

Significance of the sermon of the mount religion essay



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In this essay, I am going to explain the significance of the Sermon of the Mount and how it relates to the rest of the teachings of Jesus. I will start by defining the meaning of the term “ Sermon of the Mount”, the significance of the sermon of the mount and the structure of the Sermon of the Mount in Matthew 5: 3 – 7; 27. Furthermore, I will discuss the key theological themes in the Sermon of the Mount. I will conclude by reflecting on the centrality of the Sermon of the Mount to the other teachings of Jesus in the gospels.

WHAT IS THE SERMON OF THE MOUNT?

The term “ The Sermon of the Mount” originated from the title of Augustine’s commentary on Matthew 5 – 7, *De Sermone Domini in Monte*, which was published in 391 – 396 AD.

Matthew 5 – 7 became well known as the Sermon on the Mount in the 16th Century. The modern term of Matthew 5 – 7 is “ Sermon on the plain”. This term is used mainly to differentiate between Luke’s shorter version of the sermon of the mount from Matthew’s version. There are two versions of the Sermon on the Mount:

– Matthew’s version

Matthew 5: 3 – 7: 27 which consists of 106 verses.

– Luke’s version

“ Sermon on the plain” Luke 6: 20-49.[1]

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

ETHICAL TEACHING

The gospel of Matthew provided the Jewish Christians with evidences to ascertain their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus in the gospel of Matthew introduced the kingdom of heaven. Hence, the sermon of the mount is of great significance because it expounds the ethics of the Kingdom of heaven which was introduced by Christ Jesus. Therefore, the sermon of the mount summarised the code of conduct in this new kingdom of heaven.

Furthermore, the sermon of the mount set the standards of discipleship in the kingdom of heaven. In this sermon, Jesus showed his disciples how to live the life of the kingdom. This kingdom way of living lays great emphasis on the inner life which is in contrast to the outward workings of religious activities of the Sadducees and the Pharisees.[2] In addition, Jesus stated that, the ethical conduct of the disciples must exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees before they can enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5: 20). Henceforth, the disciples of Jesus are called to a superior ethical conduct which is by the Grace of God. This ideal character of

Discipleship in the kingdom of heaven is achievable by the infusion of the gift of righteousness in the spirit of the New Testament believer.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SERMON OF THE MOUNT

The Beatitudes forms the main introduction of the sermon of the mount. The central section of the sermon is from Matthew 5: 17 to Matthew 7: 12. This section opens and closes with Reference to The Law and The Prophets. The sermon ends by an epilog in Matthew 7: 13 – 27.[3]

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THE KEY THEOLOGICAL THEMES OF THE SERMON OF THE MOUNT

1) The Beatitudes (Matthew 5: 3 – 12)

The Beatitudes are named from the Latin word *Beatus* meaning blessed. These are the rewards from the blessings and responsibilities of discipleship. The Greek term means “ happy, fortunate”[4]. In Matthew, there are nine beatitudes and four in Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Mount. The word *Makarios* is at the beginning of the beatitudes. It means happiness which is as a result of God given salvation[5]. Jesus revealed in the beatitudes, the essential nature of true happiness. This happiness is achieved by relying and depending wholly on God.[6]

Andrew Perriman points out that the beatitude described a marginalized group within Israel that will benefit from future turn of events. His view established the eschatological dimension of the rewards of true discipleship in the kingdom of heaven[7]

Matthew 5: 14 states “ You are the light of the world. A city that is set a hill can not be hidden”. In John 8: 12, Jesus said “ I am the light of the world, he that follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life” This teaching in the Sermon of The mount has a direct comparison with Jesus’ teaching in the gospel of John. Jesus expects His disciples to shine in the midst of the darkness of this world. Hence, as Jesus is the light, the disciples will eventually become the light of the world.

2) The Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5: 17 – 20)

The new ethical standards put forward by Christ deals with the motives behind the actions of men. In accordance with Christ's Standard, sin begins in the mind and in the will of men[8]

In addition, Jesus said he has come to fulfil the Law and the Prophets. His ethical instructions reveal how the Law of the Torah will operate under the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, the Law and the Prophets are fulfilled in the inner life of motives behind the actions of men. The kingdom of heaven is within the heart of the New Testament believer. This kingdom is expected to produce corresponding actions that reflects the inner life of peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

3) The Antitheses (Matthew 5: 21 – 48)

The structure of the sayings of Jesus within Matthew 5: 21 – 48, have the same pattern: “ You have heard that it was said (by God) to those of old ... but I say to you...” The style of Jesus words repeats itself in six paragraphs. Three of the six paragraphs have similar parallels with Luke's Sermon on the Plain. The phrase “ but I say to you” seems to suggest that the sayings of Jesus is in opposition to the scripture of the Torah. Therefore, Matthew 5 : 21 – 48 is often referred to as the “ Antitheses”. Matthew is known for the antithetical structure of his writings. However, this antithetical style of writing can also be found in Luke 6: 27 “ But I say to you who hear” According to Davies and Allison, the antithesis has two primary functions:

- It shows the kind of attitude and behaviour that is required by Jesus in the life of His disciples.

– The demands of the ethical standards of Jesus surpassed those of the Torah without contradicting the Torah. For example, one can abstain from committing adultery and still lusts in his heart[9]

4) The Golden Rule and the Greatest commandment (Matthew 7: 12, Luke 10: 25 – 28, Matthew 22: 34 – 40).

“ Whatever you wish that others do to you, do so to them”. This statement has been known as the Golden Rule since the 18th century. There are various parallels to this statement in Greco – Romans, oriental and Jewish writings. The Golden Rule in Matthew 7: 12 according to Jesus is Law and The Prophets. That is, it sums up the whole essence of the Law and The Prophets in the Torah. The teaching of Jesus on the two greatest commandments in Mark 12: 28-34 “ love God and love your neighbour as yourself”. In Matthew 22: 40, Jesus said “ on this two commandments hang all the Law and The Prophets”. The Golden rule and the love commandments are the very essence of the scriptural teachings of Jesus. Furthermore, the Golden Rule in the sermon of the mount is the bedrock of all the teachings of Jesus as it is revealed in the gospel account of Luke, Mark, and John. In summary, the Golden rule in the sermon of the Mount has direct relationship to the major teachings of Christ in the gospels.[10]

THE EPILOG: TWO WAYS

The Epilog of the Sermon Of the Mount contains a series of contrasts. It starts with the contrast between the gate and the way which leads to death or life. There are other examples of contrast between “ two ways” in Deuteronomy 11: 26, 30: 15, Jeremiah

21: 8 and many Jewish and Christian writings. The Epilog summarizes the picture of the beauty in the life of anyone who makes the right decision in life.[11]

CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have attempted to show the significance of the Sermon Of the Mount and its relationship with the other teaching of Christ in the gospels. I approach this essay by exploring the theological themes in the Sermon on the Mount. The Golden Rule in the Sermon on the Mount is the foundation of the Law and the Prophets. This rule parallels with the two greatest commandments, which is Love the Lord your God with all your heart and love your neighbour as yourself. In conclusion, the Sermon on the Mount summarizes the totality of the ethical teachings of Christ in the gospel.