

# The Context of the Sermon on the Mount - Part 1

by Dick Woodward

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*The Sermon on the Mount is a call to discipleship and a challenge to be part of the solution, not part of the problem, and to follow Jesus' will and the Father's will.*

**Duration:** 23:25

**Scripture:** Matthew 4:23-24, Matthew 5:1-20, John 6:2

**Topics:** "Discipleship"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the context of the Sermon on the Mount and the invitation and challenge Jesus presents to his disciples. He highlights that there are two kinds of disciples: the many and the few. The many believe there is an easy way to be a disciple, but they soon realize that it does not lead to being part of Jesus' solution. The speaker emphasizes the importance of not just saying but doing the will of Jesus and the Father, as many will come to Jesus on judgment day claiming to have done many wonderful works, but Jesus will evaluate them as workers of iniquity.

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## Transcript

Welcome to another lesson of the Mini Bible College. Today, we will begin a new course where we will study what is perhaps the most well-known yet misunderstood passage in all of the scripture, the Sermon on the Mount. We count it a real privilege for you to join us and trust that you will not only plan to be with us each time, but will invite someone to join us as we study the essence of the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

Now, here is our teacher. Welcome to this study of scripture, the Sermon on the Mount, which is found in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 5, 6, and 7. The Sermon on the Mount is one of the basic teachings of Jesus and still one of his great discourses. His Mount Olivet Discourse was a great discourse found in Matthew 24 and 25.

And another, of course, is the Upper Room Discourse, which we looked at when we studied the Gospel of John, if you were with us when we surveyed the New Testament. The Upper Room Discourse is the longest recorded discourse of Jesus, but the Sermon on the Mount is considered his most basic discourse. It is considered to hold the essence of the teaching of Jesus in terms of his values and his ethics.

There are people who say you could take these three chapters of the Gospel of Matthew, tear them out of the Bible, and throw the rest of the New Testament away. They think so much of the Sermon on the Mount, they think that the Sermon on the Mount is the essence of the whole Bible ethically. And so they think it's all you need.

It is certainly an important discourse of Jesus, but equally important are the many, many other teachings that are found in the Scriptures. In this first study of the Sermon on the Mount, we're going to see the Sermon on the Mount in its context. After we see the Sermon on the Mount in its context, we're going to examine again the Sermon on the Mount in terms of its content.

But in this first study, let's consider the context of the Sermon on the Mount. One of the rules for Bible study is that you should always learn to see passages of Scripture in their context. The word context means with the text.

It is always important to see what comes with the text that you are studying, for example. What came before the text? What was written after that text? What was going on at the time that the teaching was given? This is a very important rule for Bible study. So as we begin our study, let us begin by considering the context of the Sermon on the Mount in the setting in which it was given.

The Gospel of John mentions this story in its sixth chapter. In John chapter 6, it says that great multitudes of people are following Jesus at this very particular point in his early ministry. And these multitudes have every kind of problem you can imagine.

Now Jesus was about ministering to those problems and healing those people. Now in John chapter 6, verses 2 and 3, John tells us that when Jesus saw all these crowds and all their problems, he went up and sat on a mountain with his disciples. It really doesn't make a whole lot of sense as you read it in the Gospel of John.

But John's purpose is not to report to us the Sermon on the Mount. John wrote his Gospel last, and please note that 90% of what John tells us about, the other Gospel writers did not tell us about. Thus, it was not his purpose to give us the Sermon on the Mount teaching again.

He does make reference though to the context or the setting in which it was given when he says that Jesus went up on a mountain and there he sat with his disciples. Mark gives us a little more information. He tells us in Mark chapter 3, verse 7, And many things he was doing came to him.

And Jesus told his disciples that a small boat should be kept ready for him because of the multitude, lest they should crush him. For he healed many, for many with afflictions pressed about him to touch him. And he went up on the mountain and called to himself those whom he wanted.

And they came to him. Then he appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons. In Mark chapter 3 we learn the names of the twelve apostles whom he appointed.

Mark is telling us about this period early in the ministry of Jesus when his healing ministry is at its zenith. And people from all around are coming to him because they have heard of his power to heal. And he is healing every kind of problem imaginable.

In the middle of this great healing ministry, which took place on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and all around the Sea of Galilee slopes up into hills, one level after another. It was on one of those hillsides, we call mountainsides, that Jesus separated himself from the multitudes who were thronging him and crushing him, trying to touch him in order that they may be healed. But then at some point, Jesus withdrew from the crowd to this upper level, and he invited, according to Mark 3.13, those whom he desired.

By personal invitation they met him at that higher level. And then at that higher level, Matthew will tell us, Jesus gave this teaching we call the Sermon on the Mount. In Mark 3.13-14, you can put all of Matthew 5, all of Matthew 6, and all of Matthew 7. At the end of the teaching there in Matthew 7, very shortly after he comes off the mountainside, he commissions the twelve apostles according to Matthew's record.

The way Mark reports it, Jesus goes up on this mountainside and invites certain people to join him there. And as a result of this meeting he has with them there, Jesus appoints twelve to be with him and then to be sent out. That is the way Mark reports it to us.

That's the context of the Sermon on the Mount. Now let us come to Matthew, and at the end of Matthew 4.23, we will see Matthew's description of the context for this great teaching that we call the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 4.23 it says, Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures and the paralyzed. And he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, from the ten cities, from Jerusalem, from Judea, and the region across the Jordan followed him.

Now when Jesus saw these multitudes, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him and he began to teach them. Then you have Matthew 5, 6, and 7, which we call the Sermon on the Mount.

Do you see the context in which this great teaching was given? Dick Woodward likes to call it the First Christian Retreat. A retreat is a time when believers get away from their regular activities to refresh themselves spiritually. We will use this word retreat often when describing the Sermon on the Mount.

In the spiritual sense, a retreat is when you pull back from the hectic pace of life to find solitude and a time for prayer and contemplation. So that's what is meant in these teachings when we talk about the Sermon on the Mount as being the First Christian Retreat. It was something very strategic that Jesus was doing on this particular occasion.

To be an effective leader, you have to learn five things. You have to learn to analyze. You have to learn to organize.

You have to learn to deputize and then supervise. And finally, agonize. That is how you become an effective executive.

You analyze the situation and then you organize your strategic approach to that situation. While you organize, you have to learn to deputize unless you want to do everything yourself forever. Deputize means to put others in charge so that they can help you.

You must successfully deputize. Then you supervise those you have deputized. And since they never do it the way you would, instead of taking it back from them when they don't do it right or the way you would, you have to learn to agonize over those you supervise.

There's a sense in which we could apply this to Jesus. He knows what his mission is. His mission is to meet the needs that are represented by these crowds of people.

These crowds of people with all their problems really represent the world and all the problems that the people of this world have or have ever had in the physical, mental, emotional, and especially spiritual states that they're in. It is normal in today's world to put the socially unacceptable people into hospitals or institutions, people like lepers, for example, or just insane people. But in the day of Jesus, it was not like that.

All these people afflicted with problems that would be institutionalized today were right out there in the multitude that Jesus saw and met and touched. Many times in the gospel records, it will say that when Jesus saw these multitudes, he would begin weeping over the people. He wept.

The suggestion of the Greek word for wept is that his whole body convulsed with sobs over these multitudes because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. They did not know their left hand from their right. They could no longer decipher the difference between right and wrong.

They were lost. They were undone. They were hurting, broken people.

Those crowds, that multitude of people with their multitude of problems, bring into focus for us the context in which the Sermon on the Mount was given. Jesus was ministering to these crowds. Even though he was the Christ, he still was subjected to the limit of his human body.

He knew he could never solve all these problems by himself. So he analyzed, and then he organized that first Christian retreat. He called together on that mountainside some of his disciples.

And it seems to me that what he was saying to them at that first Christian retreat, which we call the Sermon on the Mount, was something like this. How would you like to be part of the solution to all those problems there in that crowd of people down there around the Sea of Galilee? How would you like to be part of the answer to all that need you see down there? Here when you see the context in which he gives the teaching of Matthew 5, 6, and 7, Jesus presents a challenge. And the challenge is this.

Are you part of the problem, or are you part of the solution? Are you part of the answer, or are you just another question mark? The challenge, of course, is this. Would you not like to be part of the solution? Would you not like to be part of the answer? Jesus is saying, if you will join me here at this retreat, I will show you through my teaching how you can be a part of the answer and part of the solution, part of my answer, part of my solution to all the problems down there. And remember, the multitude at the bottom of the mountain represents the world with all of its problems.

These problems are basically spiritual, but manifested or revealed through emotional, mental, and or physical problems. After Jesus gets this retreat organized, it is his purpose at this retreat to deputize those who will be part of his solution. Jesus calls them disciples.

We might call them deputies. He wants to make deputies or disciples. It's Jesus' plan that all he has to share with the world should be passed through the lives of his disciples.

We have a beautiful picture of this when we see Jesus feeding the 5,000. We saw this when we studied the Gospel of John. Remember, Jesus could have fed the multitudes directly.

He was the Son of God. He could have done it by himself. But Jesus strategically places the disciples between himself and that hungry crowd of people.

Jesus passes the food that is miraculously multiplied through his hands, through the disciples' hands, and into the hands of that hungry multitude. We call that the parable of the missionary vision of Jesus. That's kind of the same thing that you see here as we examine the context of the Sermon on the Mount.

After Jesus teaches in Matthew 5 and Matthew 6, Matthew 7, notice how his teaching comes to a conclusion. Beginning at verse 13 of Matthew 7, Jesus gives a great invitation and presents a challenge. But the challenge here is not, are you part of the problem or part of the solution? Are you part of the answer or just another question mark? The challenge here is something like, what kind of a solution are you? What kind of an answer are you? What kind of a disciple of mine are you? What kind of a disciple of mine do you want to be? That is the sense of this invitation with which he ends this great teaching.

I won't read it all, but summarize it, and then you'll see if this isn't true. Beginning at verse 13 and going through verse 14, Jesus seems to say this. There are two kinds of disciples.

There are two kinds of solutions or answers. There are the many and the few. The many think there's an easy way to be one of my disciples, to be part of my answer and part of my solution.

They think it all starts with a wide gate that is followed by a broad road, but they'd soon discover that that does not lead to being one of my solutions nor one of my answers. That leads to destruction, utter destruction. And many who profess to be disciples are on that broad road because they think that they can follow it and take the easy way.

They think there is an easy way to be a solution and an answer, but they never become a solution or an answer. So Jesus is challenging the people who attended that first retreat and all who wish to be his disciples by the way he concluded the retreat to be part of a solution. Now when it comes to solutions and answers and disciples, what kind of a disciple, what kind of a solution, what kind of an answer are we? Are we one of the many who think there's an easy way to accomplish these things? Or are we one of the few? Jesus said that there are the few, you might call them the committed minority, who know that in order to be his solution and his answer, it's going to have to start at a very small gate or a narrow gate.

And that narrow gate is going to be followed by a very difficult, disciplined way. But people who discover this do become one of his answers and one of his solutions, one of his true disciples. So the challenge is, are we one of the many or one of the few? And this has to do with the kind of disciples we are.

The next part of his invitation at the end of Matthew 7 is there are the false and the true. It's no surprise to Jesus that you have the false and the true among his professing disciples. Jesus taught in the parable of the wheat and the tares that it would be this way.

Jesus said that you have the father planting wheat in this field which is the world. But an enemy plants tares or weeds among the wheat. The question is asked, when Jesus gives this parable in Matthew 13, did you plant good seed in your field? Where did all the weeds come from? And then the question is asked, do you want us to weed the garden? And the answer is, oh no, because you will never tell the difference between the wheat and the weeds.

Let both grow together. And at the harvest, which is the judgment time, I will separate the wheat from the weeds. At the end of this invitation, at the conclusion of this retreat in Matthew 7, the second part of his invitation is this challenge.

Jesus asks, are you one of the false or one of the true solutions? Do you have the answers? Are you disciples of mine? The rest of the seventh chapter focuses on the third part of his invitation. Jesus says, there are many who say, but there are very few who do, who really do my will and the Father's will. Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, and I will say to them, I never knew you.

Depart from me, you evildoers. Both awesome and very sad words. People will come to Jesus on the judgment day and they will sum up their lives with these three words, many wonderful works.

And Jesus will evaluate their lives with these three words. And he will say, workers of iniquity. And then he will say, I never knew you.

You were not really the people who were doing my will and the will of my Father. You were not my disciples, not my true disciples. A lot of people think that the kingdom of God or the church of Christ or the cause of Christ is simply a matter of theological semantics.

It is more than getting it said right or agreeing on how it should be said, as if it were only a matter of how you say it. Jesus says in the third part of his invitation, are you one of those who say or are you one of those who do? Are you only a talker? Is your faith only a lot of theological semantics? Only a lot of religious talk? Or by the grace of God, are you one of those who do? Who really do the will of the Father as revealed through Jesus? Someone has said, what we really believe, we do. All the rest is just religious talk.

That seems to be the way that the Lord concludes this teaching we call the Sermon on the Mount. Well, there you have the context of the Sermon on the Mount, the context in which the teaching is given, this great teaching of Christ. We will look at the content and overview in our next study.

But before we come to the content of what he taught here at this First Christian Retreat, let us consider again the context here in which he taught it. The great challenge to you and me is this. Are you part of the problem or are you part of the solution? Are you part of the answer or simply another question mark? Are you part of the solution or are you part of the problem? Are you part of the answer that Jesus brought into this world or are you only another question mark? That is the great challenge we find as we consider the context of the Sermon on the Mount.

Remember that all the teaching found in Matthew 5, 6, and 7 will be given in this context and we should see it in that way. Also, never lose sight of those multitudes described so vividly for us in John 6 and Mark 3 and at the end of Matthew 4 because all the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount was directed toward them through the disciples, the deputies of Jesus. All the problems represented in that multitude represent the problems of this world and the people of this world.

According to Matthew, the first thing Jesus did at the beginning of his public ministry was to organize this retreat at which he could recruit solutions and answers, people who would be his solutions, his followers, his disciples, and his answers to all the problems represented in the multitudes of the people of this world. God bless you until next time. We trust that these lessons will encourage you to grow in your knowledge of the teachings of Jesus Christ and that they will encourage you to become a true follower, part of his

solution, part of our Lord's answers to the problems of the world.

Plan now to join us next time and remember to invite someone to join us when we will continue to study right here in the mini-Bible college. Until then, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ fill you to overflowing so you will demonstrate his grace to others.

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