

Lesson
8

The Sermon on the Mount: “A More Excellent Way”

Matthew 5

Purpose To encourage class members to come unto Christ by applying the principles he taught in the Sermon on the Mount.

Preparation

1. Read, ponder, and pray about the following scriptures:
 - a. Matthew 5:1–12. On a mount in Galilee, Jesus teaches the Beatitudes to his disciples.
 - b. Matthew 5:13–16. Jesus declares that his disciples are “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.”
 - c. Matthew 5:17–48. Jesus declares that he has come to fulfill the law of Moses, and he teaches a higher law.
2. Additional reading: Luke 6:17–36; Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 14:35–37; Mosiah 13:28–35; Alma 34:13–16; 3 Nephi 12; Ether 12:11; Bible Dictionary, “Beatitudes,” 620; and “Sermon on the Mount,” 771–72.
3. If you use the attention activity, provide each class member with a pen or pencil and a piece of paper.
4. If the following materials are available, use them during the lesson:
 - a. The picture Sermon on the Mount (62166; Gospel Art Picture Kit 212).
 - b. A container of salt and a lamp.
5. Suggestion for teaching: Jesus Christ is the Master Teacher. As you study the Sermon on the Mount, notice his teaching methods and look for ways you can emulate him as a teacher. (See *Teaching—No Greater Call*, page 14, for other suggestions on how to follow the Savior’s example as a teacher.)

Suggested Lesson Development

Attention Activity As appropriate, use the following activity or one of your own to begin the lesson. Give each class member a piece of paper and a pen or pencil. Explain that the scriptures include many invitations from the Savior. You may want to have class members read the Savior’s invitations in Matthew 11:28–29 and 3 Nephi 27:27. Ask class members to write *The Savior invites me to:* at the top of the piece of paper. Then explain that this lesson focuses on the Sermon on the Mount, which contains many invitations from the Savior. Encourage class members to look for invitations during the lesson and to write them on the piece of paper.

Scripture Discussion As you teach the following scripture passages, discuss how they apply to daily life. Encourage class members to share experiences that relate to the scriptural principles. Because it would be difficult to ask every question or cover every point in the lesson, prayerfully select those that will best meet class members’ needs.

1. Jesus teaches the Beatitudes to his disciples.

Explain that many centuries after the premortal Christ gave the law of Moses on Mount Sinai, the mortal Messiah ascended another mount to proclaim a higher law in a discourse known as the Sermon on the Mount. Display the picture of the Sermon on the Mount.

The first teachings in this sermon are known as the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1–12). The word *beatitude* comes from the Latin *beatus*, which means fortunate, happy, or blessed (Matthew 5:3, footnote 3a). Read the Beatitudes and discuss them as outlined below.

- *Matthew 5:3*. What does it mean to be “poor in spirit”? (To be humble; see footnote 3b. See also 3 Nephi 12:3.) Why is it important that we be humble? How can we become more humble?
- *Matthew 5:4*. What are some ways the Lord provides for us to be comforted? (See John 14:26–27 and Mosiah 18:8–9 for some examples.) How have you been comforted in times of mourning?
- *Matthew 5:5*. What does it mean to be meek? (To be gentle, forgiving, or benevolent; see footnote 5a.) How can we develop meekness? (See Mosiah 3:19; Alma 7:23; 13:28.)
- *Matthew 5:6*. What did Jesus promise those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness”? (See Matthew 5:6; 3 Nephi 12:6.) What can we do to lift our appetites from the things of the world to things of righteousness?
- *Matthew 5:7*. How can we show mercy to others? Why do we need mercy from the Lord? (See Alma 42:13–15.)
- *Matthew 5:8*. What do you think it means to have a pure heart? How can we purify our hearts? (See Helaman 3:35.) Why must we have pure hearts if we are to see God and dwell with him? (See Moses 6:57.)
- *Matthew 5:9*. How can we be peacemakers in our homes and communities?
- *Matthew 5:10–12*. Why are righteous people sometimes persecuted? How should we respond to persecution? (See Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:35.)

If you used the attention activity, ask class members to list invitations in the Beatitudes that they feel are especially helpful for them.

2. Jesus declares that his disciples are “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.”

Read and discuss Matthew 5:13–16. As you discuss these verses, you may want to display a container of salt and a lamp.

- Jesus said that his disciples are “the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13; D&C 101:39). What are some uses for salt? (Answers may include that salt is a seasoning and a preservative.) How can Latter-day Saints be “the salt of the earth”?
- Invite a class member to read Doctrine and Covenants 103:9–10. What insights do these verses add about what it means to be “the salt of the earth”? How can we be “the saviors of men”? (Answers may include sharing the gospel and doing temple work.)

- How can Latter-day Saints be “the light of the world”? (Matthew 5:14; see also verse 16). What happens when a candle is placed “under a bushel”? (Matthew 5:15; note that a bushel is a large basket). How do we as Church members sometimes put our light under a bushel? How can we let our light shine in a way that will lead others to “glorify [our] Father . . . in heaven”? (See Matthew 5:16; 3 Nephi 18:24.)

3. Jesus teaches a higher law than the law of Moses.

Discuss Matthew 5:17–48. Invite class members to read selected verses aloud.

- Jesus said that he came to fulfill the law of Moses, not to destroy it (Matthew 5:17–18). How did he fulfill the law of Moses?

Explain that the law of Moses had been “given to the children of Israel, . . . for they were a stiffnecked people, quick to do iniquity, and slow to remember the Lord their God.” It was “a law of performances and of ordinances, . . . which [the Israelites] were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him” (Mosiah 13:29–30). Those who understood the law “[looked] forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law [was] fulfilled. For, for this end was the law given” (2 Nephi 25:24–25).

The Savior fulfilled the law of Moses when he atoned for our sins (Alma 34:13–16). After the Atonement, the people were no longer commanded to make animal sacrifices, which had been required as part of the law of Moses to point to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Instead, the people were commanded to “offer for a sacrifice . . . a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20; see also verse 19).

- Jesus said that his disciples’ righteousness should “exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees” (Matthew 5:20). What was lacking from the “righteousness” of the scribes and Pharisees? (They focused only on outward appearances of the law and ignored the importance of inner faithfulness. If they had observed the law as it was given, they would have recognized Jesus as the Messiah.)

In the upper left corner of the chalkboard, write *Ye have heard that it was said*. Explain that in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used these words when he referred to commandments that were part of the law of Moses. In the upper right corner of the chalkboard, write *But I say unto you*. Point out that Jesus used these words when he taught his disciples his higher law.

- In Matthew 5:21, what ancient law did Jesus refer to? (Write *Thou shalt not kill* below *Ye have heard that it was said*.) What higher law did Jesus give concerning this commandment? (See Matthew 5:22. Write *Do not get angry* below *But I say unto you*. Note that the phrase “without a cause” does not appear in the Joseph Smith Translation of Matthew 5:22 or in 3 Nephi 12:22.) How is the commandment to avoid anger a higher law than the commandment against murder? How do feelings of anger affect our relationship with God? What can we do to control feelings of anger and seek to eliminate them from our lives?
- The Savior spoke of bringing a “gift to the altar,” referring to the ancient practice of bringing sacrificial offerings to the altar (Matthew 5:23). What did Jesus say his disciples should do if they had angry feelings as they prepared to bring a gift to the altar? (See Matthew 5:23–24.) How might this apply to us?

- What should we do when someone has offended us? (See Matthew 5:24; 18:15; D&C 64:8–11.) What are the dangers of waiting for a person who has offended us to ask for our forgiveness?
- In Matthew 5:27, what ancient law did Jesus refer to? (Write *Thou shalt not commit adultery* below *Ye have heard that it was said.*) What law did Jesus give to supersede this commandment? (See Matthew 5:28. Write *Avoid lustful thoughts* below *But I say unto you.*) What are some results of unclean thoughts? (See Mosiah 4:30; Alma 12:14; D&C 63:16.) What can we do to keep our thoughts pure?
- The Joseph Smith Translation says that the eye and hand mentioned in Matthew 5:29–30 represent sins (Matthew 5:30, footnote 30*a*). What do these verses teach us about how we should deal with our sins?
- As recorded in Matthew 5:33, how did people in Old Testament times signify that they were telling the truth? (Write *Perform oaths to the Lord* below *Ye have heard that it was said.*) What law did Jesus give to supersede this practice? (See Matthew 5:34–37. Read the following statement by Elder Bruce R. McConkie. Then write *Keep your word* below *But I say unto you.*)

Elder Bruce R. McConkie said: “Under the Mosaic law the taking of oaths was so common and covered such a variety of circumstances that, in practice, little verity attended statements that were not made with an oath. . . . Under the perfect law of Christ every man’s word is his bond, and all spoken statements are as true as though an oath attended each spoken word” (*The Mortal Messiah*, 4 vols. [1979–81], 2:140).

- In Matthew 5:38, what ancient law did Jesus refer to? (Write *An eye for an eye* below *Ye have heard that it was said.* Explain that “an eye for an eye” meant that a person who injured another could receive the same injury as punishment; see Leviticus 24:17–21.) What commandment superseded this law? (See Matthew 5:39–40. Write *Turn the other cheek* below *But I say unto you.*) What principles did Jesus teach when he spoke of turning the other cheek to someone who hits us and giving our cloak to someone who takes our coat?
- In Matthew 5:43, what ancient practice did Jesus refer to? (Write *Love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy* below *Ye have heard that it was said.*) What commandment superseded this practice? (See Matthew 5:44–47. Write *Love your enemies* below *But I say unto you.*) How can we develop love for our enemies? (See Moroni 7:47–48 for one example.) How will our lives change when we love our enemies? How might their lives change?

If you used the attention activity, ask class members to look at the chalkboard and list the invitations in Matthew 5:17–47 that are especially helpful to them.

- How are we to understand the Savior’s command that we become perfect? (See Matthew 5:48, footnote 48*b*, which says that an alternate Greek translation of the word *perfect* is “complete, finished, fully developed.”) How can the command to be perfect motivate us rather than frustrate us?

President Joseph Fielding Smith said:

“I believe the Lord meant just what he said: that we should be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect. That will not come all at once, but line upon line, and precept upon precept, example upon example, and even then not as long

as we live in this mortal life, for we will have to go even beyond the grave before we reach that perfection and shall be like God.

“But here we lay the foundation. Here is where we are taught these simple truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ, in this probationary state, to prepare us for that perfection. It is our duty to be better today than we were yesterday, and better tomorrow than we are today. . . . If we are keeping the commandments of the Lord, we are on that road to perfection” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [1954–56], 2:18–19; see also D&C 93:11–14, 19–20).

- How does the Savior’s Atonement help us reach perfection? (See Moroni 10:32–33; D&C 76:68–70.) How do the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount help us “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him”?

Conclusion

Testify that the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount help us “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him” (Moroni 10:32). Encourage class members to apply those teachings in their lives. If you used the attention activity, ask class members to look at the invitations they have listed and to choose one or two that they will focus on during the coming week.

Additional Teaching Ideas

The following material supplements the suggested lesson outline. You may want to use one or more of these ideas as part of the lesson.

1. “A more excellent way” (Ether 12:11)

Invite a few class members to come to class prepared to share ideas about how the teachings in Matthew 5 can help them at home, at school, or at work.

2. The Savior’s teaching about divorce

If you or class members have questions about Matthew 5:31–32, see the fifth additional teaching idea in lesson 14 (see page 60).

3. Video presentation

The second segment of “New Testament Customs,” a selection from *New Testament Video Presentations* (53914), explains the term *schoolmaster*, which is used in Galatians 3:24–25 to describe the law of Moses. If you show this segment, discuss how the law of Moses was a schoolmaster to bring the people to Christ.