousia*, out of the really real. As G.K. Chesterton once said of the opening of the Sermon on the Mount, of the Beatitudes: "The first time you hear them nothing makes sense. The second time you hear them, nothing else makes sense." Jesus speaks "out of being." This is the really real. This is true human living. There is so much to say about Jesus' great sermon. And we will develop much of it in our series of studies over the coming weeks. One thing I want to emphasize today ... before we hear

the sermon. I will emphasize it again and again and again. The one thing: we must never separate the Sermon on the Mount from the Preacher on the Mount. When the Sermon on the Mount is separated from the Preacher on the Mount things go haywire; the whole thing goes off the rails. Separated from the Preacher, the Sermon becomes either frustrating idealism, and we hang our heads in defeat and shame. Or it becomes oppressive legalism, and we get weary and tired, life is drained from us. Separate the Sermon from the Preacher ... and the Sermon will not work. It is often said that the Sermon on the Mount is the “essence of Christianity.” I understand why. The Sermon is the most widely influential part of Jesus’ teaching. BUT the Sermon on the Mount is NOT the essence of Christianity. The essence of Christianity is the Preacher on the Mount. Who gives His life for the world on Mount Calvary. The essence of Christianity is not ethics. The essence of Christianity is not a new world-view. The essence of Christianity is not even salvation. The essence of Christianity is a Person. When you listen to the Sermon carefully this comes through so clearly. What startled the first hearers was the way Jesus spoke of Himself. Yes, they were startled by what He said. But what arrested them was the way He spoke of Himself. Throughout the Sermon there we hear this “I,” “Me,” “Mine.” Truly I say to you ... five times ... truly I say to you. You have heard it was said, but I say to you ... six times ... but I say to you. On account of Me. Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord.” Depart from Me. Whoever hears these words of Mine and does them. The essence of Christianity is not the Sermon on the Mount, but the Preacher on the Mount. SO ... Who IS He? This Man Who sits on a mountain side ... speaking like no one else ever has. Who IS He? It seems to me that we should ask Matthew. Matthew is the one who records the Sermon. Or, at least, part of the Sermon, for I am sure Jesus said a whole lot more that day. When Matthew looks at the Preacher ... Who does he see? He tells us what he sees in the chapters of his gospel before he records the Sermon. In Matthew 1,2,3 and 4. He paints, as it were, a portrait of the Preacher. The Preacher, Jesus of Nazareth, is the son of Abraham (1:1). He is the fulfillment of the promise God made long ago that one day, a son, a seed of Abraham would be born in whom all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). Jesus preaches His sermon to bless.

The Preacher, Jesus of Nazareth, is the son of David (1:1). He is the fulfillment of the promise God made long ago that one day, a son, a seed of David would be born who would rule over an everlasting kingdom of justice and peace (2 Chronicles 7:14). Jesus preaches to bring this kingdom into being. The Preacher is God-to-the-rescue. In the Christmas story, Joseph is told to name the Son of David, Son of Abraham, Jesus. Why Jesus? Because, says the angel, “He Himself will save His people from their sins” (1:21). He Himself. He Himself will save. Name Him Jesus ... for He Himself will save. Jesus. Yeshua. Yahweh saves. Yahweh to the rescue. The Preacher on the Mount is God come to rescue sinners! Jesus preaches to save us from our sins! The Preacher is Immanuel, God-with-us. “All this took place so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying: ‘Look, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall call His name, Immanuel’.” (1:23). The Preacher on the Mount is God come to be with us. No wonder He can speak the really real! The Preacher is the Great King, whom magi from the east come to worship. Born in Bethlehem to fulfill what was spoken by Micah the prophet: “Out of you shall come a Ruler, who will shepherd My

people” (2:6). Jesus the good shepherd preaches to restore our souls, to lead us in the paths of righteousness.

The Preacher is the New Israel. As an infant He flies with His parents to Egypt. After the death of King Herod, who wanted to kill the new King of the Jews, Joseph, Jesus’ adoptive father is told to return home. All this to fulfill the word, “Out of Egypt did I call My Son.” (2:15). The Preacher on the Mount is the leader of the new Exodus bringing into being the new Israel. Jesus preaches to set the captives free and bring us into the promised land.

The Preacher is the Lord. Who had promised one day to come to set all things right. John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, cried out, “Prepare the way of the Lord” (3:3). The Preacher is the Lord of lords and ladies fulfilling His promise to come to the world in person. We had better listen when HE speaks!

The Preacher is Himself a Baptizer. John the Baptist said he could baptize in water. But the One who comes after him “baptizes in and with the Holy Spirit and fire” (3:11). The Preacher on the Mount loves to pour out the very Life of God on us. To dunk us in and drench us with the Spirit. To immerse us in fire. Jesus preaches His sermon to purify us and fill us.

The Preacher gets baptized. John the Baptist was shocked that the Son of David, Son of Abraham, Yahweh-to-the-rescue, Immanuel, would choose to be baptized. John was calling sinners into the water. What is Jesus doing going into the water? He is “fulfilling all righteousness,” as He tells John (3:15). He is choosing to “be numbered with the transgressors,” as Isaiah put it. He is choosing to be one of us, identifying with us in our sin. Which is why He knows us so well and clearly understands where we live. He preaches His sermon to help us live truly human lives.

The Preacher is the One to whom all the kingdoms of the world are given. At His baptism, the Voice – the Father’s voice – says, “This is My Son” (3:17). He is echoing Psalm 2, where God promises to one day raise up a Son to whom He will give all the nations are His rightful heritage.

The Preacher is the great Servant of the Lord. At His baptism, the Father also says, “In Whom I am well-pleased” (3:17). He is echoing Isaiah 42, the first of the songs of the Servant, leading up to the Suffering Servant, Who comes to bear the sin and sickness of the world.

The Preacher on the Mount does not come to condemn us, but to bring us into His wholeness. The Preacher knows what it means to be tempted. After His Baptism, in the wilderness, the evil-one tempts Jesus to back away from the meaning of His Baptism. But Jesus stands. HE stands against the full onslaught of evil. And preaches His Sermon so we can stand.

The Preacher is Light come into the darkness. Jesus begins His public ministry, and Matthew chooses to introduce Him with the words of Isaiah 9: “the people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, to those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a light has dawned” (4:16). Jesus preaches to pierce the darkness! To bring us out of the shadows of the ways of death. One more piece of the ????. The Preacher is the One Who brings the future into the present. Matthew 4:17. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” or “has come near.” So very near! Jesus is fulfilling the promise that one day God would come and establish God’s re-creating Rule in the world. It was thought that this would happen at the end of time. But Jesus comes announcing the good news that it begins before the end of time. What was expected to happen only at the end, is beginning to happen in the middle! Jesus comes preaching “the presence of the future,” as George Ladd put it. Which is why Jesus begins healing people and freeing them from the demonic. In Jesus and because of Jesus, the kingdom of heaven is invading the earth! “Repent,” says Jesus. But of course. “Turn around.” Turn around and open up to this startling news. And when we do, the life of the kingdom begins to emerge in the world. When we turn around and embrace the Preacher the life the Preacher brings begins to emerge in the world. When we turn around and embrace Jesus the Sermon on the Mount begins to happen! And it goes like this.

Matthew 5,6,7.