

# Literary Structure of 'The Sermon on the Mount'

## (Matthew 4:25-8:1)

- A [Inclusio: opening] (4:25-5:2)
  - B [Prologue: blessings] (5:3-16)
    - [Main Body of the Sermon] (5:17-7:12)
      - C [Introduction: fulfilling the law and the prophets] (17-20)
        - D1 [Section 1] (5:21-48)
          - [Part 1: from the 10 commandments] (21-32)
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        - D2 [Section 2] (6:1-18)
          - [Introduction: principle of humility] (6:1)
          - [Part 1: alms] (6:2-4)
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        - D3 [Section 3] (6:19-7:11)
          - [Part 1: Cares of mammon] (19-34)
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    - B' [Epilogue: warnings] (13-27)
  - A' [Inclusio: closing] (28-8:1)

### [Inclusio: opening] (4:25-5:2)

(a) (4:25) And there **followed** him great **multitudes** of people from Galilee, and *from* Decapolis, and *from* Jerusalem, and *from* Judaea, and *from* beyond Jordan.

(b) (5:1a) And seeing the multitudes, he **went up into a mountain**:

(c) (1b-2) and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and **taught** them, saying,

### [Prologue: blessings]<sup>1</sup> (5:3-16)

[9 Blessings] (3-12)

(3) Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: **for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**.

(4) Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

(5) Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

(6) Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

(7) Blessed *are* the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

(8) Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

(9) Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

(10) Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: **for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**.

(11-12) Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you **falsely**, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the **prophets** which were before you.

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<sup>1</sup> The Prologue and the Epilogue share common themes identified by certain key words in pink. Both share an emphasis on good works, represented by good fruit in the epilogue. The 9<sup>th</sup> blessing refers to false accusers just as the epilogue warns against false prophets; its significance is highlighted structurally as it comes after the first 8 blessings which begin and end with the common reward 'theirs is the kingdom of heaven'.

[2 Principles of Responsibility] (13-16)

(13) **Ye are the salt of the earth**: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

(14-16) **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. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your **good works**, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

## [Main Body of the Sermon] (5:17-7:12)

### [Introduction: fulfilling the law and the prophets] (17-20)

(a) (17-18) Think not that I am come to destroy **the law, or the prophets**: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily **I say unto you**, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

(b) (19a) Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven:

(b') (19b) but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

(a') (20) For **I say unto you**, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

## [Section 1] (5:21-48)

### [Part 1: from the 10 commandments<sup>2</sup>] (21-32)

(a) (21-22) **Ye have heard that it was said** by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

**But I say unto 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: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

(b) (23-24)

(i) (23a) Therefore if thou **bring thy gift** to the altar,

(ii) (23b) and there rememberest that **thy brother** hath ought against thee;

(iii) (24a) Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way;

(ii') (24b) first be reconciled to **thy brother**,

(i') (24c) and then come and **offer thy gift**.

(a') (25-26) Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. **Verily I say unto thee**, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

(a) (27-28) **Ye have heard that it was said** by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:

**But I say unto you**, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

(b) (29) And 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.

(b') (30) And if thy **right** hand offend thee, cut it off, 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.

(a') (31-32) **It hath been said**, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

**But I say unto you**, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

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<sup>2</sup> Although divorce is not mentioned in the 10 commandments Jesus' teaching on this subject (31-32) is really part of a larger section (27-32) that deals with committing adultery - the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment. The introductory phrase of each teaching is 'Ye have heard that it was said', however we do not have the full phrase in verse 31 suggesting it is an extension of the previous section.

## [Part 2: other moral laws] (33-48)

(33-37) **Again, ye have heard that it hath been said** by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:

**But I say unto you**, 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.

(38-42) **Ye have heard that it hath been said**, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:

**But I say unto you**, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if 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.

(a) (43-44) **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 which despitefully use you, and persecute you**;

(b) (45) 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.

(a') (46-47) 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?

(b') (45) Be ye therefore perfect, even as **your Father which is in heaven** is perfect.

## [Section 2] (6:1-18)

### [Introduction: principle of humility] (6:1)

(6:1) Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

### [Part 1: alms] (6:2-4)

(a) (2a) 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.

(b) (2b) **Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.**

(a') (3-4a) **But when thou doest alms**, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine **alms** may be in secret:

(b') (4b) **and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.**

### [Part 2a: prayer] (5-6)

(a) (5a) And **when thou prayest**, thou shalt not be as the **hypocrites are**: for they love to **pray** standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.

(b) (5b) **Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.**

(a') (6a) **But thou, when thou prayest**, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, **pray** to thy Father which is in secret;

(b') (6b) **and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.**

### [Part 2b: prayer] (7-14)

(a) (7-8) **But when ye pray**, use not vain repetitions, as the **heathen do**: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for **your Father** knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

(b) (9-13)

(i) (9-10) After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be **thy** name. **Thy** kingdom come. **Thy** will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven.

(iii) (11-13a) Give **us** this 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:

(ii') (13b) For **thine** is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

(a') (14-15) 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 your trespasses.

### [Part 3: fasting] (16-18)

(a) (16a) **Moreover when ye fast**, be not, as the **hypocrites**, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to **fast**.

(b) (16b) **Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.**

(a') (17-18a) **But thou, when thou fastest**, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to **fast**, but unto thy Father which is in secret:

(b') (18b) **and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.**

## [Section 3] (6:19-7:11)

### [Part 1: Cares of mammon] (19-34)

**(A)** [Principle – Materialism] (19-21)

(a) (19) Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

(b) (20) But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

(c) (21) For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

**(B)** [2 Parables] (22-24)

(a) (22a) The **light** (*luchnos*) of the body is the eye:

(b) (22b-23a) if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of **light** (*photeinos*).  
But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness.

(c) (23b) If therefore the **light** (*phos*) that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

(a) (24a) No man can serve two masters:

(b) (24b) for either he will **hate** the one,

(c) (24c) and **love** the other;

(c') (24d) or else he will **hold to** the one,

(b') (24e) and **despise** the other.

(a') (24f) Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

**(C)** [Care of the Father] (25-34)

(a) (25) **Therefore** I say unto you, **Take no thought** for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

(b) (26) **Behold the fowls of the air**: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not **much better** than they?

(c) (27) Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

(b') (28-30) And why take ye thought for raiment? **Consider the lilies of the field**, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, *shall he* not **much more clothe** you, O ye of little faith?

(a'/2a) (31) **Therefore take no thought**, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

(2b) (32-34) (For after **all these things** do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of **all these things**.

(2c) (33a) But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;

(2b') (33b) and **all these things** shall be added unto you.

(2a') (34) **Take therefore no thought** for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day *is* the evil thereof.

## [Part 2: Judging righteously] (7:1-11)

(A') [Principle – Judging] (7:1-2)

(a) (1) Judge not, that ye be not judged.

(b) (2a) For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged:

(c) (2b) and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

(B') [2 Parables] (3-6)

(a) (3a) And why beholdest thou the **mote** that is in thy **brother's eye**,

(b) (3b) but considerest not the **beam** that is in **thine own eye**?

(c) (4-5a) Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam *is* in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite,

(b') (5b) first cast out the **beam** out of **thine own eye**;

(a') (5c) and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the **mote** out of thy **brother's eye**.

(a) (6a) Give not that which is holy unto the **dogs**,

(b) (6b) neither cast ye your pearls before **swine**,

(b') (6c) lest they **trample** them under their feet,

(a') (6d) and turn again and **rend** you.

(C') [Care of the Father] (7-11)

(a) (7a) **Ask**, and it shall be **given** you;

(b) (7b) **seek**, and ye shall **find**;

(c) (7c) **knock**, and it shall be **opened** unto you:

(a') (8a) For every one that **asketh** **receiveth**;

(b') (8b) and he that **seeketh** **findeth**;

(c') (8c) and to him that **knocketh** it shall be **opened**.

(d) (9-11) Or what man is there of you, whom if his son **ask** bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he **ask** a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how **much more** shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that **ask** him?

## [Conclusion] (7:12)

(12) Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is **the law and the prophets**.

## [Epilogue: warnings] (13-27)

(a) (13) Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to **destruction**, and many there be which go in thereat:

(b) (14) Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto **life**, and few there be that find it.

(c) (15) Beware of **false prophets**, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

(d) (16a) **Ye shall know them by their fruits**.

(e) (16b) Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

(f) (17a) Even so every good tree bringeth forth **good fruit**;

(g) (17b) but a corrupt tree bringeth forth **evil fruit**.

(g') (18a) A good tree cannot bring forth **evil fruit**,

(f') (18b) neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth **good fruit**.

(e') (19) Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

(d') (20) Wherefore **by their fruits ye shall know them**.

(c') (21-23) Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not **prophesied** in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

(b') (24-25) Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and **it fell not**: for it was founded upon a rock.

(a') (26-27) And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and **it fell**: and great was the fall of it.

### **[Inclusio: closing] (28-8:1)**

(c') And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he **taught** them as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes

(b') When he was **come down from the mountain**,

(a') great **multitudes followed** him.