

Excerpt from The Gospel According to Matthew (1st c. CE)

Matthew 5:1-12; 5:21-26; 5:38-48; 6:8-13; 7:7-12. The Bible. New American Standard Version.

The Gospel According to Matthew 5-7 features the Sermon on the Mount of Jesus of Nazareth. It is said that he provided this sermon on a mountainside to his disciples and a large crowd around AD 30 at Galilee. As there are no actual mountains in the region where Jesus of Nazareth supposedly provided his sermon, many scholars assume the reference to "mountain" in the text refers to a description of the hilly area of Galilee. The Sermon on the Mount holds particular significance in the Christian religion as it holds teachings central to its practice, including the Lord's Prayer, the Golden Rule, and teachings related to the Ten Commandments.

The Sermon on the Mount; The Beatitudes

1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Personal Relationships

21 "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be

thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent."

38 "You have heard that it was said, AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you."

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Giving to the Poor and Prayer

8 "So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]'

Prayer and the Golden Rule

7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

Questions to Answer

1. In what ways does Jesus' teaching challenge or contradict the conventional outlook of his time (and of the capitalist West today)?

2. According to this Gospel, what is Jesus' central message? In answering, consider what characteristics of the “good life” Jesus would promote.
3. What are the larger social implications of the Sermon on the Mount?

Excerpt from The Gospel According to Luke (1st c. CE)

Luke 2:1-7; 5:27-32; 6:20-7:10. The Bible. New American Standard Version.

At the same time that Augustus and his heirs were establishing an imperial government in Rome, religious controversies in the eastern Mediterranean province of Judea were beginning to focus on the teachings of an itinerant teacher named Jesus. For several centuries many Jews had come to believe that the coming of the Messiah (anointed one) promised in the Hebrew Scriptures was immanent. The Messiah would be a descendant of David and a savior of the Jewish people. Exactly what kind of savior was open to debate. Some expected the Messiah to overthrow the Romans. Although Jesus discouraged resistance to the Romans, his followers believed him to be the Messiah. And while Jesus was executed by the Romans at the request of certain Jewish leaders, his followers claimed to have seen Jesus three days after he had been killed. His followers, called Christians, began making converts among both Jews and non-Jews. Today, more than two billion people claim to be Christian.

The Gospel According to Luke is one of many accounts of the teaching and active ministry of Jesus in the three years before he was executed and one of four to be included in the Christian Scriptures (New Testament). The Gospel is actually the first part of a history of the early Christian movement. The second half, known as the Acts of the Apostles, is also included in the Christian Scriptures. According to Christian tradition, Luke was a physician who traveled with the Apostle Paul. While not a modern historian, Luke was concerned with using reliable eyewitnesses and sources in composing his history. The following selection contains the Sermon on the Mount, the classic statement of Jesus' ethical teachings. It also contains passages that highlight the presence of Rome in Judea.

Jesus' Birth in Bethlehem

2 NOW it came about in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all were proceeding to register for the census, everyone to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register, along with Mary, who was engaged

to him, and was with child. And it came about that while they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her first-born son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Call of Levi (Matthew)

27 And after that He went out, and noticed a tax-gatherer named Levi, sitting in the tax office, and He said to him, "Follow Me." And he left everything behind, and rose and began to follow Him.

29 And Levi gave a big reception for Him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax-gatherers and other people who were reclining at the table with them. And the Pharisees¹ and their scribes ran grumbling at His disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax-gatherers and sinners?" And Jesus answered and said to them, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

The Beatitudes

20 And turning His gaze on His disciples, He began to say, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for in the same way their fathers used to treat the false prophets.

27 "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. And just as you want people to treat you, treat them in the same way. And if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you?

¹ The Pharisees were one of several important factions among Jews during the time of Jesus. Pharisees (which means separated ones) emphasized strict adherence to the Mosaic Law as a defining characteristic of Jews. They considered other Jews who did not separate themselves from the pagan world or strictly adhere to the Law as ritually unclean or sinners.

Even sinners lend to sinners, in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. And do not judge and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."

39 And He also spoke a parable to them: "A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he? Will they not both fall into a pit? A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher. And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye. For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit; nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

Builders and Foundations

46 "And why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? Everyone who comes to Me, and hears My words, and acts upon them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation upon the rock; and when a flood rose, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard, and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house upon the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great."

Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant

7 WHEN He had completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people, He went to Capernaum.

2 And a certain centurion's slave, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and about to die. And when he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave. And when they had come to Jesus, they earnestly entreated Him, saying, "He is worthy for You to grant this to him; for he loves our nation, and it was he who built us our synagogue." Now Jesus started on His way with them; and when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to

Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof; for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I, too, am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes; and to another, 'Come!' and he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the multitude that was following Him, "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith." And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

Questions to Answer

1. In your own words, summarize the ethical teachings of Jesus as described in this document.
2. The admonitions that Jesus gives in chapter 5:27-29 refer to how the Jews should react to mistreatment by the Romans. What does Jesus teach about responding to oppression?
3. What is the goal of life, according to Jesus? How does one achieve that goal?
4. What does this document tell us about Roman rule in Judea?