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The Life: ~~Under~~ The Sermon on the Mount II

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Division of the Sermon on the Mount. And now we come to a part of the great sermon which lays it open to criticism, and that has been criticized perhaps more severely than any other part of it. The Christ is represented as saying: "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your ⟨bodies⟩ [body], what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body ⟨more⟩ than raiment?" The fowls of the air are represented as not sowing or reaping, nor storing, yet the heavenly Father feedeth them. "Are ye not much better than they?" And why take thought of raiment? "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin," yet in raiment they outshine Solomon in all his glory. If God will so clothe the grass of the field, shall he not much more clothe you? "O ye of little faith" (Matt. 6:25-30). And hence, as is generally thought, men are admonished to take no thought of what they shall eat or what they shall drink or wherewithal they shall be clothed. After these things the Gentiles seek, but the followers of the Master are admonished to "seek [ye] first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," to take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:33-34).

"An impossible manner of life," men cry out; and they cry out thus from practical, human experience. Men may not live as the birds live, nor expect to be clothed as the lilies of the field in beauty and in glory. Civilization can not be established and perpetuated by taking no thought of tomorrow. Civilization has its beginning by man taking thought for tomorrow; by planning for the future. The sacrifice of today which shall provide for the future day is the beginning of the creation of capital, the means through which great things are achieved, and is the process by which civilization advances. So this admonition as it stands in Matthew, advising men to live as the birds live, and to trust for clothing as the lilies do for beauty and glory, and to take no thought for tomorrow as to what

they shall eat or drink or where withal they shall be clothed, seems like folly, and wholly at variance with true economic principles and the stern requirements of common sense.

The Book of Mormon version of ~~this part of the Sermon~~: “Take no thought.” Here, however, by what has come to light in the New Dispensation of the gospel through the Book of Mormon version of this matchless sermon, there comes a sidelight which removes every objection to this part of the discourse of the Christ, and destroys all the force of infidel argument against it in this: that this part of the sermon on “take no thought” etc. is not addressed to the multitude before the Savior, but having delivered the admonitions concerning almsgiving, prayer and fasting, and emphasizing the importance of singleness of purpose in the worship of God to the multitude, then:

And now it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words he looked upon the twelve whom he had chosen, and said unto them: Remember the words which I have spoken. For behold, ye are they whom I have chosen to minister unto this people. 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. (3 Ne. 13:25)

And then follows consecutively the admonitions that they go forth in their ministry wholly consecrated to the service of God, and he will provide for their temporal needs. Closing this portion of his discourse with these words, “Take therefore no thought for ⟨tomorrow⟩ [the morrow], for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient is the day unto the evil thereof” (3 Ne. 13:34).¹

This admonition then of taking no thought for food or raiment, or any of the material things of life can be safely addressed to twelve men who have been chosen to make an absolute consecration of their lives to the accomplishment of the special spiritual things of God’s kingdom; but not expanded to cover the general economic principles of a whole community, or nation, or the world.

The thought struggling for expression here is that if this part of the sermon was especially addressed to the Twelve when the sermon was delivered in America, may it not be that it was likewise limited when delivered in Palestine.

¹Note the difference in the closing of this division of the Christ’s sermon as given in Matthew and as given in the Book of Mormon. In Matthew it stands: “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matt. 6:34), but in the Book of Mormon more logically it reads: “Sufficient is the day unto the evil thereof” (3 Ne. 13:34).

Judge not. I resume now my quotation from St. Matthew: “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Matt. 7:1) said the Christ, pointing out how inadequate men are to judge each other, because of their inability to see clearly the mote in their brother’s eye, while perhaps a beam is in their own. How shall such an one judge righteously? It is reserved to God alone to so judge. To judge righteously one must know all; not only what is done, but has been resisted; the hungering and thirsting and striving for righteousness will enter into just judgment, as well as the lapses in the midst of those strivings. The sum of the matter is, then, to leave judgment to one who knows all and seek the whole and not part only. And this warning is given with the admonition “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matt. 7:2). Sufficient the warning surely to lead one to abstain from judgment of his fellow men. For us men, the heart and mind of our fellows is something of a sealed book, and we are incompetent to judge with righteous judgment: hence, Judge not!^a

Sacredness of holy things. Then comes the admonition in the sermon to hold sacred the holy things—“Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast [ye] you[r] pearls before swine”—these sacred things will not be appreciated by the “dogs” and the “swine,” and they may trample precious things under their feet and turn and rend you (Matt. 7:6).

Of asking. “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; . . . every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth” (Matt. 7:7–8). Again appears the truth, men shall have according to their desires, inasmuch as that interferes not with the general purposes of God, both in particular cases and in the general scheme of things; for we must remember that we live in a world of broken harmonies from which men are to learn certain great and important things; and some of these can only be realized through disappointments and suffering. So our asking must be in wisdom, and not in petulant selfishness, but always in the spirit of the Master, who, let us remember, when he asked that the bitter cup of his suffering might pass if that were possible or be consistent with the will and purposes of God, yet though asking for the passing of the cup, that petition was quickly followed with “not my

^aRoberts here does not note that Joseph Smith modified this verse to read, “Judge not unrighteously, that ye be not judged: but judge righteous judgment” (JST Matt. 7:2).

will, but ⟨thy will⟩ [thine,] be done” (cf. Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). So he would have his disciples pray, for his own actions are to be taken as the illustration of his doctrine. But the Master gave encouragement on this point of asking by trying to convince those who heard him that the heavenly Father would be as reasonable in giving, surely, as earthly fathers would. So:

What man is there of you, whom if his son ask ⟨for⟩ 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 [un]to your children, how much more ⟨will⟩ [shall] your Father which is in heaven give good ⟨gifts⟩ [things] to ⟨him⟩ [them] that ask him? (Matt. 7:9-11)

And here I might add: If the wisdom of parents sometimes prompts them to withhold the gift that would be injurious to their children, considering their age, and their circumstances, and the effect upon their lives of granting an unwholesome wish that might be mischievous, shall not our Father in heaven do likewise?

The Golden Rule. Now comes a new summary of all the truths the Master is reaching: “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” (Matt. 7:12).

This is called, and worthily called, the “Golden Rule.” Its essence will be found in love of God and love of man, it is the Master’s generalization of all law and of all prophets. A generalization in fact, even of the Christ’s generalization when he said, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matt. 22:37-39). This is the great commandment, and he made it inclusive of all the law and all the prophets. And now all this is again condensed into this “Golden Rule,” the rule which bursts into an act of doing. Doing to others as you would have them do unto you.

It detracts nothing from this great rule of supreme Christian conduct, because others catching a glint of the same glory have said something akin to it. Confucius for instance, long before Christ (551-478 B.C.) is credited with saying: “Do not to others what you would not wish done to yourself.” But this is negative in form and only half the truth of the Golden Rule, the Chinese chief teacher only went so far as to say, do not those things to others that you would not have them do to you. But the Golden Rule admonishes not only to refrain from doing evil that you would not have done to yourself; but by putting it into the positive form it bids you to do unto others what you would wish might be done unto and for you, under like circumstances.

So with the saying accredited to the good Rabbi Hillel, when a would-be proselyte demanded to be taught the whole law while he stood upon one leg, the Rabbi answered, and won a proselyte by saying: “What is hateful to thyself, that do not thou to another. This is the whole law, the rest is commentary.”² But this saying, excellent as it is, has the same defect that the negative statement of Confucius carries.

Aristotle, the subtle Greek philosopher approached the summary of the Golden Rule most nearly of all the ancients, when he said in answer to the question: “What should one’s conduct be towards one’s friends?” He replied: “As we would that they should act towards us.” Here again is a defect, for his statement of principle is limited to “our friends.” Not so the Golden Rule of the Christ. There it stands in all its perfection: “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Matt. 7:12).

Closing Admonitions. We are hastening to the close of the Sermon, and hence we find admonition predominant, and warning: “Enter ye in ⟨to⟩ [at] the ⟨straight⟩ [strait] gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because ⟨straight⟩ [strait] is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matt. 7:13-14). Let those who cry there are many ways leading to the one place, the kingdom of heaven, and it matters not by what route we may elect to make the journey—let them *know that* their theory is contradicted by this teaching of the Divine Master. There is a unity in truth, there is a one-ness of way, there is one-ness of the gospel life. Straight is the gate, narrow the way, that *leadeth unto Life* and but few find it, because wide is the gate, devious and many the paths that lead to destruction and many find them, since both gates and ways lead along lines of least resistance.

“Beware of false prophets,” rings out the warning of the Christ, “⟨they may⟩ [which] come [to you] in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matt. 7:15). He gives as an invariable sign for their detection: “Ye shall know them by their fruits”; and then the pertinent inquiry, “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” (Matt. 7:16). A tree is known by its fruit. A good tree bringeth forth good fruit; a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit, and the reverse can not be true. And the end of evil trees and false prophets, of course, will be destruction.

And now against mere pretensions of sanctity and pretensions of following the Master: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my

²Dummelow, *Commentary*, on Matthew 7:12.

Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). The utterances of prophecies in the name of the Christ, casting out of devils, and doing many wonderful works in the name of the Christ, may not sanctify those who are influenced by mere pretensions, by show of sanctity, and religious fervour. To such he represents himself as saying in finality, “Depart from me ye workers of iniquity, I never knew you” (cf. Matt. 7:23).

And now the Master’s peroration to the master sermon of all ages. Referring to all subdivisions of the discourse, the closing it up in one splendid utterance:

Exordium.

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. 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. 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. (Matt. 7:24-29)

The living Sermon on the Mount. The best part of this sermon is not expressed in the words of it, however gracious, or apt, or profound, or splendidly placed, or true. The best part of the sermon consists in the fact that he who delivered it, LIVED IT! The Christ’s Sermon on the Mount is but the blue print of the Christ’s earth life; and he lived his life according to the blue print—the plan.

Thus the Christ meets us at every point of the way. Considered directly as the example of what God would have revealed as the one perfect Life—the ideal of all ages—Behold the CHRIST-LIFE!

Considered as fulfilling the law given to Moses: Behold the Christ!

Considered as the founder of the church in the meridian dispensation, revealed God in his own person, and the love of God in the Atonement, and in expounding the ethic of the gospel, shifted from the negative to the positive form, and basing it on love of God and love of man, re-enforcing it by living it—Behold the Christ!

Considered as setting forth a universal ethic without limitations of age or place—timeless, eternal, and exemplifying every precept of it in his life—again, Behold the Christ!

Further references recommended by Roberts for this lesson: Roberts, *New Witnesses for God* 3:432-40; compare Matt. 5-7 and Luke 6 and 11 to 3 Ne. 12-14.