

**No.1 Introduction to the series 'Sermon on the Mount.'**

"Christian counterculture" says John Stott are the best two words to sum up the intention of what should develop from the Sermon on the Mount. He goes on to say that it is probably the best-known part of the teaching of Jesus, though arguably it is the least understood, and certainly it is the least obeyed. Before looking at our readings – what can you recall from your previous readings of this body of teaching?



**Read Matthew 5: 1-2 - followed by Exodus 19: 3-8** Immediately Matthew is deliberately connecting his readers to the Exodus passage; 'when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down'. Our modern English translations hide that in The Septuagint (Greek translation of Israel's scriptures), very familiar to Matthew's first readers and the language in which Matthew writes, he is using the exact same words as the opening of Exodus 19:3, about going up the mountain to meet God. It would seem Matthew wants his readers to note the connection and realise that Jesus was ascending the mountain to teach God's people with similarities to how Moses had previously. *Having made the connection to Moses, what links and characteristics is Matthew prompting his readers to make? How is this relevant to the teaching that follows?*

The nation Israel had time and time again failed to be as they had covenanted with God, 'my holy nation, kingdom of priests, set apart', and from whom other nations could witness God's love (Leviticus 18: 3, 2 Kings 17: 7-8, Jeremiah 10: 1-5, Ezekiel 20: 7). This is essential background to understanding the 'counterculture' Jesus' teaching delivers. Those living within 'the Kingdom of God' are to be noticeably different from the surrounding cultures; in this sermon Jesus will deliver the necessary guidance and objectives. *Is it possible to be 'noticeably different' (a witnessing Christian) and yet be an integral and valued member of the surrounding community?*

**Read Matthew 7: 24-29** An often-quoted passage, full of sound advice for living, but coming at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, primarily it is a warning. Note that in verse 29 Jesus taught in his own authority - therefore he is greater than Moses. Matthew places this as the final assertion of Jesus in this teaching and it must directly relate to all he has said. The consequences for hearing but not putting his teaching into practice are made clear. *How and where did you learn the ethical and moral teachings of this whole sermon? How and where do you anticipate the next generation will be taught?*

Jesus uses elsewhere the picture of rock as a sure foundation – Peter's faith is the rock on which he will build the church. Jesus predicts that the Temple (believed by the Temple leaders to be built on the solid rock of their traditions) will come crashing down (Matt 23: 37 – 24:2). *Has this anything to say about the church of Christ today? Is the reprimand and warning to the church at Sardis (Revelation 3: 1-7) something of a reminder about listening to Jesus but not hearing?*

"Only the one who obeys Christ as Lord is wise. For only they are building their house on a foundation of rock, which the storms neither of adversity nor of judgment will be able to undermine." *John Stott.*

**Prayer:** Father God, teach us not only your will, but how to do it. In your will is my peace.