

Matt. 5:1-2

I. Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount (1-2)

These verses obviously give the setting and introduction to the Sermon on the Mount which takes up the rest of chapters 5-7. It gives the physical setting as well as the context in Jesus's growing ministry up to this point. He had revealed Himself as a preacher and miracle worker, proclaiming the impending arrival of the Kingdom of God. And great crowds were following Him, because they had seen or heard of His miraculous healings and message.

A. Jesus went up on the mountainside to address the crowd (1a-b)

1. Seeing the crowds (1a)

The last part of Matthew chapter 4 narrates how great crowds from the surrounding areas had come out to see Jesus. Matthew specifically mentioned all who had brought the sick and afflicted to be healed, because the report of miraculous healings had spread. This sermon is a response to the opportunity to preach given by the gathering of this large crowd. In other contexts, Jesus emphasized His mission to proclaim the Kingdom of God over His healing ministry. And in this case, He chose to exercise His ministry of proclamation.

2. He went up into the mountainside (1b)

The traditional site for this sermon is on the side of the hills rising to the northeast from the Sea of Galilee. There is a large indentation in the hill that forms a natural amphitheater in the hillside. In other words, it is a flat plateau that breaks up a rising hillside. That is why Luke 6:17 can say that Jesus went to a "level place" and this verse can say he went up to the mountainside without there being any contradiction. The traditional location for the Sermon on the Mount is a relatively level place in the hillside rising from the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus may have chosen this place because it was a natural amphitheater, with acoustics helpful for being heard by a large crowd. Or He may have chosen it because it was remote and large enough to accommodate the large crowd. The reason why He chose this place must remain conjecture. But it is the reason why chapters 5-7 are called the "Sermon on the Mount."

Throughout the Bible, mountains are often the location of revelation from God. For instance, the transfiguration took place on a mountain top. And Moses went up on Mount Sinai to speak with God and to receive the Ten Commandments and the stipulations of the covenant. This is significant, because in the Book of Matthew, Jesus is often cast as a second Moses, Who reveals the new teaching to God's people. And in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus directly clarifies and corrects their understanding of the Law given through Moses. However, in this case, Jesus is not placed in the role of Moses receiving the Law on a mountain. Rather, He is placed in the role of God, revealing the new teaching on the mountain by His own authority. This is another hint at the nature and authority of Jesus.

B. He sat down and the disciples gathered to Him (1c-d)

1. After He sat down (1c)

It was the tradition of the Rabbis of this period to teach from a seated position. And Jesus typically followed this practice. Sitting down was often a signal that teaching was about to commence.

2. His disciples went to Him (1d)

After Jesus had signaled that He was about to teach, His disciples gathered. Obviously from the context, there was a large crowd that gathered. And presumably this was a mixed crowd that contained some who were His disciples, as well as some who were not (yet), and some who were just there to see the spectacle. But Matthew emphasized that His disciples were the primary intended audience for this sermon. The content of the sermon reinforces that it was teaching for disciples, though there is nothing in the sermon that was not profitable for the outsiders to hear as well.

C. He taught the Sermon on the Mount (2a)

1. He began to speak and taught them (2a-b)

a Opening His mouth (2a)

This is obviously just a preliminary action, introducing the act of teaching.

b He taught them (2b)

The content of the Sermon on the Mount is “teaching” with the intention to inform, but also to inspire to action, based on the newly learned information. Here Jesus began the actual activity of teaching, described in the next few chapters.

2. By saying: (2c)

This is a typical discourse formula introducing the content of what was said. But in this case, the content is a large block of material extending to the end of chapter 7.

II. *The Sermon on the Mount* [see outlines of later passages] (5:3-7:27)