



The Sermon on the Mount Study  
**Bible Study Session 30**  
**Matthew 7:28-29: Topic 29.0**

Study By  
*Lorin L Cranford*  
 cranfordville.com

**Greek NT**

7.28 Καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοὺς λόγους τούτους, ἐξεπλήρουντο οἱ ὄχλοι ἐπὶ τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ αὐτοῦ· 7.29 ἦν γὰρ διδάσκων αὐτοῦς ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων καὶ οὐχ ὡς οἱ γραμματεῖς αὐτῶν.

**Gute Nachricht Bibel**

28 Als Jesus seine Rede beendet hatte, waren alle von seinen Worten tief beeindruckt. 29 Denn er lehrte wie einer, der Vollmacht von Gott hat – ganz anders als ihre Gesetzeslehrer.

**NRSV**

28 Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, 29 for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

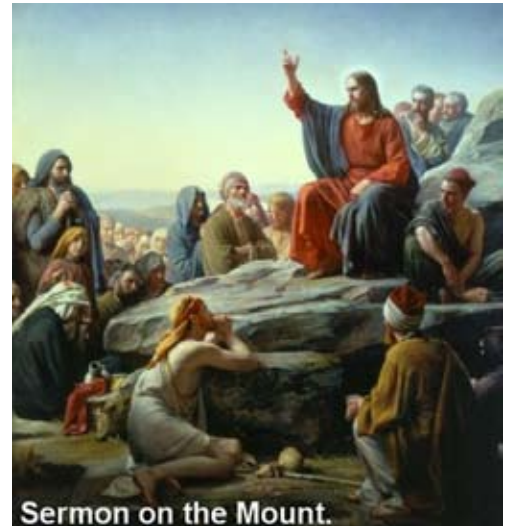
**NLT**

28 After Jesus finished speaking, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 for he taught as one who had real authority -- quite unlike the teachers of religious law.

**The Study of the Text:<sup>1</sup>**

**1. What did the text mean to the first readers?**

In this final pericope of the Sermon on the Mount we are made to understand how the people responded to Jesus' teaching. The essence of Matthew's declaration is a positive reaction. But one should look closely at his depiction, especially in light of the four appeals to decision contained in the Conclusion (7:13-27). Careful comparison reveals an important insight: the people were impressed but didn't necessarily commit themselves to Jesus. Elsewhere in the gospel narratives about Jesus similar language will be used to depict reaction to Jesus.<sup>2</sup> What emerges is that being impressed with Jesus and committing oneself to follow Jesus are two very different things. Much insight into modern application of this perspective then emerges from a careful analysis of the text in its historical and literary contexts.



The Lukan parallel in 7:1 in Luke's version of the Sermon is instructive to what Matthew does: "After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum."<sup>3</sup> For Luke, the narrative conclusion serves mainly as a transition into the next series of pericopes in his story of Jesus. He makes no mention of the reaction of the crowds who heard Jesus deliver these teachings. Consequently Matthew's recording the response of the listeners takes on greater significance. And this is heightened when the subsequent narrative conclusion markers in his gospel uniformly follow the Lukan pattern in distinction to here (See **Literary Aspects** below for details).

**Historical Context:**

The historical setting issues connected to 7:28-29 are limited. Mostly they focus on the methods of Jewish scribal teachers<sup>4</sup> in Jesus' day went about teaching and how people tended to respond to them. The contrast

<sup>1</sup>Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Mt. 8:10, 27; 9:33; 12:23; 21:20; 22:22; 27:14; Mk. 1:27; 2:12; 5:20, 42; 10:32; 12:17; 15:5; 16:8; Luke 4:22, 36; 5:9, 26; 8:25; 9:43; 20:26; 24:12.

<sup>3</sup>GNT: Ἐπειδὴ ἐπλήρωσεν πάντα τὰ ῥήματα αὐτοῦ εἰς τὰς ἀκοὰς τοῦ λαοῦ, εἰσῆλθεν εἰς Καφαρναοῦμ.

<sup>4</sup>In order to recognize the nature and meaning of the scribes at the time of Jesus, we must draw upon Jewish sources. The model of the scribes (Heb. sōpēr, writer) was Ezra (ca. 450 B.C.), who is characterized in Ezra 7:6 as a scribe skilled in the law of Moses which the God of Israel had given. The list of scribes, who originally took over the priestly task of interpreting and applying the law, was derived from him. In the Hellenistic age their significance as teachers of the law grew, as they were faced with a high-priesthood that was largely Hellenized. Consequently, under Salome Alexandra (7667 B.C.) scribes of a Pharisaic orientation took their place in the gerousia, the old representative body and earlier form of the Sanhedrin. Increasingly they gained in significance.

The scribes were exegetes, interpreters of Scripture, who established its instructions in a binding way for the present; teachers, who sought to equip the greatest possible number of pupils with the methods of interpretation; and jurists, who, as trial judges,

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that Matthew makes between the response of the crowds to Jesus<sup>5</sup> and also to the ‘scribes’ raises an interesting historical question: *how did the scribes teach so that they did not produce a similar reaction from the listeners?* The answer to this question is somewhat difficult to describe in great detail because of limited information from scribal teaching styles during the first Christian century. Later on very detailed information is available, but it is not clear whether the later patterns were present during Jesus’ day or not. The Matthean contrast centers on the tone of divine authority in the words of Jesus in contrast to the words of the Jewish scribes. But how was that? In the tone of voice? In the style of teaching? Just what? If the later Midrashic patterns of the Jewish rabbis can provide insight here, then the picture becomes clearer. Later rabbinical teaching would depend primarily upon quoting the view of an earlier highly recognized rabbi as the authority for the particular interpretation of the Torah being given. No phoney ‘God language’<sup>6</sup> would dare be used to justify any viewpoint. The appeal was to one of the recognized experts in the Torah as a justification for the interpretation of the sacred scripture. The style of teaching is unclear. Whether it was boring or exciting cannot be determined from existing information. Plus, the emotional impact of teaching is a hugely culturally determined dynamic.

The nature of Matthew’s verbal depiction of the reaction of the crowd by the use of the Greek verb ἐξεπλήσσαντο stresses surprise rather than excitement, primarily at the level of shock.<sup>7</sup> Clearly, the crowd did not expect an untrained Galilean Jew to be able to deliver a message from God with such power and persuasiveness. The use of the Imperfect tense in the Greek verb stresses the beginning of an extended period of disbelief; that is, their shock wasn’t momentary, it continued for some time. I suspect that lots of discussion took place as the people made their way back home after hearing Jesus speak.



administered the law in practical situations (cf. Sir 38:24–30). They exerted their greatest influence through their teaching activity in the synagogues and schools for boys, which existed after the 1st cent. A.D.

With the increasing significance of synagogues in the first century after Christ, the scribes gained more power and reputation, which is suggested by the address “rabbi” (“rabbuni,” “rab”). Because knowledge of the Torah distinguished the scribes, birth and descent did not form the basis for entrance into this respected position, but rather intensive study at the feet of a famous teacher, which consisted essentially of learning by memory the rabbi’s teachings. Ordination by laying on of hands later accompanied the successful completion of the course of study. Most scribes were married, in observance of the command associated with the creation in Gen 1:28, and were involved in manual work in order to earn their living, since they received no remuneration for teaching.” [Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, vol. 1, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990-), 259–260]

<sup>5</sup>Matthew uses ἐξεπλήσσαντο οἱ ὄχλοι ἐπὶ τῇ διδασκίᾳ αὐτοῦ to frame the response. In similar fashion he uses the same expression to define the listener response to Jesus in 13:54 and 22:33 (cf. also 19:25). Mark (1:22; 6:2; 7:37; 10:26; 11:18) and Luke (4:32) employ the same expression to define listener response to Jesus’ words.

Mt. 13:54 (NRSV): 54 He came to his hometown and began to teach the people in their synagogue, *so that they were astounded* and said, “Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of power? 55 Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? 56 And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all this?”

Mt. 22:33 (NRSV): “And when the crowd heard it, *they were astounded at his teaching.*”

<sup>6</sup>For example, the preferencing of comments by “God told me this...” Note that neither did Jesus use such language, nor did any of the apostles. This kind of appeal to authority is a relatively modern phenomena found only among a few religious groups of our day. It has dangerous undertones and more often than not leads to heresy.

<sup>7</sup>ἐκπλήσω Att. ἐκπλήττω MPO<sup>1</sup> 7:3; 1 aor ἐξέπληξα; in N<sup>1</sup> (and LX<sup>x</sup>) only in pass—impf ἐξέπλησόμην; 2 aor ἐξέπλάγην (Ho<sup>m</sup>. et al; LX<sup>x</sup>, TestSo<sup>1</sup>; TestAb<sup>1</sup> A 3 p. 80, 13 [Stone p. 8]; TestJo<sup>b</sup>; ApcrEz<sup>k</sup> [Epip<sup>h</sup>. 70, 12]) to cause to be filled with amazement to the point of being overwhelmed, amaze, astound, overwhelm (lit: strike out of one’s senses), act τινά someone (Appia<sup>n</sup>, Mithrid. 116 §566; Ammonius<sup>1</sup> Hermiae in Aristotle, Lib. de Interpr. p. 66, 6 Busse τὸν ἀκροατήν; Jos., Bell. 7, 419) <sup>B</sup> 1:3 (Himerius<sup>1</sup>, Or. 39 [=Or. 5], 7 of an ‘overwhelming’ sight).—Pass. in act: sense be amazed, overwhelmed w. fright (Dio Chrys<sup>1</sup>. 80 [30], 12) οἱ μαθηταὶ ἐξεπλήσσαντο σφόδρα the disciples were terribly shocked Mt 19:25; Mk 10:26; or wonder (Dio Chrys<sup>1</sup>. 71 [21], 14; SI<sup>o</sup> 1168, 46 [IV b.c.]; Jos., Ant. 8, 168; 17, 110;142) Mt 13:54; Mk 6:2; 7:37; Lk 2:48 the parents of Jesus were dumbfounded; MPO<sup>1</sup> 7:3. W. the reason given: ἐπὶ τινί at someth or someone (X, Cyr. 1, 4, 27 ἐπὶ τῷ κάλλει; Dio Chrys<sup>1</sup>. 29 [46], 1; Aelia<sup>n</sup>, VH 12, 41) Mt 7:28; 22:33; Mk 1:22; 11:18; Lk 4:32; 9:43; Ac 13:12; <sup>B</sup> 7:10; 16:10.—M-M. [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 308.]

After listening to various scribes teach “in Moses’ seat”<sup>8</sup> in the outer court of the temple in Jerusalem, they would depart and quickly forget what had been said, or else spending some time debating whether the scribe was correct or not in his interpretation of the Old Testament text.

### **Literary Aspects:**

The discourse material, 5:3-7:27, has ended and Matthew now frames this material with a historical marker as the narrative termination of the Sermon just as 5:1-2 had marked the narrative introduction to the Sermon.<sup>9</sup> Such markers are common in Matthew as can be seen in 11:1, 13:53; 19:1 and 26:1.<sup>10</sup>

Awareness of the literary aspects helps develop an accurate interpretation of these verses.

### **Literary Form:**

The genre of these two verses is a historical narrative. In this instance 7:28-29 serves as the closing narrative text in tandem with 5:1-2, which serves as the opening narrative text.

**5:1-2:** “1 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:”

*Text of the Sermon: 5:3-7:27*

**7:28-29:** “28 Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, 29 for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.”

The narrative introduction in 5:1-2 set up the scene with the ‘characters’ being positioned for the speech. Jesus was setting in typical scribal fashion; everyone was ‘on a mountain’ in the manner of Moses’ receiving the Law from God. The disciples were the direct target of Jesus’ words, while the crowds of people sat further away but were permitted to ‘listen in’ on what Jesus was telling His disciples.

The narrative conclusion focuses not on the disciples, nor on Jesus, but rather the reaction of the crowds of people who had listened to His words to the disciples. Quite logically, the crowds who were not familiar with Jesus at this point were ‘shocked’ by His teaching, while no mention is given regarding the disciples’ reaction. They had heard Him teach already and evidently were not particularly surprised by what they heard Him say.

This narrative formation by Matthew is somewhat like that in Luke<sup>11</sup> but with important differences. Luke ties the initial setting details in v. 20a closer to the Summary Narrative in 6:17-19. Matthew presents a Summary Narrative prior to the Narrative Introduction in 4:23-25 with limited connection between the two units of text. Matthew in targeting a Jewish Christian readership of his gospel stresses the traditional Jewish aspects much more prominently such as the mountain, sitting posture of Jesus etc. Both gospel writers signal that the Sermon was directed to the disciples, while a larger crowd was present and also listening to what Jesus said.

Luke closes his narration of the Sermon by mentioning simply that Jesus finished speaking ‘in the hearing of the people’ (εἰς τὰς ἀκοὰς τοῦ λαοῦ) and then left for Capernaum. Both Luke and Matthew focus on the crowd rather than either Jesus or the disciples in their Narrative Conclusion. But Matthew highlights

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Matt. 23:2 (NRSV): “1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, 2 ‘The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; 3 therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.’”

<sup>9</sup>Mt. 5:1-2 (NRSV): “1 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:...”

<sup>10</sup>Mt. 11:1 (NRSV): “1 *Now when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples*, he went on from there to teach and proclaim his message in their cities.”

Mt. 13:53 (NRSV): “53 *When Jesus had finished these parables*, he left that place.”

Mt. 19:1 (NRSV): “1 *When Jesus had finished saying these things*, he left Galilee and went to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan.”

Mt. 26:1 (NRSV): “1 *When Jesus had finished saying all these things*, he said to his disciples,”

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Luke 6:17-7:1.

**Narrative Introduction, 6:17-20a:** 17 He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. 18 They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. 19 And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. 20 Then he looked up at his disciples and said:...

*Text of the Sermon: 6:20b-49*

**Narrative Conclusion, 7:1:** After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.



the response of the crowds to Jesus while Luke simply mentions that they heard what Jesus said, which is the first signal by Luke that the crowds were listeners to the words of Jesus along with the disciples.

Why Matthew chooses to stress the response of the crowds is not certain. It very well could have something to do with his Markan source for much of his gospel narrative. In Mark 1:22 virtually the exact phraseology is found: "They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."<sup>12</sup> Although the setting for the two narratives is different, the reaction of listeners to Jesus' words are depicted exactly the same way.<sup>13</sup>

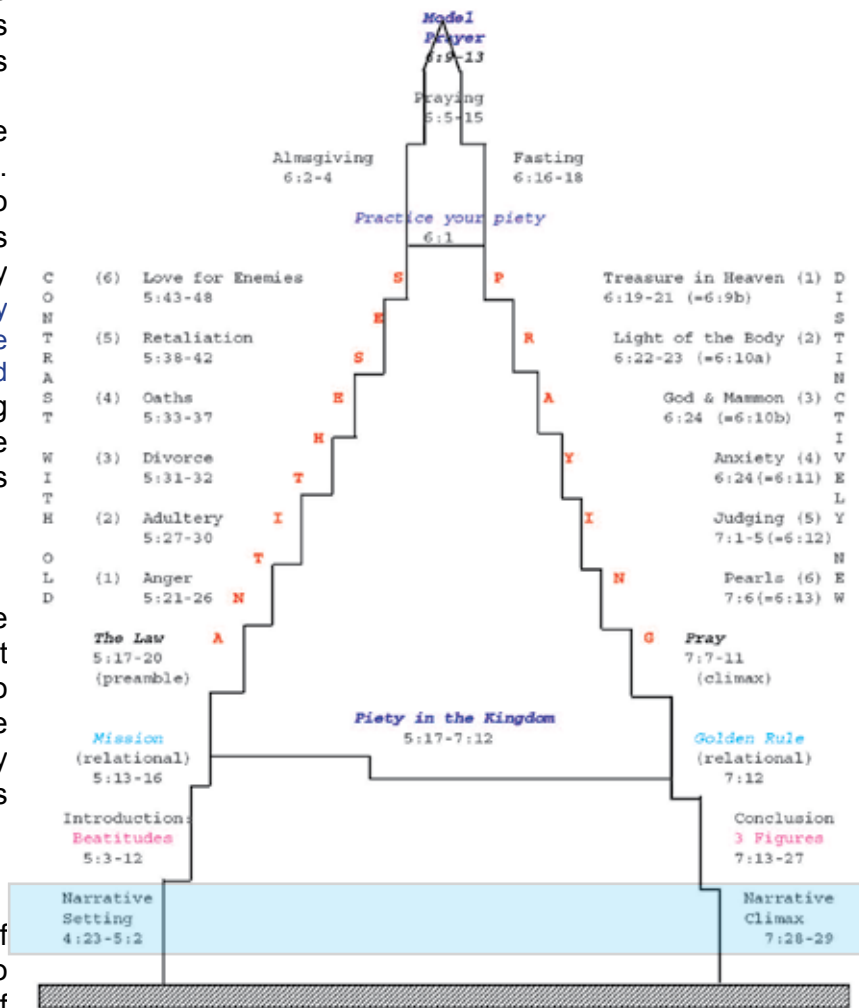
**Literary Setting:**

From the above discussion the literary context of 7:28-29 is clear. It stands as the Narrative Conclusion to the Sermon and thus closes out the discourse text of 5:1-7:29. The literary diagram to the right highlights this setting.

**Literary Structure:**

The internal organization of ideas is rather clear and easy to grasp. The following block diagram of the underlying Greek text illustrates visually this arrangement of ideas.

**The Literary Structure of the Sermon on the Mount**  
Matthew 4:23-7:29



Source: Lorin L. Cranford, *Study Manual of the Sermon on the Mount: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publishing Inc., 1988), 320. Adapted from Gunter Bornkamm, "Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977-78): 419-432.

7:28 And  
I **it happened that**

when Jesus had finished these words  
the crowds were astonished  
at His teaching;

7:29 for  
J **He was teaching them**  
as having authority,  
and  
K ---  
not as their scribes.

The over arching structure is clear. Matthew begins with a declaration of the response of the crowds when Jesus finished teaching (statement #1). This is followed by stating a reason for this response

<sup>12</sup>Mk. 1:22: καὶ ἐξεπλήσσαντο ἐπὶ τῇ διδασκίᾳ αὐτοῦ· ἦν γὰρ διδάσκων αὐτοὺς ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων καὶ οὐχ ὡς οἱ γραμματεῖς.

Mt. 7:28-29: Καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοὺς λόγους τούτους, ἐξεπλήσσαντο οἱ ὄχλοι ἐπὶ τῇ διδασκίᾳ αὐτοῦ· ἦν γὰρ διδάσκων αὐτοὺς ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων καὶ οὐχ ὡς οἱ γραμματεῖς αὐτῶν.

<sup>13</sup>The Lukan parallel to Mk. 1:22 in Lk. 4:31-32 makes a similar point: 31 He went down to Capernaum, a city in Galilee, and was teaching them on the sabbath. 32 **They were astounded at his teaching, because he spoke with authority.** [καὶ ἐξεπλήσσαντο ἐπὶ τῇ διδασκίᾳ αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἐν ἐξουσίᾳ ἦν ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ.]

(statements J and K).

The way Matthew introduces the crowd response is significant: Καὶ ἐγένετο. This more formal, Jewish pattern is used by the gospel writer to end all five of the major discourses in his gospel.<sup>14</sup> Thus it has stylistic importance for Matthew in order to signal the end of a major set of teaching, i.e., discourse, material in the gospel. From a literary aspect, Matthew has organized his story of Jesus about five major speeches of Jesus in the then popular Jewish pattern of the ‘five books of Moses.’<sup>15</sup> This first introductory discourse has now ended.

### Exegesis of the Text:

**The reaction to Jesus’ teaching, v. 28:** “Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching,” (Καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοὺς λόγους τούτους, ἐξεπλήσσαντο οἱ ὄχλοι ἐπὶ τῇ διδαχῇ αὐτοῦ).

Matthew injects himself back into the narrative as the narrator offering his comments on the scene that he is painting. Jesus finished what he wanted to say to the disciples. Interestingly, Matthew characterizes the Sermon as τοὺς λόγους τούτους (‘these words’), while Luke labels them πάντα τὰ ῥήματα αὐτοῦ (‘all his words’). Luke’s phraseology stresses the oral delivery of words more than does Matthew’s. Additionally, Matthew also labels the words of the Sermon as τῇ διδαχῇ αὐτοῦ (‘his teaching’). Note that the typical words for preaching<sup>16</sup> over against teaching are not used by Matthew to define the Sermon. The major significance of that is to point to the disciples as the target of the Sermon, rather than to the crowds. Jesus was speaking to ‘insiders’ while allowing ‘outsiders’ to listen in to His words.

The reaction of the crowds is the primary point of Matthew’s initial declaration. The heart of their response was ongoing shock as denoted by the Greek verb ἐξεπλήσσαντο. This verb is closely related to fear and may very well suggest also that the concluding words about final judgment created intense uncomfortableness at the prospect of facing God in judgment.<sup>17</sup>



<sup>14c</sup>Compare Num 16:31; Deut 31:1 LXX; 31:24; 32:45; Jer 26:8. Particularly close is 2 Bar: 87:1: ‘And it came to pass when I had ended all the words of this epistle ...’. Matthew repeats his closing formula five times, at the end of each major discourse (5–7, 10, 13, 18, 24–5). On the Semitism, καὶ ἐγένετο, see p. 82.” [W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 725]

15Cr. Lorin Cranford, “Literary Outline: The Gospel according to Matthew,” cranfordville.com.

### The Prologue Matt. 1-2

#### Book One: The Son begins to proclaim the Kingdom Matt. 3:1-7:29

Narrative: Beginnings of the ministry Matt. 3:1-4:25

Discourse: The Sermon on the Mount Matt. 5:1-7:29

#### Book Two: The mission of Jesus and his disciples in Galilee Matt. 8:1-11:1

Narrative: The cycle of nine miracle stories Matt. 8:1-9:38

Discourse: The mission, past and future Matt. 10:1-11:1

#### Book Three: Jesus meets opposition from Israel Matt. 11:2-13:53

Narrative: Jesus disputes with Israel and condemns it Matt. 11:2-12:50

Discourse: Jesus withdraws from Israel into parabolic speech Matt. 13:1-53

#### Book Four: The Messiah forms his church and prophesies his passion Matt. 13:54-18:35

Narrative: The itinerant Jesus prepares for the church by his deeds Matt. 13:54-17:27

Discourse: Church life and order Matt. 18:1-35

#### Book Five: The Messiah and his church on the way to the passion Matt. 19:1-25:46

Narrative: Jesus leads his disciples to the cross as he confounds his enemies. Matt. 19:1-23:29

Discourse: The Last Judgment Matt. 24-25

### The Climax: Death-Resurrection Matt. 26-28

From Wednesday to Thursday night Matt. 26:1-75

From Friday morning to Saturday Matt. 27:1-66

From Sunday to the End of the Age Matt. 28:1-20

<sup>16</sup>These include the κηρύσσω and εὐαγγελίζω word groups. .

<sup>17</sup>ἐξεπλήσσαντο οἱ ὄχλοι ἐπὶ τῇ διδαχῇ αὐτοῦ. This phrase, borrowed from Mk 1:22, appears again (slightly modified) Page 5 of Bergpredigt Study

This focus on the disciples has interpretive implications as were raised in Study One on the Sermon. The Sermon is not an evangelistic tool; instead, it is a discipleship channel. The assumption of the Sermon is that listeners are already 'disciples' and are seeking to understand how to live in the Kingdom a life that is pleasing to God and that will prepare them to successfully face Almighty God in final judgment. That it can speak to 'outsiders' is unquestioned, but that is not its basic objective. Thus Gerhard Kittel's interpretive perspective completely misses the mark. Equally off the mark is the Dispensational relegation of the Sermon to a supposed thousand year reign of Christ, along with Albert Schweitzer's mistaken notion of a Plan B option of Jesus. As the study of the text of the Sermon has consistently shown, the interpretive views that see the Sermon as 'good works' miss the mark as well.

The Sermon begins with commitment to Jesus as the Teacher of the Sermon. In the posture of commitment to Him, one then hears His words giving direction and definition to foundational principle of discipleship under the rule of God over one's life. This perspective corrects a distortion often made of Paul that salvation is defined solely as an faith commitment initial rite publicly affirmed in baptism. Salvation begins with this commitment, but this is only the starting point. The Pauline concept of the lordship of Jesus corresponds clearly to the principles of the Sermon that faith **MUST** be lived out in consistent obedience to Christ if it is genuine. James in his infamous 'faith and works' emphasis in Jas. 2:14-26 has elaborated on the Sermon at just this point.

**The reason for the reaction to Jesus' teach, v. 29:** "for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (ἦν γὰρ διδάσκων αὐτοὺς ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων καὶ οὐχ ὡς οἱ γραμματεῖς αὐτῶν).

The foundation of the people's astonishment at Jesus' teaching was the authority with which He spoke. Matthew's point is clearly that divine authorization penetrated these words of Jesus so that they came though with the Heavenly Father's stamp of approval clearly evident to the listeners. To the disciples already committed to Jesus as God's Son and Messiah, this authority was not a surprise. But to the 'outsiders' curious about Jesus, this tone of divine authorization was quite surprising.

It stood in stark contrast to what they often heard from the Jewish scribes in the temple and in the synagogues. In part, the words taught by the scribes focused attention on the scribal interpretative perspective on the Old Testament Law. One could easily agree or disagree that the scribe correctly interpreted the scripture text. But with Jesus' words in the Sermon, the focus is on Him and His claim to speak directly from God, even at a level higher than did Moses. Thus the listener is forced to accept or reject the Teacher, not just His words.

How many accepted Jesus from this Sermon? From the astonishment of the crowds, one cannot conclude any converts, for the verb ἐξεπλήσθη carries no suggestion of discipleship commitment as an outcome of listening to Him. They were impressed but whether that turned into discipleship commitment the text doesn't say. In fact the subsequent pericopes following the Sermon in chapters eight and nine stress growing opposition to Jesus. Particularly important is the so-called 'Would-be Followers of Jesus' pericope in 8:18-22 clearly implying that many were not prepared to make the required commitment to Jesus.

Discipleship in the Kingdom of Heaven is demanding and requires our best and most consistent commitment. Anything less will prove to be a spiritual disaster on the Day of Judgment. One cannot substitute religious actions for discipleship commitment. Jesus makes it abundantly clear that doing the will of God must stem from the very core of one's being down inside. But also that it must flow outward in sincere and authentic expressions of devotion to God. Thus it can be described correctly as a life changing transformation of a person's existence inside and out. As the apostle Paul experienced this he described it with these words (2 Cor. 5:17 NRSV): "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has

in the redactional 22:33. Compare also Mk 11:18; Lk 4:32; Acts 13:12. In Mark and Luke, the verb, ἐκπλήσσω, sometimes refers to the reaction that naturally follows an extraordinary event or miracle (Mk 7:37; Lk 2:48; 9:43). This is never so in Matthew's gospel, where the word is reserved exclusively for the response provoked by Jesus' words (7:28; 13:54; 19:25; 22:33). The addition by Matthew of ὄχλος (cf. 4:25; 5:1) displaces the impersonal plural of Mk 1:22. The disciples, oddly enough, are not mentioned. We do not hear that they too were amazed.

"The passive of ἐκπλήσσω can mean to be 'amazed' or 'overwhelmed' either with wonder, as in 13:54, or with fright, as in 19:25 (cf. BAG<sup>p</sup>, s.v.). Because both meanings are appropriate to 7:28-9, maybe the distinction just made should here be abandoned. If Jesus' teaching would cause wonder because of its novelty (cf. Mk 1:27; Jn 7:46; and see below),<sup>51</sup> it would also, given that the note of judgement has been rung so loudly at the end of chapter 7, be natural for people to react with fear. (The imperfect tense has the force of indicating continued amazement or wonder, as though the people returned to their homes still pondering what it all meant.)" [W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 728]

passed away; see, everything has become new!" Truly, the words of Jesus in the Sermon, when implemented in a person's life, will produce this kind of transformation.

The Kingdom of Heaven is the anchor point of the Sermon. The concept is central to the teaching of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. It is the same concept as the Kingdom of God. And the concept corresponds to Paul's contention of confessing Jesus as Lord. All of these labels depict the absolute authority of God over one's life. To be in the Kingdom is to consistently obey Jesus as Lord.

But the richness of the concept of the Kingdom is profound. The theological principle of 'already but not yet' is affirmed by Matthew in his framing of Jesus' words in the Sermon. We are by virtue of our commitment to Jesus already under God's authority and rule. Yet that reign of God through Christ will not be fully realized until the end of the age and the coming of Christ to take absolute control of the Father's creation. With the ushering in of the eternal order God will truly have total control fully expressed and acknowledge by all His creation. That subsequent 'entry point' into the Kingdom will mean a purging out of all sin and impurity, along with those clinging to their rebellious ways. Eternal damnation will be their unending fate. But the people of God will step into the full realization of the indescribable blessings of God's total reign over all things. The Sermon lays out the program of obedience to Christ that will prepare us to make that entry successfully on the Day of Judgment.

## **2. What does the text mean to us today?**

1) What is your impression of Jesus?

2) How seriously do you take His words?

3) Are you willing to implement the principles of the Sermon into your life?