

Living Counter-Culturally in Pagan Society

Matthew 5:1-12

Sermon on Mt. addresses how God wants his people to live in the world today.

In light of much confusion about how Christ's words to the people of His day relate to our doctrine, and to the church today, we want to consider what those words say to us.

The church: Lighthouse in a Pagan Culture

Prov 29:18 *"Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint."*

lit., "become unbridled."

Many people lack any stable control in life—have no purpose for living. When we don't know what God expects of us, nothing gives us direction. We've been called as a lighthouse to a pagan culture.

That vision is introduced by our Lord in Sermon on Mt. Matt. 5-7

Jesus addresses fact that throughout history many have prided themselves in being moral—good people who'd never harm anyone

Many assent verbally to living by 10 commandments. Hard to present Christ to such; they live pretty well. "Don't need Him."

They've joined the rich young ruler who said to the Lord: *"All these I've kept since I was a boy..."* what am I lacking?

Birth of king is important for any country.

Among God's people this announcement was exciting motive for hope.

People were waiting to see the redemption of Israel & fulfillment of God's promises, so they received the announcement with great joy.

However, not everyone was ready to receive the announcement.

Matt. is book about people who weren't ready.

It was written to explain what happened to God's plan

– why it didn't work out like everyone thought it would.

Was it God's fault?

What happened?

AUTHOR AND DATE

Who wrote it? Tradition attributes it to Matt.

No serious refutation presented.

When? Sometime between A.D. 40 and 70

Synoptic problem – which was first?

Matt.'s placed 1st because of primacy of message.

Parallel expressions used by writers, & evolutionary presupposition that shorter & simpler documents would have been written first, commonly used to prove Mk. was written 1st & other writers used his work as starting point.

Why do people who don't accept evolutionary theory to explain origin of humanity, accept evolutionary theory to explain origin of the gospels?

Most commentaries affirm Matt. was placed 1st because of primary nature of message.

Primary nature of message leads to conclusion that Matthew was 1st gospel

Nature of message demonstrates it's needed 1st by early church, both for their sake as well as for Jews around them.

Matt deals with initial ?s, begging for answers
So it seems likely that Matt was 1st gospel

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Reconstruction – 400 years of silence

After O.T. reconstruction, when Israel's remnant returns to the land, period of silence ensues.

For 400 yrs Israel continues in ritualism & unbelief.

God sends other nations, particularly Ptolemies of Egypt, Seleucids of north (Syria), & Romans, to discipline them & call them back to Himself.

At conclusion of 400 yrs, God graciously intervenes & sends His Son to fulfill His promises to them.

Discontent under Rome's dominion

Period marked by **discontent** with situation under the authority of Rome, & by **expectation** that Messiah's about to come to deliver them & give them long-awaited victory over oppressors.

Messianic expectancy

Time Dan. predicted is coming to end.

Messianic coming

When Messiah came, though He fulfilled what God promised, He doesn't conform to what they want Him to be, so they reject Him.

Messianic crucifixion

Frustrated expectation – Why?

Their rejection brings Israel back under God's judgment

Destruction of Jerusalem

Destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, consummated by A.D. 135, brought to a close the period of hope.

PURPOSE AND THEME

Matt. attempts to resolve problem of their frustrated expectation:

What happened to God's plan?

Matt. attempts to answer their question.

He writes following death of Christ, at time when Messianic expectation has been high.

Based on **Zec. 9-10**, & other OT prophecies, they expected a 3-step restoration:

- return to the land
- coming of Messiah
- blessing for Israel

For non-Christian Jewish people–

Jew of 1st century, who heard & believed Zech.'s prophecy, was left with a problem.

What would their problem be?

They had returned to the land long before.

Messianic expectation ran high, but years passed and Messiah didn't come.
Therefore, neither did promised blessing.

What happened to God's plan?

How about for Christian Jewish people?

For Christian Jewish people–

Christian Jews did a *little* better.

They had returned to the land.

Messiah did come, in Jesus, the Christ.

But they didn't receive promised blessings of Messianic kingdom either!

What happened to God's plan?

Has God failed them?

Matt. wrote to answer their question.

Answer: Messiah did come,
but people rejected Him.

=> He rejects them
& institutes new form of kingdom

They'll be judged for their rebellion; restored later.

2 major themes:

1. *Jesus is the promised Messiah*
2. *What happened to God's plan for His people*

3 purposes:

1. *That Jewish readers might recognize Who Jesus is & trust Him.*
2. *That early church might understand their place in God's program*
3. *That they might use Matt.'s message to make disciples of all nations, as Christ commanded*

MESSIANIC AUTHENTICATION 1-7

Matt. begins to establish case re. what happened to God's plan by demonstrating that Jesus is Messiah.

HIS CREDENTIALS 1-4

Testimony from many sources, some unlikely & hostile, demonstrates that He's Messiah.

Testimony of His genealogy 1:1-17

Testimony of His birth 1:18-25

Testimony of the magi 2:1-12

Testimony of His origins 2:13-23

Testimony of John 3:1-12

Testimony at His baptism 3:13-17

Testimony of Satan 4:1-11

Testimony of His followers 4:12-22

Testimony of His works 4:23-25

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, & healing every disease & sick-ness among the people. ²⁴*News about him spread all*

over Syria, & people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, & the paralyzed; & he healed them.

²⁵ **Large crowds** from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea & the region across the Jordan **followed him.**"

In conclusion, crowds began to follow Him expectantly – coming from all over Israel.

HIS PROCLAMATION 5-7

As crowds follow Jesus, they listen to His words.

Logical question: *If King has come & kingdom is about to begin, will **we** be allowed to participate?*

Rich young ruler expresses what's on their minds: **"What more do I lack?"**

What are requirements to enter kingdom?

Answers from various perspectives in Sermon on Mt

Summary: What's His answer?

5:20 *"Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."*

How would they react to that answer?

Description of those accepted 5:1-16

Their godly character 1-12

Beatitudes describe people who participate in kingdom

=> same ones who enjoy true prosperity & contentment

It's not those who follow prescribed ritual

& put on religious show who enter the kingdom.

Notice contrast with **the Pharisees**.

In spite of their religious pretense,

NONE of these are them!

Entrance to kingdom based on internal, godly character.

³ *"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

They're "beggars" – know they have nothing to offer God

Aware of their need – come pleading to God for mercy.

⁴ *"Blessed are those who mourn,
for they'll be comforted."*

They confess their sin with great sadness.

Not content with the way things are.

⁵ *"Blessed are the meek, for they'll inherit the earth."*

Genuine humility and concern for others.

⁶ *"Blessed are those who hunger & thirst for righteousness, for they'll be filled."*
(=> satisfied; receive what they seek).

⁷ *"Blessed are the merciful,
for they'll be shown mercy."*

They show mercy.

Christ urges the religious to learn what it means:

"I desire mercy!"

He urges us to be merciful—

those who show mercy, receive mercy.

⁸*"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they'll see God."*

⁹*"Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they'll be called sons of God."*

Like our Father, we'll be characterized, as He is,
by making peace.

Not characterized by creating conflict.

¹⁰*"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

¹¹*"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you & falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me."*

¹²*"Rejoice & be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*

People who are content with present conditions in the world now,
won't be content in the coming kingdom.

In contrast, those who suffer & weep for the sake of righteousness can be sure there'll be just recompense in the future.

They will experience God's blessing in the kingdom.