

The Character of the Kingdom

Matthew 5:1-48

OPENING

Almighty God, who in your Son went up the mountain and taught with the authority of the Law's own author: grant that we who hear these words may not admire them only, but be formed by them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

THE TEXT IN VIEW

Matthew has spent four chapters establishing who Jesus is: the son of David and son of Abraham, born of a virgin, called out of Egypt, baptized, tested in the wilderness, and gathering his first disciples. At 4:23 the Gospel gives us a summary of his ministry in three words, teaching and preaching and healing. Chapter 5 stops summarizing and lets us hear the teaching itself.

Two details in the opening verses carry weight. He goes up the mountain, which for a Jewish reader recalls Sinai and a law given through a mediator. And he sits down, which was the posture of an authoritative teacher rather than a wandering preacher. The crowds are present and the disciples draw near, so the sermon is spoken to both at once. That double audience runs through the whole discourse and the text never resolves it for us.

The question the Sermon answers is set by 4:17: the kingdom of heaven has come near. If that is true, what does life under this King look like? The answer that follows is not a list of entrance requirements. It is a portrait of a people who already belong to him.

KEY MOVEMENTS

- ◆ The Beatitudes, 5:3-12. A verdict pronounced over people the world would not congratulate. Verses 3 and 10 both close with the same promise, so the eight sayings sit inside a single frame.
- ◆ Salt and light, 5:13-16. Influence that cannot be kept private, with the glory landing on the Father rather than the one doing the work.
- ◆ Fulfillment and higher righteousness, 5:17-20. Jesus denies abolishing the law and claims to bring it to completion. Verse 20 sets the bar and governs everything after it.



FIVE SERMONS OF THE KING

- ◆ The six antitheses, 5:21–48. Murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation, and enemy love. The repeated formula is the point: he cites no authority but his own.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. If the Beatitudes describe rather than prescribe, what changes about how we read them?
2. Verse 16 tells us to let our light shine before others. Where is the line between visible faithfulness and performance?
3. Jesus intensifies rather than relaxes the commands. Does that make the Christian life harder than life under the law, or is something else going on?

NOTES

THIS WEEK

Matthew 6:1–34. Carry a question with you: 5:16 tells us to let our light shine before others, and 6:1 warns us against practicing righteousness before others. Watch how often Jesus repeats the phrase about the Father who sees in secret.

