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## Jesus and the Composition of the Sermon on the Mount

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CHAPTER 10

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## JESUS AND THE COMPOSITION OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The presence of virtually all of the Sermon on the Mount in the Sermon at the Temple, and therefore in the *ipsissima vox*, or personal voice, of Jesus, will certainly present yet a different set of improbabilities to the minds of many liberal New Testament scholars. It is widely accepted in New Testament scholarship that Matthew gave the Sermon on the Mount its final form (although there is no consensus about when Matthew worked, how much he wrote himself, or which words and phrases he drew from the variously existing pre-Matthean sources or traditions that scholars have hypothesized).

The Book of Mormon, however, presents the reader with a version of the Sermon on the Mount that is substantially identical to the Sermon in the King James Bible and that places this text entirely in the mouth of Jesus in A.D. 34. The idea that Jesus was the author of the Sermon on the Mount, let alone the author of the covenant-oriented interpretation that the Sermon at the Temple gives to the Sermon, is not likely to find many ready-made adherents

among the disciples of Q or other source-critical students of the New Testament. Without purporting to deal with all the complexities of the synoptic question, I will attempt to explain to a general audience some of the very legitimate issues raised by New Testament studies and how the Sermon at the Temple has tended to shape my thinking about these scholarly endeavors.

### **Characteristic Words of Jesus**

At the outset it is worth pointing out that there are no words in the Sermon at the Temple that Jesus *could not* have said. As discussed in chapter 6, places where scholars have found the strongest traces of later redaction in the Sermon on the Mount are not in evidence in the Sermon at the Temple. Perhaps far more of the Sermon on the Mount was original with Jesus than New Testament scholarship has come to assume; it is certainly too aggressive to date the entire Sermon on the Mount by the last element added to this sermon in the course of its transmission and transcription.

Moreover, all the themes of the Sermon on the Mount are consistent with the generally accepted characteristics of the very voice of Jesus, even judging very cautiously. Those characteristics of Jesus' personal words, as they have been identified by Joachim Jeremias,<sup>1</sup> are readily visible in the Sermon, namely, (1) the use of parables (for example, the salt, the light, the tree, the house on the rock); (2) the use of cryptic sayings or riddles (for example, 3 Nephi 12:17; Matthew 5:17); (3) speaking of the reign or kingdom of God (for example, 3 Nephi 11:33, 38; Matthew 5:3, 10; 6:33); (4) the use of "amen" or "verily" (over thirty times in the Sermon at the Temple); and (5) the word *Abba*, or *Father* (Matthew 6:9, and dozens of times in the Sermon at the Temple). Based on Jeremias's analysis, one may presume

that New Testament phrases containing one of these five qualities are authentic to the *ipsissima vox* of Jesus.

### **Proceeding with Caution**

For most New Testament scholars, however, the question of authorship in the Sermon on the Mount is likely to be a much greater stumbling block to the Sermon at the Temple than any manuscript or stylistic issue, for it is a very widely held opinion that Matthew or some earlier redactor compiled or wrote the Sermon on the Mount as we now know it, collecting miscellaneous sayings of Jesus and putting them together into a more or less unified sermon or series of sermonettes. The presence of this material in the Sermon at the Temple, however, commits the believing Latter-day Saint to doubt such a claim. It seems unlikely for a person to believe that the resurrected Jesus delivered the sermon to the Nephites recorded in 3 Nephi 11–18 within a year after his crucifixion and at the same time to hold that the evangelist gave the Sermon its basic form and selected its content.

It is thus necessary to ask why many scholars have concluded that Matthew composed the Sermon on the Mount. Are their assumptions and reasons persuasive? The synoptic question, which has driven an enormous amount of New Testament research, cannot be casually dismissed or lightly ignored. How the Gospels were composed, when and why they were written, how they are similar to or different from each other, and what underlying sources they drew upon, are intriguing questions. After a century of work, these issues still remain fascinating to many readers.

Over the years, a steady flow of journal articles and books have advanced various ingenious theories and have marshalled evidence for or against certain positions

regarding the composition of the synoptic Gospels. Any thoughtful and well-informed Latter-day Saint can derive a wealth of information from these studies about the subtlety of these sacred records that tell us so much about the mortal ministry of Jesus Christ. But not every proposed theory regarding the synoptic question is equally persuasive. All readers must evaluate and carefully consider the evidence presented. Covert biases and assumptions are sometimes at work; and despite the overwhelming popularity of a particular hypothesis today, it may likely fall into disfavor tomorrow.<sup>2</sup> Surmising, extrapolating, following hunches, and outright guesswork fuel much of this research, as some forage for tidbits of information gleaned here and there from among the textual records.

With regard to the composition of the Sermon on the Mount in particular, the assertion of Matthean authorship is not a simple one. It is difficult to attack in large part because it is not very focused. The reasons for seeing Matthew's hand in the text of the Sermon on the Mount are vague and broad. They can scarcely be negated because they can hardly be verified. The theory has spawned numerous books and dissertations, developing and applying the hypothesis, but the results are still far from conclusive. This is largely because the relationships between the Sermon and the other Gospels are so complex. As Harvey K. McArthur states: "The Sermon on the Mount presents unusual complications in the matter of sources. . . . Of the Sermon's 111 verses, about 45 have no obvious parallels in Luke, 35 have loose parallels, and 31 have parallels which are close both in content and in phraseology. The curious feature of this evidence is [that] . . . [t]he close parallels are unusually close, and the loose parallels are unusually loose!"<sup>3</sup>

Faced with this array of difficulties, it is not surprising that nothing approaching scholarly unanimity exists over how much of the Sermon on the Mount Matthew wrote himself, or how much he took from an existing pre-Matthean text or other sources. For those who have concluded that Matthew had documents at his disposal from which he drew, there is even less consensus about where those records came from or for what purpose they were written or used in the earliest Christian communities.

### **The Sermon as a Pre-Matthean Text**

The trend in recent years, however, has been toward seeing somewhat less Matthean influence in the composition of the Sermon on the Mount itself and toward dating large sections of the Sermon on the Mount back into the first decades of Jewish Christianity. Hans Dieter Betz, in particular, has advanced the theory that the Sermon on the Mount was a composite of pre-Matthean sources, embodying a set of cultic instructions that served the earliest Jewish-Christian community in Jerusalem as an epitome of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which Matthew later incorporated into his Gospel.<sup>4</sup>

Betz's thesis has much to commend it. For one thing, it finds support in the vocabulary of the Sermon on the Mount. When one compares the Greek words in the Sermon on the Mount with those used by Matthew in the rest of his Gospel, some sharp contrasts emerge. Of the 383 basic vocabulary words in the Sermon on the Mount, I count 73 (or 19% of the total) that appear *only* in the Sermon (sometimes more than once) and *never* elsewhere in the Gospel of Matthew; in fact, they often are *never* used again in the entire New Testament. In some cases, words used in the Sermon on the Mount, such as *doma* (gift,

Matthew 7:11; compare Ephesians 4:8, quoting Psalm 68:18), appear un-Matthean, for on all nine other occasions outside the Sermon on the Mount when Matthew speaks of gifts, he prefers to use the word *dōron* (gift), even where the context is similar to that of Matthew 7:11 (see, for example, Matthew 2:11; 15:5). Only two words in the Sermon, *geennan* (hell) and *grammateoi* (scribes), are used by Matthew in greater preponderance than other New Testament writers, and in only one case, *rhapizei* (smite; Matthew 5:39; 26:67), is Matthew the sole New Testament writer to use a Sermon on the Mount vocabulary word outside the Sermon.

Thus on the level of mere vocabulary, the Sermon on the Mount appears to be unlike Matthew's writings. Although this kind of straightforward word study is not conclusive of authorship, especially since the textual sample involved is statistically small, the result seems to me to be indicative.<sup>5</sup> If Matthew's hand played a significant role in drafting, selecting, or reworking the contents of the Sermon on the Mount, it seems odd that nearly every fifth vocabulary word is one that Matthew never had occasion to use again in his Gospel. Nevertheless, the issue is not cut-and-dried.

### **New Light from New Documents**

I am confident that New Testament scholars are doing about the best they can with what they have. If it were not for my acceptance of the material contained in the Book of Mormon, I would readily agree with many of their conjectures. They have three synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—and it is entirely indeterminable in most passages which Gospel is the oldest or reflects the most accurate or original image of the historical Jesus. Sometimes Luke appears to give the better view, other

times Mark, and still other times Matthew. Discussion and resolution of the problem, however, are prejudicially circumscribed by the documents permitted into consideration. For example, if the *Gospel of Thomas*, or another newly discovered text, were to be accepted as a very early source, it would have a tremendous impact on the question of which sayings of Jesus in the synoptic Gospels people would accept as authentic.

History is always vulnerable to the inherent weaknesses of its records.<sup>6</sup> For example, newspapers once reported that a cannon mounted on a monument erected by the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers in Farmington, Utah, could not have been brought across the plains, since its serial number and an 1864 date stamp indicate that it was cast in Richmond, Virginia, during the Civil War.<sup>7</sup> If this were the only information known about the famous pioneer cannon, we would be tempted to reject out of hand the mind-boggling stories about dragging a cannon all the way from Nauvoo to Salt Lake City in 1847 through the mud and over hundreds of trackless miles. In this case, however, the 1847 diary of Charles C. Rich removes any doubt: There was a cannon that his company fired regularly as the wagon train moved across the prairie, even though the Farmington monument may not have the right one. This serves as a sobering reminder of our inability to date historical details conclusively by relying solely on the earliest surviving artifact.

The question of which sayings of Jesus are authentic usually turns on certain assumptions people have made about which parts of the Gospel accounts were early or which came later. For example, if a person holds to the premise that Jesus neither ordained apostles nor formally organized a church in Palestine, then it is a foregone conclusion



that the person will strongly discount any sayings with ecclesiastical content in the Gospels as being later additions by someone belonging to the settled church later in the first century. Of course, such issues are complex and deeply interwoven with other historical and literary strands. Thus, the discussion of the Matthean composition of the Sermon on the Mount begins, and to a large extent ends, with the same sort of preassessment of source documents and their possible provenances.

These points are relevant to our discussion of the Sermon at the Temple. Most scholars are willing to change or modify their old opinions when new, credible evidence is discovered. My personal verdict is that the Sermon at the Temple constitutes such evidence. If admitted into evidence, it becomes a major factor in settling the question of who wrote the Sermon on the Mount. The problem rests in determining whether the Book of Mormon should be allowed to contribute any primary evidence in this discussion. Of course, for Latter-day Saints, who are convinced on their own grounds of the historicity of the Book of Mormon, the Sermon at the Temple will figure as one of the main determining documents in their discussion of the issue of who composed the Sermon, rather than as a text whose character is judged as a by-product of that discussion.

Others will likely reject the Sermon at the Temple and the Book of Mormon as such evidence, but that rejection will usually be made on other religious or theological grounds, not on the alleged Matthean authorship of the Sermon on the Mount. It would be circular, of course, to disallow the Sermon at the Temple as evidence against Matthean authorship by rejecting it simply on the ground that Matthew wrote the Sermon on the Mount, for that is

the very question about which one seeks the further documentary evidence in the first place.

### **Rejecting Some Speculative Presumptions**

Limited to the sources in the New Testament, scholars advance several theories to support the proposition that Matthew wrote the Sermon on the Mount. I have not found any of these presumptions or hypotheses compelling enough to discredit the Sermon at the Temple.

For example, many scholars assume that the sayings of Jesus started out short and simple and that they grew in complexity as they were collected, grouped, and handed down in lore and tradition until his followers canonized them. Hence, Jeremias reasons as follows: "The Sermon on the Plain [in Luke 6] is very much shorter than that on the mount, and from this we must conclude that in the Lucan Sermon on the Plain we have an earlier form of the Sermon on the Mount."<sup>8</sup> This view receives some support from the fact that pithy sayings of Jesus were collected elsewhere by Matthew into single chapters (as in the Parable Sermon of Matthew 13), and thus one infers that the same thing occurred with the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>9</sup>

This inference is not compelling, however. What apparently happened in the case of Matthew 13 need not have happened for Matthew 5–7. Moreover, movements as dynamic as early Christianity do not characteristically begin with a sputtering start. Great religious and philosophical movements typically begin with the monumental appearance of a figure who captures the spirit of his followers and galvanizes them into dedicated action. It seems more likely to me, as a hypothesis, that the words and discourses of Jesus started out profound and already well developed, than that they began as disjointed sayings or fragmented

maxims. Day in and day out, Jesus spoke to his disciples and to the multitudes who flocked to see him. I doubt that they came out to hear a string of oracular one-liners. What they heard were coherent sentences projecting a vision and worldview. The Sermon on the Mount would reflect such wisdom and perspective, making it just as likely that the abbreviated excerpts of it that are scattered elsewhere in the synoptic Gospels are its derivatives.

One can hardly be unaware of the vast amount of effort that has been spent searching for Q and for the original words of Jesus.<sup>10</sup> The assumption here is that Matthew, Mark, and Luke had access to a common source that no longer survives. In this quest some scholars stipulate or conclude that the form of a saying of Jesus as it appears in Mark or Luke was earlier than the parallel saying in Matthew. But this discipline is far from objective or certain. For example, many have often argued that Luke 6, the Sermon on the Plain, was earlier than the Sermon on the Mount and that Matthew used the Sermon on the Plain as one of his sources in compiling the Sermon on the Mount. It is also possible, however, that Luke 6 was dependent on the Sermon on the Mount. The debate tilts both ways: Some articles advance reasons for seeing the Matthean Beatitudes and Lord's Prayer or other formulations as bearing the characteristics of earlier sayings,<sup>11</sup> while a minority of others advance reasons for Lukan priority of the same material.<sup>12</sup> To resolve these difficulties, some scholars have advanced the idea of multiple Qs. These arguments revolve around a number of assumptions about the kinds of words, expressions, themes, or issues that Jesus would most likely have used or that would have concerned him. Much of this is sophisticated, technical, informed guesswork.

Many scholars have also often assumed that Jesus said

something only once, or said it in only one form. Hence scholars launch prolonged odysseys, such as the one to ascertain the “original form” of the Beatitudes or of the Lord’s Prayer. This quest, however, assumes that Jesus blessed his disciples using the words of the Beatitudes only once and taught his followers to pray using the words of the Lord’s Prayer on only one occasion. If this assumption fails, then two different iterations (even though closely related to each other in form) could both be original sayings.

It should also be noted that the most persuasive evidence for the synoptic problem comes from parallel reports of events rather than sayings. In the case of singular events, which logically can be assumed to have happened only once, the differences in the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are very telling. But the same logic does not necessarily carry over into the reported speeches, all or parts of which could very well have been repeated more than once and not quite the same each time.

For example, regarding the relationship between the Sermon on the Mount and Luke’s Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6, it is significant that the two speeches follow essentially the same order, making the omissions in Luke especially interesting. Luke begins with certain beatitudes, notably blessing those whose names had been cast out as evil or worthless (see Luke 6:22). There follows a set of woes or curses upon the rich, the full, those who laugh or make fun, and followers of false prophets (see Luke 6:24–26). Brief instructions are given regarding loving enemies, turning the other cheek, giving to those who ask, lending to sinners, being merciful, and doing well unto others (see Luke 6:27–36), the last point being one of the few major elements taken out of order from the Matthean text. The Sermon at the Plain then skips all of the material found in Matthew 6

(some of which is found when Jesus speaks in private to his apostles in Luke 11), and then presents most of the items found in Matthew 7, with some variations, including judge not, give and it shall be given, whatsoever ye measure, the mote and the beam in the eye, good fruit from a good tree, grapes and figs, calling the Lord "Lord," and the houses built on the rock and the sand (Luke 6:37–49).

This selection of materials can be explained by the different settings in which the two speeches were reportedly given. The Lucan speech, of course, was delivered to a much larger audience than was the Sermon on the Mount, for "a great multitude of people" had come out from all around the region, from Jewish and gentile cities, "to hear him" (Luke 6:17). Consistent with this circumstance, Jesus presents here the more public elements of his message.<sup>13</sup> He covers the golden rule and the principles of charity, and then he teaches the people the manner in which God will judge all people. Missing from this speech in Luke are all of the elements that one would expect to be reserved for the closer circle of disciples, such as the call to be the light unto the world and the salt of the earth; the specific laws of obedience, sacrifice, brotherhood, chastity, and consecration; instructions regarding oaths, prayer, clothing, and secrecy; and entering through the narrow gate into the presence of God. Rather than detracting from the historicity of these two speeches as independent iterations, their settings and audiences appropriately dictate what has been included and what has been omitted. Assuming that Jesus indeed spoke to a large multitude of diverse people, he would have followed his own instruction on such occasions and would not have given "that which is holy" to those who were not yet prepared to receive it (Matthew 7:6). He seems to have followed that principle exactly in de-

termining which elements to mention in Luke 6 and which points to pass over in speaking to this particular crowd, addressing them not on a temple mount but on an ordinary level in the countryside.

Others argue that if the Sermon on the Mount had been in existence before the writing of the Gospel of Matthew, then Mark and Luke would also have used it in exactly that form. This, however, is an argument from silence. Mark's and Luke's purposes were different from Matthew's; they included different sorts of speeches and information. In Mark's case, there is reason to believe that he consciously chose not to include all that he knew of what Jesus had said.<sup>14</sup>

Certain passages in the Sermon on the Mount seem likely to postdate Jesus' lifetime, such as those that reflect anti-Pharisaical, antigentile, or anti-Pauline sentiments, and possibly the designation of Jerusalem as the City of the Great King. These passages have been pointed to as sure signs of late composition of the Sermon on the Mount. Strecker, for example, argues that "Matthew does not reflect a historically faithful picture" because he distinguishes between the Pharisees and scribes, when "in truth one cannot differentiate stringently between scribes and Pharisees."<sup>15</sup> However, such verses alone may simply be later additions. They need not point to a late composition of the bulk of the Sermon. As discussed above, all of these elements, which may be strongly suspected of being late intrusions, are absent from the Sermon at the Temple.

Finally, some scholars point to the possible presence of Greek concepts in the Sermon on the Mount and argue that only Matthew could have inserted them. These points of possible Hellenistic influence are far from certain, however; and even if they are present in the Sermon on the Mount, it

is equally possible that Jesus would have known them from his own cultural surroundings, which included several neighboring Hellenistic centers. Nor must these allegedly Greek ideas in the Sermon be understood exclusively as Hellenisms in any event. Many of these ethical teachings are universally present in all kinds of centers. The foregoing discussion surveys the kinds of arguments, generally speaking, that have been advanced supporting the theory of Matthean composition of the Sermon on the Mount and why they are not necessarily persuasive.

### **Putting the Words of Jesus before Matthew**

In addition to the rebuttals made above, several affirmative reasons can be adduced for believing that the Sermon on the Mount was not written by Matthew but existed as a pre-Matthean source. For example, the Sermon on the Mount is in tension in places with the major themes of the Gospel of Matthew as a whole. Kingsbury, for example, finds that the Sermon presents Jesus in one direction as a conciliatory teacher and a new Moses, whereas "the driving force of the plot [of the Gospel of Matthew] is the element of conflict," with this second direction culminating in the tensions of the passion narrative.<sup>16</sup> As discussed above, Betz and others have marshalled considerable evidence that the Sermon on the Mount is the kind of document used as a cultic text or to instruct or remind initiates of church rules, and it makes the most sense for the Sermon to have been used in that way before the time when the Gospel of Matthew was written.<sup>17</sup>

I would add that verbal and conceptual similarities between the epistle of James (which I believe to be early) and the Sermon further indicate that James knew something like the Sermon on the Mount when he wrote his letter.

Compare, for example, James 5:12 with Matthew 5:33–37 on oaths; James 3:11–12 with Matthew 7:16–22 on knowing a fig tree or vine by its fruit; James 1:13 with Matthew 6:13 on being led into temptation; James 4:11 with Matthew 7:1–2 on judging a brother; James 2:13 and Matthew 5:7 on showing mercy; and many other similarities.<sup>18</sup> Jeremias has also noted that James and the Sermon on the Mount share the same character as “the classical example of an early Christian *didache*,”<sup>19</sup> and this rings true in light of the way the early Christian *Didache*, discovered in 1873, quotes extensively from the Sermon on the Mount. It seems quite evident that the epistle of James was consciously drawing on a known body of basic Christian teachings already known and used in the church as persuasive, authentic sayings. Thus it seems unlikely that James could have written as he did unless something like the Sermon on the Mount was already considered authoritative, whether oral or written. In that case, is it possible that Matthew could have written the Sermon on the Mount late in the day and have pawned it off in James’ community as an original? A similar point can be made with respect to Paul’s letters, some of which seem to reflect parts of the Sermon, although Paul could have learned these through other channels.<sup>20</sup> I do not insist that these similarities prove a literary dependency on the Sermon on the Mount. In particular, the role of memory must not be discounted,<sup>21</sup> especially where ritual texts are involved. In light of the Jewish and Hellenistic teaching methods of his day, “If [Jesus] taught, he must have required his disciples to memorize.”<sup>22</sup> At the time Matthew wrote, people were still alive who personally remembered Jesus. One must ask how a totally new sermon of Jesus, compiled and advanced by Matthew, would ever have been accepted. As Gerhardsson has argued, “Remembering



the attitude of Jewish disciples to their master, it is unrealistic to suppose that forgetfulness and the exercise of a pious imagination had too much hand in transforming authentic memories beyond all recognition in the course of a few short decades."<sup>23</sup>

### **Emphasizing Jesus at the Temple**

Although the New Testament may not tell as much as one would like about the numerous teachings of Jesus, and in spite of the different approaches taken by each of the four Evangelists, one strong thread that runs through the earliest memories about Christ in all four Gospels is the centrality of the temple for Jesus. In light of the purpose of the present book, namely, to associate the Sermon on the Mount with ancient temple motifs recognized by Latter-day Saints, it is worth revisiting the many passages in the New Testament Gospels that link Jesus deeply with the temple. By emphasizing the presence of Jesus at the temple, these passages increase the likelihood that temple elements should be found in his main teachings. The temple was important to Jesus. Finding features in the Sermon on the Mount that Latter-day Saints may follow as leading to the temple is, therefore, consonant with this significant element in the life of Jesus as reported in the New Testament Gospels.

Jesus did not reject the idea of the temple. Instead, he desired to replace the temple system in Jerusalem with a new temple order, a sacred way of holiness and purity that he promised to raise up without hands (see Mark 14:58; compare Daniel 2:34).<sup>24</sup> In speaking of this new temple system, of course, Jesus alluded to his body and the resurrection (see John 2:21). But what does the resurrection have to do with the temple? Through the resurrection, all mankind

will be brought into the presence of God to be judged according to the fruits they have borne. Preparing people to pass that day of judgment, to be known by their fruits, and to enter into the presence of God is precisely the final objective of the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 7:2, 13, 20–21).

Where else in the teachings of the Savior can one find a stronger candidate than the Sermon on the Mount for instructions regarding the essential order that should take the place of the old temple system under the new covenant? Jesus promised that he would “draw all men” unto God by leading the way (John 12:32). Should readers of the New Testament assume that the new temple, which Jesus promised to build, was left by him without blueprints? I think not. Can a better source be found for such directions than the Sermon on the Mount?

The new temple, we know, would not be built with hands; instead, it would be built with the heart (see Matthew 5:8, 28; 6:21). Jeremiah had prophesied that, through a spiritually transforming experience, the new temple in the day of the Lord would write the law upon the people “in their inward parts” (Jeremiah 31:33). The new temple would thereby build a covenant people of the heart, not of outward performances of the hand only. The epistle to the Hebrews has much to say about the high priesthood of Christ and related temple imagery (see Hebrews 7–10). In the midst of this temple section of the epistle stands the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy: “For this is the covenant . . . I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people” (Hebrews 8:10). This shows that early Christians understood that a new temple system had in fact been established by Jesus and that it involved the

covenantal transformation of the heart. This is precisely what the Sermon on the Mount strives to achieve.

It appears that Jesus discretely imbedded this new order in the words he spoke, proclaiming his new law and covenant and supplanting the old law and testament (as one sees again in the Sermon on the Mount in its antitheses, Matthew 5:17, 21–22, 27–28, 33–34, 38–39). One may thus suspect that he carried this, his central message, directly into the heart of all Israel by preaching its elements regularly in the temple. Perhaps for this reason, especially, the earliest Christians remembered with vivid particularity things that Jesus said and did at the temple. Many of their most salient recollections of his ministry were associated with the temple.

All four Gospels remember Jesus walking and teaching daily in the temple (see Matthew 21:23; 26:55; Mark 11:27; 12:35–40; 14:49; Luke 19:45–48; 20:1; 22:52; John 7:28; 10:23). This main impression about Jesus and the temple is one of the relatively few historical facts about the life of Jesus that all four Gospels share. The meanings ascribed to his presence in the temple may well be more theological than historical, but they all rest on this “issue marked as crucial in all the Gospels: Jesus’ engagement with the [temple] cult.”<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, the three synoptic Gospels have several points in common regarding Jesus and the temple, particularly in the course of their passion narratives. In these three gospels, and told directly following Jesus’ triumphal entry from the east into the temple mount of Jerusalem, Jesus surveyed the situation at the temple (see Mark 11:11) and drove out the money changers (see Matthew 21:12–15; Mark 11:15–19; Luke 19:45). These Gospels then tell how Jesus prophesied that not one stone of the temple would be left standing on top of the other (see Matthew 24:1–2; Mark

13:1–2; Luke 21:5–6). These cryptic words formed a major element in the accusations leveled against Jesus by the chief priests' witnesses in two of these accounts (see Matthew 26:61; Mark 14:58–59), and similar words were reiterated in cruel taunts against Jesus as he hung on the cross (see Matthew 27:40; Mark 15:29). Ultimately, however, the synoptic gospels do not position Jesus against the temple per se, but show him as the fulfillment of the temple. They each report that when Jesus died, the veil of the temple tore in half from top to bottom (see Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45), effectively opening the holy of holies to all the pure in heart who would seek to see God and enter his presence through the new covenant of Jesus Christ.

The temple was seen in the Jewish world as a source of God's power. From this sacred place flowed streams of living water and divine blessing. Unlike the chief priests who had abused those powers, Jesus did not succumb to such temptations to aspire to the honors of men or to exercise unrighteous dominion. When Matthew and Luke tell how Jesus resisted the temptation to abuse his divine powers, they report how Satan took Jesus specifically to the temple, where Jesus refused to take any advantage of those powers (see Matthew 4:5–7; Luke 4:9–12).

It does not seem coincidental that the Gospel of Matthew (the tax collector) takes particular note of temple matters that have to do with money. He alone reports that Jesus encouraged his disciples to pay the temple tax voluntarily and miraculously provided a coin for them to pay this offering (see Matthew 17:24–27).<sup>26</sup> Those who operated the temple economy had, quite notably, violated the principle that temple offerings and transactions should be consecrated exclusively to the Lord, for which Jesus held them accountable. The story of the unforgiving steward, who

himself had squandered 10,000 talents owed to his master, may well be a veiled critique of the misuse of the temple treasury, which according to Josephus amounted to the phenomenal sum of 10,000 talents.<sup>27</sup> This story appears only in Matthew 18. Furthermore, Matthew is the only one to point out that the thirty pieces of silver were returned by Judas to the temple treasury, where those coins apparently came from (see Matthew 27:5). Given the importance of the law of consecration, laying up treasures in heaven, and serving God and not mammon as temple motifs, it is not surprising that Jesus was so deeply troubled by money changing and commercial abuses in the temple.

Matthew adds other unique points of emphasis in reporting Jesus' program of temple novation. In Matthew, in refuting those who criticized Jesus for supposedly working on the Sabbath, Jesus responded, "Have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? But I say unto you, That in this place is one [meaning God] greater than the temple" (Matthew 12:5–6). Similarly, when Jesus taught that swearing by the temple really means swearing by God (see Matthew 23:16–17), he pointed his disciples toward the true spirit of the temple, the house of God. It is God who sanctifies all things, including the temple, not vice versa.

Mark, the Gospel of actions, uniquely states that after Jesus cleansed the temple, he "would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple" (Mark 11:16). In Mark's view, Jesus brought the old temple services "to a halt."<sup>28</sup> This act speaks volumes, dramatically indicating the totality of change from the old to the new.

The Gospel of Luke, the wise Greek, emphasizes the temple as a place of learning, as temples typically were in the ancient world.<sup>29</sup> Luke alone looks back on the time

when Jesus as a youth outwitted the doctors at their own game (see Luke 2:42–50), and Luke alone notes that in Jesus' final week people came to the temple "early in the morning" to hear him preach (see Luke 21:37–38).

Recollections of Jesus at the temple are even stronger in the Gospel of John. So strong is the positive association between Jesus and the temple in the Gospel of John that John never mentions, in connection with the so-called trials of Jesus, that Jesus had ever spoken anything against that holy place. John reports that Jesus came regularly to Jerusalem for such temple festivals as the Passover (see John 2:13) and the Feast of Tabernacles (see John 7:10). He was in the temple when he found the man whom he had cleansed at the Pool of Bethesda (meaning "the house of mercy") on the Sabbath (see John 5:14–16). He was in the temple when he declared the kingdom at the Feast of Tabernacles (see John 7:28). He was in the temple when the woman taken in adultery was brought to him for judgment (see John 8:2). He spoke of the temple as "my father's house" (John 14:2), and he appropriated to himself various temple symbols such as the living water, the bread of life, the light of the world, and the true vine.<sup>30</sup> His final high priestly prayer blessed his apostles that they might know God and achieve unity with him and each other, echoing the blessings of the temple.<sup>31</sup>

For John, Jesus embodies the name and presence of God, the ascension to heaven, and rites of purification.<sup>32</sup> John places the cleansing at the temple at the beginning of his Gospel (see John 2:14–17), perhaps so that he can report without embarrassment all of the times that Jesus came to Jerusalem and used the temple as his base of operations. In John, immediately after Jesus drove out not only the money changers but also all the sellers and their animals, he gave

as a prophetic sign the saying “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). In John are found allusions to the prophecy of Zechariah, “which presents an eschatological expectation of a restored temple,”<sup>33</sup> and which may also echo the prophecy of restoration for all Israel as a new people: “After two days he will revive us; in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight [‘in his presence’; literally, ‘before his face’]. Then shall we know [him]” (Hosea 6:2 LXX).

All this is to say that the earliest Christian memory of Jesus was deeply intertwined with the temple. The reason for this, I would suggest, has something to do not merely with the place where Jesus often stood, but even more with the things that he taught, which created a new, yet old, temple environment for his followers, complete with a new high priest, a new set of commandments adopted by way of covenant, a new order of prayer and sacrifice, and a new manner of receiving an endowment of power from on high and entering God’s presence. Understanding the Sermon on the Mount as a text that has everything to do with a new order of sacred relationships between God and his people exposes the temple subtext for Jesus’ program of temple novation. He did not aim his mission merely at the fringes of rural Jewish societies; he sought to recreate the very heart of all Judaism. By contemporary measures, that heart stood in Jerusalem on the Temple Mount in its holy of holies.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the earliest Christians continued to follow their Master by meeting at the temple. Luke reports that they assembled “continually in the temple, praising and blessing God” (Luke 24:53). In the book of Acts, the temple in Jerusalem continues to figure prominently in the religious lives of the followers of Jesus.<sup>34</sup> Even long after the destruction of the temple in

Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70, the Christians subtly continued to envy the temple and to sense the loss of this sacred institution, righteously understood and administered, as Hugh Nibley has extensively demonstrated.<sup>35</sup> It is difficult to imagine that this emphasis on the temple would have arisen in early Christianity if the teachings of Jesus had not been explicitly understood by his earliest disciples as having much to do with instituting a new temple order.

In sum, these brief comments on the words of Jesus, the composition of the Sermon on the Mount and the Gospels, and the memories of the early Christians are not intended to be conclusive. By offering these thoughts, I acknowledge the vast amount of literature that exists concerning the questions of the historical Jesus and the authorship of the Sermon on the Mount. I find the questions fascinating and engaging, but most of them still remain questions. I know of no reason why Jesus could not have said all the things contained in the Sermon at the Temple or on the Mount, the many theories and treatises to the contrary notwithstanding, and, given Jesus' strong orientation toward the temple, I see several reasons to believe that he did.

## Notes

1. Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, trans. J. Bowden (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 29–37; see John Strugnell, "'Amen, I Say unto You' in the Sayings of Jesus and in Early Christian Literature," *Harvard Theological Review* 67/2 (1974): 177–82.

2. For a quantitative attack on the synoptic problem, see Eta Linneman, *Is There a Synoptic Problem?* trans. Robert W. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1992).

3. Harvey K. McArthur, *Understanding the Sermon on the Mount* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1978), 21–22.



4. Hans Dieter Betz, *Essays on the Sermon on the Mount*, trans. L. L. Welborn (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 1–15, 55–76; and Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 70–80. Alfred M. Perry, “The Framework of the Sermon on the Mount,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 54 (1935): 103–15, similarly finds evidence that Matthew worked from a written source that he regarded “so highly that he used it for the foundation of his longer Sermon, even in preference to the Q discourse” (*ibid.*, 115). On the conjectured existence of other pre-Matthean sources, see Georg Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Exegetical Commentary*, trans. O. C. Dean Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 55–56, 63, 67–68, 72.

5. M. D. Goulder, reply to “The Beatitudes: A Source-Critical Study,” by C. M. Tuckett, *Novum Testamentum* 25/3 (1983): 211, comments that “word-counts can be used in a much more sophisticated way than is usual. . . . Over a longer passage, say the Sermon, such counting would be significant.”

6. For further discussion, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 81–104.

7. *Deseret News*, 5 August 1989, sec. B, p. 1.

8. Joachim Jeremias, *The Sermon on the Mount*, trans. Norman Perrin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), 15.

9. *Ibid.*, 13.

10. For the present state of the art, see John S. Kloppenborg, *Q Parallels: Synopsis, Critical Notes, and Concordance* (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge, 1988).

11. Robert A. Guelich, “The Matthean Beatitudes: ‘Entrance Requirements’ or Eschatological Blessings?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95/3 (1976): 416–19; M. D. Goulder, “The Composition of the Lord’s Prayer,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 14 (1963): 32–45; Ernest Lohmeyer, *The Lord’s Prayer*, trans. J. Bowden (London: Collins, 1965), 27–28; and Raymond E. Brown, “The Pater Noster as an Eschatological Prayer,” in *New Testament Essays* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965), 244. Erik Sjöberg, “Das Licht in dir: Zur Deutung von Matth. 6,22f Par.,” in *Studia*

*Theologica* (Lund, Sweden: Gleerup, 1952), 5:89, finds that there "can be no doubt that the Matthean formulation is the original" of Matthew 6:22, as compared with Luke 11:35–36. D. Flusser, "Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit," *Israel Exploration Journal* 10 (1960): 11, concludes that it is "certain that Matt. v, 3–5 faithfully preserves the saying of Jesus and that Luke vi, 20 is an abbreviation of the original text."

12. Neil J. McEleney, "The Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount/Plain," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43/1 (1981): 7–8; and Robert A. Guelich, "The Antitheses of Matthew V. 21–48: Traditional and/or Redactional?" *New Testament Studies* 22 (1976): 446–49.

13. Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, 372.

14. See the discussion of the Secret Gospel of Mark, in pp. 75–76 of this book, concerning 3 Nephi 12:48.

15. Strecker, *Sermon on the Mount*, 59.

16. Jack D. Kingsbury, "The Place, Structure, and Meaning of the Sermon on the Mount within Matthew," *Interpretation* 41 (1987): 132–33; he also points out that the depiction of the disciples in Matthew 5:11–12 and 7:15–23 has "no place in the picture the narrator paints of the disciples during the earthly ministry of Jesus" (*ibid.*, 135). See Charles E. Carlston, "Interpreting the Gospel of Matthew," *Interpretation* 29 (1975): 3–12, for a more harmonious view of the unique traditional and ecclesiastical interests of Matthew. See also C. J. A. Hickling, "Conflicting Motives in the Redaction of Matthew: Some Considerations on the Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 18:15–20," *Studia Evangelica* 7 (1982): 247–60.

17. Betz, *Essays on the Sermon on the Mount*, 55–70; and W. D. Davies, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 105–6.

18. These are mentioned in John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the New Testament," in *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*, ed. John W. Welch (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981; reprint, Provo, Utah: Research Press, 1999), 212; and Patrick J. Hartin, "James and the Q Sermon on the Mount/Plain," *Society of*

*Biblical Literature 1989 Seminar Papers*, ed. David J. Lull (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 440–57. John Gee, “Use of the Sermon on the Mount in the Earliest Christian Church” (FARMS, 1989), 5–9, has observed further connections between Matthew 5:48 (*teleioi*) and James 1:4 (*teleioi*); asking of God (James 1:5–6; Matthew 7:7–11); blessed (*makarios*) in James 1:12 and the Beatitudes; lust (James 1:14–15; Matthew 5:28); good gifts and perfect (*teleion*) offerings (James 1:17; Matthew 7:11); anger and insult (James 1:19–20; Matthew 5:22); doing the word (James 1:22–25; Matthew 7:21–27); and several others. Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Paul’s Witness to the Early History of Jesus’ Ministry,” in *The Apostle Paul: His Life and Testimony* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 28, concludes that “James has used representative sections of Christ’s full sermon.” However, the precise nature of the relationship between James and the Sermon remains a puzzle (Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, 6 n. 13).

19. Jeremias, *Sermon on the Mount*, 22.

20. Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, 6 n. 12.

21. Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998); and Linnemann, *Is There a Synoptic Problem?* 182–85.

22. Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript*, 328.

23. *Ibid.*, 329.

24. Bruce Chilton, *The Temple of Jesus: His Sacrificial Program within a Cultural History of Sacrifice* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 137–54.

25. *Ibid.*, 138.

26. Hugh Montefiore, “Jesus and the Temple Tax,” *New Testament Studies* 11 (1964–65): 70–71.

27. John W. Welch, “Herod’s Wealth,” in *Masada and the World of the New Testament*, ed. John F. Hall and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1997), 81–82.

28. Chilton, *Temple of Jesus*, 115.

29. Hugh W. Nibley, “Temples: Meanings and Functions of Temples,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4:1462.

30. On the temple in the Gospel of John generally, see

Richard Holzapfel and David Seely, *My Father's House: Temple Worship and Symbolism in the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 141–70.

31. William Hamblin, "Temple Motifs in John 17" (FARMS, 1995).

32. Mark Kinzer, "Temple Christology in the Gospel of John," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1998 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1998), 1:447–64.

33. Mark A. Matson, "The Contribution to the Temple Cleansing by the Fourth Gospel," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1992 Seminar Papers*, ed. Eugene H. Lovering Jr. (Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 503.

34. Holzapfel and Seely, *My Father's House*, 119–38.

35. Hugh W. Nibley, "Christian Envy of the Temple," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 50 (1959–60): 97–123, 229–40; reprinted in Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 391–434.