

Sermon All Saints' Day 2019

November 3, 2019

Matthew 5:1-12

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning, as we observe the feast of All Saints we meditate on the Gospel Lesson that was previously read, especially the first two verses: **“Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them.”**

With these words, Matthew introduces the first block of the teaching of Jesus. In fact, this block of teaching in that Gospel is significant in itself. Why? Because it's what we so often call the Sermon on the Mount. There is Jesus, He's called disciples to Himself, and now they've come to Him, and He preaches this sermon to them. If you know this sermon, then you know why it is so significant. There is such clear instruction there. There is such distinct exhortation: if you are angry you have committed murder. There is such joyful encouragement: don't worry about tomorrow, God will provide these things for you. There is teaching of Jesus and His Words: whoever build His house upon the rock will survive the trials of this life.

But as we hear the beginning words of this sermon this morning, and as we celebrate the Feast of All Saints, I want to take some time and look not at the instruction of the sermon itself, but what Matthew tells us about Jesus outside of it. Hear again those words which he uses to introduce this monologue: **“Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them.”**

Now before I begin exposition of this, I'd like to make a point. It's a point that one of my professors would always make to us in seminary. You see seminarians often come to seminary with great zeal. And this is good, they should leave with great zeal as well—and they generally do, but in a different way. But in our day one of the things Missouri Synod Lutheran seminarians are often zealous about is that they believe the Scriptures to be the inspired, inerrant Word of God. And this is a good thing. They should be zealous for that. But in that zeal something they are wont to do is cast out anything that bears the faintest odor of what's called higher criticism. Now, if you're not familiar with that term, higher criticism, let me explain it. You see what that is is a teaching that came about in the late 1700's or so that said that we obviously couldn't see the Bible as this inspired, inerrant Word of God, because it's so filled with these crazy miracles and these obviously legendary things like the resurrection of people, namely Jesus, from the dead.

Now, as I say that you can see why this is problematic. I will assure you I am not a higher critic, I see it as utterly problematic too. In fact, it was this teaching that became the center of the controversy that resulted in the walkout from our St. Louis seminary, and the formation of Seminex in 1974, if you're familiar with that. But I digress.

So, to my professor. What he would make the point about was that we seminarians would be so quick to mark and avoid writings from the higher critics that we did not realize what we could learn from them. You see, as he had studied the writings of both orthodox and higher critical writers, he found something. He found that since higher critics had no skin in the game—since they didn't care what the implications for these words were, because they didn't believe them anyway, they could read the words with the care to draw their meaning out of them. In other words, they would look carefully at what the words said and learn from that. They could even do this in a way that could put to shame us who believe these words spoken as the very voice of God.

So, being that we believe these words truly given by God, what do we see Matthew, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, saying about Jesus here?

Well to start, it says that He went up on the mountain. Now, it's easy for us to just think, "OK, sure Jesus went up where there's this natural amphitheater for people to hear Him." And practically speaking, that's likely. However, why does Matthew tell us this? After all, look at this book. It's nothing close to as long as books we read. Papyrus and scrolls were at a premium, so it wasn't like the volume of printing media available even as with the printing press. In view of that you wouldn't waste words. So why describe this just for the sake of description? Because it's not. There's a connection he wants people to make. Think about it. Jesus goes up on the mountain. And as I often say, remember that the Old Testament is the context for the New and the New is the fulfillment of the Old. When thinking of that, what do you think of with going up the mountain? Who went up a mountain? Hopefully you think of Moses—kind of a big figure in the Old Testament.

But here's where we get a statement about Jesus. Moses went up on the mountain to do what? To hear from God. Jesus goes up on the mountain to do what? To speak as God. Jesus, we see He "**opened His mouth,**" just like it says in Psalm 72: "**Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old.**" Yes, this Jesus goes up and speaks with the authority of God.

In fact, look at what else He does. It says that He sits down. I read something that said this is just a practical thing. He knows He's going to preach a long sermon, so He

wants to sit down. Listen, I know my sermons are shorter than what's recorded in the Sermon on the Mount, but I do stand for them then go from here and stand for the whole of Bible Class. I'm fairly certain the One who carried the cross from Jerusalem to Mount Calvary could handle standing for the duration of that sermon. But again, Matthew records the fact that He sits. So why? Because it drives the point home that much more. Jesus is speaking with authority. When the rabbis taught authoritatively, or as authoritatively as they could, they sat. Jesus sits often in the Gospels explicitly in the context of teaching. And if that's not enough to convince you let me point you to one more thing. The Greek word here for sitting is *kathisantos*. That's a verb, but the noun form: *kathedra*. You know that the Roman Catholic Church has cathedrals. That's where this comes from. The cathedral is where the bishop sits in his authority. In fact, if you ever go to a Tridentine Mass, one that's pre-Vatican Two, that's still in Latin, from what I understand, the priest sits for the homily. Why? Because in the seat, the *cathedra*, he's showing authority. So also Jesus, sitting to show His authority.

Now, as I'm saying all of this, Matthew finally drives home this point at the end of the sermon. When Jesus is finished talking, he tells us, **“the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.”** So, there is it, in these two little sentences, Matthew wants you to see just how much He understands Jesus has having that authority.

But you might be sitting there thinking, “So what?” And that's fair. I've spent all of this time pointing you to look at Jesus as having authority. We know that, right? We know that He is God who came in the flesh. We know that He has ascended and sits at the right hand of the Father. We know that He lives and reigns with the Father and Holy Spirit, one God now and forever, amen, right? So why?

Because we still wrestle with this. Day in and day out we still have to be reminded of it. I was reminded of this myself on my Facebook feed just this week. If you're in touch with pop culture—which don't be ashamed of not being—but if you are you may have heard that Kanye West, a rapper famous for his egotism, recently confessed that he has become Christian. In light of that conversion he released an album this week that is about that faith. In fact it's called *Jesus is King*. Now as we see things like this, on the one hand we should be thankful to God. We pray that this conversion is sincere and that Kanye will continue in this faith until He is with the Lord. We also know that our faith isn't and shouldn't be in him and in his public testimony. The devil will certainly try to malign the testimony by crushing the man under some form of attack and sin, even into apostasy. But in the now, I was humbled as someone made the point that this album grasps what so many famous people who profess some faith don't confess: that Jesus is

King. The lyrics confess that, confess the need for us to live in view of that, and in the light of the Word.

So that's the point of this. On All Saints' Day, we're remembering those who have gone before us in the faith. We're remembering those who lived under this authority of Jesus, hearing the Word He spoke. Thanks be to God for them. And as we say that, what does that look like?

In this life it looks weak: poverty in spirit; mourning; meekness; hunger and thirst for righteousness; mercy; purity in heart; making peace; and, most jarring of all, persecution. Considering the authority of Jesus and the authority by which He spoke that Word, examine yourself for that submission to authority. Examine yourself for that poverty, purity, meekness, despising the world and hungering and thirsting for righteousness, for that willingness to be reviled and persecuted. Do you have it?

And in that examination, understand authority. You see, we so often think of it in terms of the Law. Those in authority are just power mongers who would crush those underneath into submission to their demands. We think of it just as this Law relationship, this power relationship. One has power the other doesn't. And when we consider this obedience to Jesus' authority we do the same thing. When we examine ourselves and our short comings as I just mentioned, we do that same thing. We know the guilt of not having done it, and a part of us resents the power that Jesus has.

But Christians, this Jesus, this One with all this authority, this One speaking in this sermon doesn't work like we do. We think of power as strong. His power is made perfect in weakness. We think of authority as power wielding, but what do we see in this One? We see the One who had the authority even to lay His life down. And He did. Because that's what God's authority does. It lays that down in love. It covers over sin with that authority with love that He has for us. It gives up its own life, just as He shows on the cross, shedding His blood for you and for your sin, so that in that same authority He might take up His life again in His resurrection.

Christians, it's with that same authority that He speaks to you now. He speaks to you not only in the conviction of the Law, but as the One who was most impoverished in spirit, most mournful, hungriest and thirstiest for righteousness, most merciful and pure in heart, so that as His authoritative word bespeaks you righteous you could have comfort, satisfaction, mercy, inheritance, and even the whole kingdom of heaven. Because that's what this One with authority does. He gives up what is His own to give to you, the saints He has made His own. Amen.