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The Life: ~~Under~~ The Sermon on the Mount I

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The Life: ~~Under~~ The Sermon on the Mount I

The Sermon on the Mount: St. Matthew's version. The next great document to the Christ's summary of the gospel law is the Sermon on the Mount; and this is but an extension into detail, and a commentary on the statement and summary of the law already considered.

I shall follow the sermon as set forth in St. Matthew, as it is there in the completest form among the New Testament writers. St. Luke is the only other writer in the Gospels who gives any considerable part of this sermon, and he divides it really into two parts, and gives it in two widely separated chapters, the sixth and the twelfth. The first part, Luke 6:17-49, seems to be a different occasion, and a different setting from that given on the mount according to St. Matthew. For Luke's setting is in a "plain" in the presence of a great multitude out of all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon. Many came to be healed of physical infirmities. To this mixed multitude the Master delivered a discourse which includes a large part of the principles set forth in Matthew chapters five, six and seven; but greatly curtailed, extending only from verse seventeen to forty-nine of Luke's chapter six. Another part of the sermon, a fragment, is found in Luke 12, which seems more especially directed to those whom *the Master* had called to be his disciples—more especially the Twelve (see Luke 12:22).

The Beatitudes. The Beatitudes with which the Sermon on the Mount **opens** (following from now on St. Matthew) might well be regarded as statements of the results growing out of acceptance of, and living in harmony with, the Master's all-inclusive one "Great

For the two lessons on the Sermon on the Mount, chapters 50 and 51, Roberts recommended readings in Matthew, Luke, 3 Nephi, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the "whole of the four gospels passim. Also Doctrine and Covenants passim." In chapter 51, he also refers the reader to his 1909 work on the Book of Mormon, *New Witnesses for God*.

Commandment”—love of God and love of man. For love of God and love of man is the “fulfilling of the law,” and reaching its complete fruition shall mellow man’s nature and his life to the Beatitudes combined. The Christ was all the Beatitudes express.

Discipleship: The glory and responsibility of it. Having closed his exordium on the Beatitudes, the Savior directly addressed the disciples as to their responsibilities as disciples, destined to follow his doctrines: “Ye are the salt of the earth.” Salt, the preservative element; the symbol in man’s thought of wholesomeness; that which renders tasteless things palatable. The symbol also of wisdom, but best regarded as the preservative element. How gracious the characterization: “Ye are the salt of the earth”; but what a tremendous responsibility runs parallel with that asseveration! “But if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it ⟨the world⟩ be salted?” The salt “is thence[forth] ⟨found⟩ good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men” (Matt. 5:13). Discipleship means nothing unless it holds first to the doctrine and the example of the Christ, both in form and substance; unless disciples do this, they are as salt that has lost its savor and good for nothing, and become despicable!

~~The disciples of Christ, “The light of the world: And Again~~ *the Christ* to his disciples: “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house” (Matt. 5:14-15). Again, noting the exalted place granted to his following and with that exaltation comes again an equal responsibility; hence the admonition: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). Then comes a most important statement, linking up the true and pure system of ethics the Christ is unfolding with the righteous law of God of previous dispensations, he said:

Think not that I [am] come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy ⟨it⟩, but to fulfil. . . . Till heaven and earth pass, one jot ⟨and⟩ [or] one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, ⟨referring to the previous law of God’s system of righteousness⟩ and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:17-19)

Solidarity of the righteousness of God’s law through all dispensations is here affirmed, and the duty of his disciples is to adhere unto that law of righteousness both ancient and in his own times, which were the

modern times then; and it shall be true of all times and dispensations, this solidarity of God's law of righteousness.

In illustration of the relationship of his teaching to the law the Master proceeds to intensify the law of the ancients and reveals the spirit of the law which the teachers in Israel were reducing to the mere letter of the law, and losing sight of its spirit, hence a series of apparent changes in the law, but really an amplification to set forth their spirit and intensify their power. So ~~he~~ *the Christ* proceeds:

Anger and hatred without cause. It was said by them of old, "Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto \langle thee, \rangle [you, That] whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: \langle and \rangle [but] whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matt. 5:21-22).

This treatise has to do with the beginning of those emotions of anger and hatred in which murderous thoughts have their inception. The Christ's teaching would stop this murderous spirit at its source, and therefore eliminate ~~the development of~~ hatred and anger and the expression of them which may lead in the ultimate development to murder. As he would have men avoid the appearance of evil, so would he have them eliminate the possibility of anger and hateful thoughts. And if these be eliminated there will be no possibility of murder. So important did the Christ esteem this lesson that he bade his disciples that if men bringing a gift to God's altar they there remembered that a brother had ought against them, they should leave their gift and go their way and become reconciled to their brother, "then come and offer thy gift" (Matt. 5:24).

As in a way supplementing this instruction the Master counseled sapiency in dealing with adversaries. "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him;" lest at any time the adversary getting advantage should deliver thee to the judge and the judge to the officer and thence to prison, whence there may be no release until the utmost farthing is paid (Matt. 5:25-26). Reconciliation, conciliation with adversaries, is the part of wisdom, to follow which the Christ gave the foregoing as his advice.

The sin of adultery. Again to the law and its intensification. Thou shalt not commit adultery. We have already in an incidental way (see ante chapter [49]) pointed out the Master's intensification of this part of the law, which demanded the elimination even of lustful desires, and we

need not repeat that here, but include this addition with it, that the Master pointing out the importance of eliminating lustful contemplation and desires remarked in his striking manner in way of illustration, “If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members [should] perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.” And the same as to the right hand, if it offend thee, cut it off, and cast it away, with the same end in view, viz., entering heaven (Matt. 5:29–30). In the Book of Mormon version of this same sermon, this particular matter is put in this form:

⟨Behold⟩ [But] I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman, to lust after her, hath committed adultery already in his heart. Behold, I give unto you a commandment, that ye suffer none of these things to enter into your heart; For it is better that ye should deny yourselves of these things, wherein ye will take up your cross, than that ye should be cast into hell. (3 Ne. 12:28–30)

If this be taken as the commentary of the Christ on his principle, how beautifully clear this principle of purity in thought is set forth, and surely relieves the principle of that implication that has been read into it by fanatics which lead in some cases to self-mutilation in order to comply, as was supposed, with the admonition “If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee.”^a

Divorcement. Closely connected with the matter of the above paragraph is the law of divorcement, “It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement.” Such was the law of Moses: “But I say unto you,” said the Master, “That whosoever shall put away his wife, ⟨save⟩ [saving] for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery” (Matt. 5:31–32). Observe in passing, that under the Christ’s exposition of the law, so far from being destroyed it is intensified, at each touch. It is quite clear, that God “hateth putting away,” as was said by Malachi: “Let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away” (Mal. 2:15–16). But one sin may justify the “putting away,” the sin of breaking the marriage covenant; the sin of high treason on the part of man or wife, the sin of adultery, that is the law of Christ. It is doubtful, however, if this statement of the law is to be understood as applying to the innocent parties to divorcement. For example: here

^aThis reference to self-mutilation refers to the early Christian Father Origen, who took literally the Lord’s saying “There be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake” (Matt. 19:12) and emasculated himself. See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6, 8, 2.

is the case of a young wife, not guilty of the offense that would justify her husband in putting her away, but blameless. Her husband, however, has become weary of her, she no longer pleases his fancy, he may already have found someone more desirable to him, and so puts away his wife that he may marry the creature of his lust. Of course, in effect he commits adultery, and the woman he marries, having guilty knowledge of his course, might well be thought to participate in his guilt of adultery. But in the case of the innocent, cast-off wife, where does she appear in blame or guilt? Not at all if she remain unmarried, of course. But is the law in her case to be so interpreted that, though innocent, she must be condemned to this sort of widowhood, perhaps, through a long period of life, or if she marry be adjudged guilty of adultery, together with him who marries her? Here would be manifest injustice; and it may be followed as a safe rule of interpretation of our Lord's precepts, that that interpretation which would result in manifest injustice is not the law, nor the right interpretation of it. For God's law must be held to be in harmony with God's attributes, of which justice is equal to the others; and that which is not justice is not law. The statement of this divorce law as found in St. Mark may be nearest the truth, being the Christ's statement and his interpretation of what he had said to the Pharisees on the subject. For when the disciples were entered into a friend's house, they questioned him as to what he had said to the Pharisees outside. "And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery" (Mark 10:11-12). This limits the sin of adultery to those who are the guilty parties to the "putting away" *and of course to the putting away* for other causes than that which the Master recognized as a justification for divorce. They are the parties of adultery, under this divorce doctrine of Messiah, not the innocent parties, those who were sinned against in the transaction.[†]

Perform to the Lord thine oaths: The better way. Again to the law, "Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths" (Matt. 5:33). So strictly was this law regarded in Israel, that Israel's chieftain Jephthah, having vowed that if God would give him a victory

[†]The committee of the Quorum of the Twelve noted: "The question of divorce does not seem clear to us as here stated, and in harmony with the words of the Savior." On this final comment of the committee that reviewed the manuscript, Roberts noted: **nothing more to be said.** Reporting to President Clawson on October 10, 1929, George Albert Smith explained: "Some things in the argument on divorce were questioned, as appearing in conflict with the revelations."

over the Ammonites, he would offer as a burnt offering whosoever shall come forth from his house to meet him. And when his only daughter, came forth with timbrels and dancing to meet him, she became the sacrifice for the oath's sake! This matter of keeping oaths crystallized for Israel in this formula: "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" and the answer is, "He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not" (Ps. 15:1, 4). But the Master pointed out a more excellent way than all this:

Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. [But] let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. (Matt. 5:34-37)

How excellent the teacher that moveth stumbling blocks from our path! "Thou shalt not forswear thyself . . . perform unto the Lord thine oaths!" "Swear not at all."

"An eye for an eye." "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" (Matt. 5:38). The law of vengeance, supposed to be of exact, stern, inexorable justice. Pay me what you owe me to the last farthing, there shall be no mitigation, there shall no circumstances be considered, the pound of flesh is due; the pound of flesh exactly shall be paid. Now on this law of exaction of an "eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," "I say unto you," said the Christ,

That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if $\langle a \rangle$ [any] man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. (Matt. 5:39-42)

"Utterly impracticable!" would cry out your man of affairs, and especially your modern man of affairs. "Utterly out of the question, this course of procedure, unfair; it would produce a race of mollicoddles, of nonresisting, unaggressive simpletons." But let us not be too quick in judgment on these sayings of the Sermon. Let us regard them as setting forth, not so much the precise things that shall be done in the respectively given cases, but as setting forth in these few bold strokes, the spirit in which men should live; holding in mind that the letter killeth, but ~~it is~~ the spirit ~~that~~ giveth life. And here may be shown the spirit of the Life in which men should live; not stressing the "eye for an eye" and "tooth for a tooth" doctrine so far as not to admit into our

personal economy of life the willingness, so far as possible to live in peace with all men; but living in the spirit that “a ⟨mild⟩ [soft] answer turneth away wrath” (Prov. 15:1), and so a willingness to mitigate the stern demands that justice alone might warrant as to bring forth a spirit of conciliation and reconciliation into the affairs of life, by living in the unaggressive and unexacting spirit that the Master here enjoins.

Of loving and hating.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them ⟨that⟩ [which] despitefully use you, and persecute you. (Matt. 5:43-44)

A difficult undertaking, possible only when the mind is capable of immense vision, conscious of the truth respecting God and man, especially conscious of one’s own soul, having knowledge also of man’s mission in this earth life, with right apprehension as to immortality and eternal life. Only then can one hope for a man to attain to this nobility of soul which shall put aside the things of evil and live only in the spirit of the things that are great, and noble, and good. Also being able to view men, not as they are, but in the light of their possibilities, as eternal intelligences on their way to progress—men in the making! Fortunately the Christ in his commentary on the principle here stated, cites God in his graciousness towards things wicked and ungodly, and points out with what liberal hand he bestows blessings, not only upon the obedient, but upon the disobedient, admonishing his disciples to pursue the course indicated, that “ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45). He would have the children to be even as the Father. He would have the disciple to be as his Master, and then the argument: “For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?” (Matt. 5:46-47). Already he had served notice upon his disciples in a previous paragraph (see Matt. 5:20) that unless their righteousness should exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the pharisees, they should in no case enter the kingdom of heaven. It is equally true of the Master’s discipleship today.

“Be ye perfect”: *The ideal.* And now the climax, the setting forth of the ideal, and sternly demanding its achievement: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48).

And our Book of Mormon version of the same discourse delivered to the Nephites on the continent of America, makes this variation. “I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect” (3 Ne. 12:48).

At this point in the Book of Mormon version of the discourse, and closing out the references to the things which had been said in former times *the Christ* adds: “Therefore those things which were of old time, which were under the law, in me are [all] fulfilled. Old things are done away, and all things have become new” (3 Ne. 12:46–47).

Almsgiving: The spirit of. The next instruction has to do with almsgiving and the spirit in which helpfulness shall be imparted to the needy.

Do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. (Matt. 6:1–4)

Nothing can be added by way of amplification that will add to the beauty of the spirit of this injunction.

Prayer: “The Christian’s vital breath.”^b Now the instructions on prayer, opening with a warning that the disciples must not pray as the hypocrites do, who prayed standing in the synagogue and in the corner of the streets that they might be seen of men. In that they had their reward in the praises of men. “But thou,” said the Master, “when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matt. 6:6). Then the warning against vain repetition, as was the custom of the heathen, who thought they would be heard for their much speaking. “{But} [Be] not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye:”

The Lord’s Prayer.

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this

^bRoberts quotes here from the hymn “Prayer Is the Soul’s Sincere Desire,” fourth verse.

day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. (Matt. 6:8-13)

Such the prayer the Master outlines for them (*disciples*) and this his commentary on the more salient point of forgiveness: “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive \langle you \rangle [your trespasses]” (Matt. 6:14-15).

This prayer was not given as a set form to be always followed, and used on every occasion, but rather as an illustration of the spirit in which prayer should be offered and also as illustrating the admonitions preceding it as to simplicity and directness in which one should pray, and in these respects how excellent it is! It has been much praised by writers who love it for its literary merit, and its pure spirituality; its sweet spirit of trust and faith, and for its appropriateness as an address of the soul to the heavenly Father. Dean Paley in his “Christian Evidences” says of it, “for a succession of solemn thoughts, for fixing the attention upon a few great points, for suitableness, . . . for sufficiency, for conciseness without obscurity, for the *weight and real* importance of its petitions, it is without an equal or a rival.”

A defect in St. Matthew’s version of the Lord’s Prayer. All this in the main may be allowed; but as the prayer stands, in St. Matthew, it may not be said to be quite without fault. The phrase, for instance, “Lead us not into temptation.” Is it conceivable, quite, that a God of infinite goodness and wisdom would lead men into temptation? Knowing *man’s proneness to evil, and his weakness under temptation and knowing* that in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases in a thousand men yield to temptation? Would it be like God to do a thing of that kind? There is in this petition also—“lead us not into temptation”—the contradiction of another scripture: “Let no man,” says St. James,

say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. (James 1:13-15)

There is named the source of temptation, and the death it brings. “God tempteth no man!” Then why pray, “lead us not into temptation,” since that is something God will not do? The inconsistency of that sentence in the beautiful prayer as it stands in Matthew is evident; and so our

Prophet of the New Dispensation, in correcting many things that are erroneous in the imperfect reporting or translation of the Master's words, corrected this utterance, and makes it *to* read in his version, "suffer us not to be lead into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (JST Matt. 6:14) With that correction made on it, the praise and admiration expressed by Dean Paley can be accepted.

Of fasting. In fasting, the Master again warns his disciples against the practices of the hypocrites, who in their fasting went about with sad countenances and disfigured faces, that they might appear unto men to fast. "Verily I say unto you, They have their reward," was the Master's comment. "But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which \langle seeth \rangle [is] in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:16-18). This presents the thought of cheerfulness in fasting, light-heartedness and joy, for the keynote in which these several duties of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting shall be done; not as if they were burdens hard to bear, but pleasant duties, sweet responses of the soul to God, and not for worldly fame or glory or a reputation for piety, but as so many dear and unseen approaches into the fellowship and communion with God. Let men's sacrifices, if sacrifices they be considered at all, be held dear, as showing a willingness to give an offering of the soul for the re-action of fellowship with God: laying up of treasure in heaven, "where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves \langle can \rangle [do] not break through \langle and \rangle [nor] steal" (Matt. 6:20); and with the confidence that where our treasure is, there will our heart be also. "The light of the body," said the Christ, continuing this sermon, "is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if \langle the \rangle [thine] eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matt. 6:22-23).

Singleness of service: No serving of two masters. There must be singleness of purpose also in the service of God. For on this the Master said, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye can not serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24). Herein we may see the so-called "jealousy" of God. Those who would serve him, must serve him wholly, with singleness of purpose. Acceptance of God as God Almighty, admits of no divided allegiance. Loyalty must be wholly given else service is not acceptable. Through this Sermon on the Mount comes up the consciousness, the truth of the whole law: "Thou shalt

have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:3). All images of God are “verboten.” Men cannot serve two masters, there must be singleness of mind and purpose in this. Men “cannot serve God and Mammon.” They may not worship the “golden calf” and Jehovah; neither worship the gold of the calf, and the Christ. There must be no divided allegiance in the services of God.

Further references recommended by Roberts for this lesson: *Latter-day Saint Hymns*, “Prayer Is the Soul’s Sincere Desire”; *Four Gospels* (passim); 3 Ne. 12-14; and *D&C* (passim), esp. 42 and 45.