



*Henrik Olrik, Sermon on the Mount (detail), ca. 1860, Sankt Mattheus Kirke, Copenhagen. Image via Wikimedia Commons.*

# MATTHEW 5; LUKE 6 (3 NEPHI 12)

SERMON ON THE MOUNT AND PLAIN

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## **Jesus Teaches the Higher Law**

Jesus's Sermon on the Mount is arguably the most influential sermon to "the history and character of Christianity."<sup>1</sup> Evidence that this message was very important to Jesus is the fact that we find portions of Matthew's account in the Gospels of Mark and Luke, in the Sermon on the Plain, and in 3 Nephi, in the Sermon at the Temple. The repetition of the message and the care taken in recording it are further evidence of how important the message was to Jesus. The texts often overlap, yet they are still individualized for each audience and setting. Each difference will be pointed out as we go through Matthew's account verse by verse.

Matthew’s Gospel draws regular parallels from the Old Testament. One of those emphasized in Mt 5–7 is the fact that Jesus gives this sermon on a mountain. Moses received God’s law on a mountain, but his people refused it, and then he received the Mosaic law instead. Jesus was the premortal Jehovah, the Law Giver. Now He is back on a mountain in a sacred setting, gathering His most trusted disciples to teach the higher law again. The sermon was given as spiritual training for disciples, and this time, they received it. The audiences in Matthew and 3 Nephi are those who have chosen to follow Jesus—covenant makers, if you will.

### **Mt 5:1–12; Lk 6:17–23. The Beatitudes**

Jews of the late second temple period (the time of the New Testament) knew their Psalms, second only to the Torah. Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount and Sermon on the Plain echo the Psalms by beginning with the word “blessed.”

#### *Setting*

**Mt 5:1. “mountain.”** Before the sermon begins in Matthew, Jesus escapes from the crowd by climbing up or “into” a mountain, being followed by His closest disciples. (Matthew uses “disciples” for the Twelve Apostles). Contrast this private setting of believers to the audience of the shorter Sermon on the Plain.

**Lk 6:17–20. “plain.”** Luke places the Sermon on the Plain as occurring after an enormous crowd has gathered from great distances to seek Jesus’s healing. However, Lk 6:20 says that when the teaching begins, “looking up at His disciples, Jesus said . . .” (BSB). Perhaps Jesus addressed only believers who were ready for the higher law in both settings.

#### *Beatitudes*

**Mt 5:2. “he opened His mouth.”** The JST of this verse includes a seventy-five-word addition, which follows 3 Nephi 12:2 almost verbatim. It begins with the familiar phrase “blessed are they” and then refers to those who (1) have faith in the Lord and His messengers, (2) are baptized, (3) receive the promised fire and the Holy Ghost for a remission of their sins, and (4) remain humble. The JST addition reads:

More blessed are they who shall believe in your words because that ye shall testify that ye have seen me, and that ye know that I am. Yea, blessed are they who shall believe in your words, and come down into the depths of humility and be baptized, for they shall be visited with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and shall receive a remission of their sins.

The addition teaches that those who believe on Jesus as their Savior through the teachings of Jesus’s servants will be even more blessed for their extension of greater faith.

**Mt 5:3–11. “blessed.”** In English Bibles, “blessed” is used for two different Greek words—an adjective and a verb.

Table 1. Comparison of Beatitudes in the Sermons on the Mount, on the Plain, and at the Temple

Mt 5:3–12	Lk 6:20–23	3 Ne 12:3–12 (and JST, Mt 5)
<p><sup>3</sup> ___ Blessed are the poor in spirit: _____ for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p>	<p><sup>20</sup> Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.</p>	<p><sup>3</sup> <i>Yea</i>, blessed are the poor in spirit <i>who come unto me</i>, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p>
<p><sup>4</sup> ___ Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.</p>		<p><sup>4</sup> <i>And again</i>, blessed are all they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.</p>
<p><sup>5</sup> ___ Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.</p>		<p><sup>5</sup> <i>And</i> blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.</p>
<p><sup>6</sup> ___ Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled _____.</p>	<p><sup>21</sup> Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled.</p>	<p><sup>6</sup> <i>And</i> blessed are <i>all</i> they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled <i>with the Holy Ghost</i>.</p>
<p><sup>7</sup> ___ Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.</p>	<p>Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh.</p>	<p><sup>7</sup> <i>And</i> blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.</p>
<p><sup>8</sup> ___ Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.</p>		<p><sup>8</sup> <i>And</i> blessed are <i>all</i> the pure in heart, for they shall see God.</p>
<p><sup>9</sup> ___ Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.</p>		<p><sup>9</sup> <i>And</i> blessed are <i>all</i> the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God.</p>
<p><sup>10</sup> ___ Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p>		<p><sup>10</sup> <i>And</i> blessed are <i>all</i> they who are persecuted for <i>my name's sake</i>, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p>
<p><sup>11</sup> ___ Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.</p>	<p><sup>22</sup> Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.</p>	<p><sup>11</sup> <i>And</i> blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake;</p>
<p><sup>12</sup> Rejoice, _____ and be exceeding glad: for great _____ is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.</p>	<p><sup>23</sup> Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.</p>	<p><sup>12</sup> <i>For ye shall have great joy</i> and be exceedingly glad, for great <i>shall be</i> your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets who were before you.</p>

The adjective *makarios* is usually translated as “fortunate, well, happy or blessed.” However, in studying the word’s fifty uses in the New Testament, *makarios* takes on additional meaning. Often, early Christian disciples and the authors of the New Testament used the word to refer to a future state of divine blessedness, a future heavenly state (that is, when the pure in heart will see God). This is the way the word is used in the Beatitudes. The word is “exalted and exalting.”

The verb *eulogeo* means “to thank, praise, or to give a blessing.” Jesus gave a blessing as “He blessed, and brake, and gave“ bread (Mt 14:19). Luke used *eulogeo* recalling the angel Gabriel’s and Elizabeth’s words about the young virgin Mary, who received God’s special blessings: “Blessed art thou among women” (Lk 1:28, 42). Forms of this verb are used forty-three times in the New Testament, many of those times by each Gospel writer.

**Beatitudes.** The Sermon on the Mount lists eight beatitudes (or future promised blessings), the Sermon at the Temple includes thirteen (3 Nephi 12:1–11), and the Sermon on the Plain has only four (Lk 6:20–22). Different biblical translations help to communicate the original meaning of Christ’s new higher law.

### *Differences: High Christology*

The minor differences in setting, order, and content suggest that Jesus shared similar ideas in different sermons. Interestingly, in Luke we find four parallel woes following the four blessed states (Lk 6:24–26). The Book of Mormon adds “and” several times, which can be argued to be evidence of ancient language usage for punctuation. More significantly, it also adds statements to encourage disciples to turn to God for help and healing. We must come unto Christ when poor in spirit and receive the Spirit when hungering after righteousness. In 3 Ne 12:10, Jesus’s name is emphasized rather than “righteousness’ sake” (Mt 5:10). These significant additions, in addition to the five extra beatitudes in 3 Ne 12:1–2, turn one to Jesus as the Savior, which changes the text to high Christology.

### *Definitions*

**Mt 5:3. “poor in spirit.”** The New Testament uses *ptochos*, “poor,” thirty-four times to mean “reduced to beggary, asking alms; destitute of wealth, influence, position, honor; lowly, afflicted; destitute of the Christian virtues and eternal riches; helpless, powerless to accomplish an end; lacking in anything that respects their spirit.”

The word *pneuma*, “pirit,” is used 385 times in New Testament to mean “(1) a movement of air or wind; breath of nostrils or mouth; (2) the spirit, that is, the vital principle by which the body is animated; the rational spirit, the power by which the human being feels, thinks, decides; the soul; (3) a spirit, a life giving spirit; a human soul that has left the body; a spirit higher than man but lower than God, that is, an angel; used of demons, or evil spirits; of God, that is, God’s power and agency; the disposition or influence which fills and governs the soul of any one; the efficient source of any power, affection, emotion, desire, and so forth.”

These two words are used together only here in the New Testament.

**Mt 5:4 (Lk 6:21).** “**mourn**” is used ten times from the Greek word *pentheo*, “lament, feel guilt.”

**Mt 5:5.** “**meek**” is used four times translated from *praios*, “mild, gentle, meekness toward God as that disposition of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting, the opposite to self-assertiveness and self-interest.” Meekness stems from trust in God’s goodness and control.

*Love God and love neighbors: God’s Spirit fills us to bless humanity*

The structure of the Beatitudes is similar to the that of Moses’s Ten Commandments, in which the first four commandments deal with our relationship with God and the last six with our relationship to our fellow humans. The first four beatitudes focus on our need for God’s help and our relationship to Him. We need God when we are poor in spirit, mourning, and meek. Then when we hunger after Him, we receive the strength to be merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers and to endure persecution.

Table 2. Comparison of the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes

	<b>Ten Commandments</b> <b>Ex 20:3–17</b>	<b>Beatitudes</b> <b>JST, Mt 5:3–12</b>
Love God	Have no other gods Do not make or worship graven images Do not take the Lord’s name in vain Keep the Sabbath day holy	Poor in spirit who come unto me are blessed Mourners will be comforted Meek will inherit Hunger for righteousness = filled with Spirit
Love Others	Honor your father and mother Do not kill Do not commit sexual sin Do not steal Do not bear false witness Do not covet	Merciful obtain mercy Pure in heart will see God Peacemakers are children of God Those persecuted for God will be blessed

Like many of Christ’s teachings, the Beatitudes cite many ideas found in the Old Testament as outlined in the table below.

**Mt 5:6 (JST).** “**hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost.**” This is the transition verse between being spiritually needy and receiving a restoration of spiritual strength. The JST follows the Book of Mormon text, which adds the Spirit to this transition. God strengthens us by filling us with the Holy Ghost (3 Ne 12:6). Seeking and receiving the Holy Spirit evokes the gift of the Holy Ghost and the change that comes to us when we do.

**Mt 5:7–9.** “**Blessed are the merciful . . . the pure in heart . . . the peacemakers.**” Three of the last four beatitudes help us to serve others.

NT	=	OT
Mt 5:4	=	Isa 61:2
Mt 5:5	=	Ps 37:1
Mt 5:6	=	Ps 107:4–7
Mt 5:7	=	2 Sam 22:26
Mt 5:8	=	Ps 24:3–4
Mt 5:9	=	Gen 13:8
Mt 5:10–11	=	2 Chr 36:16

Table 3. Parallels between the Beatitudes and Old Testament Scriptures

Blessed (Lk 6:20–22)	Woe (Lk 6:24–26)
Poor	Rich
Weep	Full
Hunger	Laugh
Hated	Socially accepted

Table 4. Comparison of the blessed and those who receive woes

**Mt 5:10–11 (JST).** “**Blessed are all they that are persecuted for my name’s sake.**” The JST changes “righteousness” to the Lord’s name. Righteousness may be another name for the Lord, but it is helpful to point to those who are persecuted for their belief in Jesus. Early Christian writings record that eleven of Jesus’s Apostles would die as martyrs for their testimonies. It seems significant that the Lord placed persecution as the last state of blessedness. If people can seek charity or love even for their persecutors, then they have become more like our Savior. It “provides the greatest opportunity to triumph over hate and fear and to love one’s enemies . . . the last point the Lord made before the injunction to be perfect.”<sup>2</sup>

*Sermon on the Plain: “Woe”*

**Lk 6:23–26. “Woe.”** Jesus’s Sermon on the Plain detours from the Sermon on the Mount by aligning its four beatitudes with four woes. Rewards and judgment will both come in heaven, where opposition will still apply.

Luke’s record of Jesus’s sermon is like a Reader’s Digest version and no longer runs alongside the version in Luke until it returns to discuss the need to love our enemies. Yet, many missing sections

are found in Jesus’s teachings elsewhere in Luke’s Gospel. This realistically portrays Jesus reiterating important messages when speaking to a new audience.<sup>3</sup>

**Mt 5:13–16. Teaching for a Higher Order: Covenant Making**

**Mt 5:13 (JST).** “**Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the salt.**” The JST addition emphasizes that God called servants to bless others. There is no question that God gives an assignment to His disciples. The twice-repeated “you” refers to those disciples present as well as to future disciples who are willing to enter a covenant to serve and follow Jesus.

**Mt 5:13. “salt”** was very precious in the ancient world. Furthermore, salt had significance in the temple setting as a sign or symbol of the covenant: “It is a covenant of salt for ever before the Lord” (Num 18:19; see D&C 101:39). Temple sacrifices were sprinkled with salts (Lev 2:13). Salt, like fire, was a purifier.

Salt crystals can lose their flavor and preservative capabilities in moisture. Jesus builds on this image to invite His disciples to make covenants. He asks them to bless and preserve the earth. If they do not, they will be useless salt without its savor. (We find a similar discussion between Jesus and His disciples in another setting; see Mk 9:49–50 and Lk 14:34–35.)

**Mt 5:14–16 (JST).** “**Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the light.**” In the ancient world, light came from the sun, moon, stars, fire, or God (Ex 13:21). Fire was used in sacrifices as a purifier, which is also the Spirit’s role in our lives—it acts “like a fire is burning.”<sup>4</sup> The JST again adds the repeated focus that disciples are called to become a light to others in darkness. This is needed to combat the interpretation that claims that the instruction given in the Sermon on the Mount “represents an impossible ideal.”<sup>5</sup>

As Jesus combines of the topics of salt and light together, He figuratively asks His disciples to make themselves a sacrifice to God. *Sacrifice* and *sanctification* come from the same roots. In Latin, *sacrifice* meant “to make sacred.” Jesus introduces the new change from offering a blood sacrifice to instead sacrificing one’s heart.

Salt, light, and earth also evoke the theme of Creation. John W. Welch sees this as part of the new, higher law for covenant disciples to make:

Instead of the old imperative, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3), Jesus now issues the new injunction, “Let your light so shine before this people, that they may see your good works” (3 Nephi 12:16). Just as the Creator looked at the creation and pronounced his works to be good, Jesus now invites each disciple to become a creator of “good works,” that when they are seen, men may glorify God. With this, Jesus is forming a new heaven and new earth, a new creative act and new creation.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus calls His disciples to radiate His light to the world on a candlestick. Jesus is the Light of the World, and Christians can reflect or hold up His light. In addition to being an injunction against hiding one’s light, this communicates the need to get more of His light, or to strengthen one’s testimony, to offer a witness that will shine so brightly that it cannot be hidden.

### *Lower and higher law explained—Mt 5:17–19*

**Mt 5:17. “fulfil.”** The word *pleroo*, “fulfill,” in Greek means “to fill up; to render full, to complete; to fill to the top so that nothing shall be wanting to full measure, fill to the brim; make complete in every particular, to render perfect; to carry through to the end, to accomplish, carry out.” Many ancient Jews viewed the laws of Moses (written and oral) as the source of salvation. Jesus attacked that falsehood by teaching that He was the source of salvation. Later He taught the Nephites, “I am the law” (3 Ne 15:9). The old law of Moses was fulfilled in Jesus’s life, death, and Resurrection.

The new law and covenant were a restoration of the higher law (see D&C 84:23–27). Christ restored attention on the inward state of one’s heart, which is changed through the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is essential

to being born again. With the higher or Melchizedek Priesthood available again, so was the gift of the Holy Ghost. Jesus compares the old and new laws from verses 21–48.

**Mt 5:18. “till.”** The text does not explain when the law is going to be fulfilled. Only in 3 Nephi’s parallel account do we find a helpful explanation saying that it was Jesus’s mortal life, Atonement, death, and Resurrection that fulfilled the law of Moses. Unlike in the earlier sermon in Galilee, in the Sermon at the Temple Jesus rightly emphasizes fulfillment and the need to keep His commandments.

Table 5. Comparison of the JST additions to Mt 5:18–20 with 3 Ne 12:18–20

<b>Mt 5:18–20</b>	<b>JST, Mt 5:18–20</b>	<b>3 Ne 12:18–20</b>
<p><sup>18</sup> 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.</p>	<p><sup>18</sup> For verily, I say unto you, Heaven and earth <i>must</i> pass <i>away, but</i> one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law <i>until</i> all be fulfilled.</p>	<p><sup>18</sup> For verily I say unto you, one jot nor one tittle hath not passed away from the law, but in me it hath all been fulfilled.</p>
<p><sup>19</sup> 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: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.</p>	<p><sup>19</sup> Whosoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so <i>to do</i>, he shall <i>in no wise be saved</i> in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach <i>these commandments of the law until it be fulfilled</i>, the same shall be called great <i>and shall be saved</i> in the kingdom of heaven.</p>	<p><sup>19</sup> And behold, I have given you the law and the commandments of my Father, that ye shall believe in me, and that ye shall repent of your sins, and come unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Behold, ye have the commandments before you, and the law is fulfilled.</p>
<p><sup>20</sup> 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.</p>	<p><sup>20</sup> For I say unto you, except your righteousness shall exceed <i>that</i> of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.</p>	<p><sup>20</sup> Therefore come unto me and be ye saved; for verily I say unto you, that except ye shall keep my commandments, which I have commanded you at this time, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.</p>

**3 Ne 12:19–20. “contrite”** is not used in the New Testament (but it is used four times in the Old Testament). It meant “to grind down to powder.” A contrite heart should be broken and ground down to dust. Our will must be broken so that we can receive the will of the Father in our hearts. If we live the first three



beatitudes and are poor in spirit, mournful, and meek, we will develop a contrite spirit. Here the Sermon at the Temple emphasizes the laws of obedience and sacrifice more than the Sermon on the Mount does.

### *Prohibition against anger—Mt 5:21–22*

**Mt 5:21–22. “But I say unto you.”** Jesus quotes the most heinous sin in the Decalogue, found in Ex 20:13, and then adds its higher law. The outward deed of intentional killing is now the inner feeling of anger. Mt 5:22 is altered by the JST to match 3 Ne 12:22 by taking out “without a cause.” Disciples must sacrifice their anger and contempt in order to come to the Lord’s altar. Under Moses’ law, the penalty for intentional killing was physical death; now it is spiritual death. Jesus refers to the council, which was the Sanhedrin, the Jewish leadership body composed of seventy male leaders plus the high priest. It is also good to recall Jesus’s reminder of the reality that there is a hell (*gehenna*).

### *Reconciliation requirement—Mt 5:23–24*

**Mt 5:23 (JST). “If ye shall come unto me, or shall desire to come unto me.”** The JST strengthens the need for disciples to desire to be aligned with the Lord. The condition of wanting to choose God is crucial as the motivator of future actions. The sermon consistently asks disciples to live the higher law by purifying their desires to “come unto me.”

**Mt 5:25. “leave thy gift.”** Before we cry to the Lord, we are to reconcile our differences with our fellow humans. Healing is needed for both parties. Reconciliation also requires a sacrifice of our pride. This may explain why sometimes we don’t receive answers from God. Jesus’s counsel also applies to our sacrament preparation and participation.

### *Higher law of chastity—Mt 5:27–28*

**Mt 5:27–28. “lust.”** The second most damning sin in the Decalogue is adultery. Jesus’s new, higher law again asks us to control the condition of our hearts. Joseph Smith probably had no idea how Satan would sexually tempt in the twenty-first century, but the principle offered in the JST covers everything. (The JST addition at the end of verse 28 is not footnoted because it is found in 3 Ne 12:29–30.) “*Behold, I give unto you a commandment, that ye suffer none of these things to enter into your heart, for it is better that ye should deny yourselves of these things, wherein ye will take up your cross, than that ye should be cast into hell.*” The Lord repeated this again in D&C 63:16.

**Mt 5:29. “pluck it out.”** Mutilating the body was extremely offensive in Jewish culture. Jesus probably shocked the people into realizing the vileness of lust. The JST adds an additional verse of explanation: “*And now this I speak, a parable concerning your sins; wherefore, cast them from you, that ye may not be hewn down and cast into the fire.*” Interestingly, 3 Ne 12:30 has none of these last verses since the shock treatment wasn’t needed.

**Mt 5:30 (JST).** “**And now this I speak, a parable concerning your sins; wherefore, cast them from you, that ye may not be hewn down and cast into the fire.**” As a master teacher, Jesus often exaggerates ideas in His parables to grab the attention of His audience. This JST addition explains that the above example of gouging out an eye or cutting off a hand is likewise given as a parable—not as literal commandment.

*Marriage covenants not dissolved except for fornication—Mt 5:31–33*

**Mt 5:31. “divorcement.”** Deu 24:1 states the Mosaic law of divorce. But by the time of Jesus, this law had been contorted to destroy the marital relationship. At the time, only men could initiate divorce, and only either for a “religious duty” (in which case the man did not need to return the bride price) or for a “just cause.” All the causes were heavily debated by the rabbis. In either case, the woman was left in dire straits.

*Table 6. Reasons constituting religious duty and just cause for a man to divorce his wife*

Religious Duty	Just Cause
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The wife committed adultery</li> <li>• The wife fed her husband untithed food</li> <li>• The couple had marital relations while the wife was “ritually unclean”</li> <li>• The wife failed to fulfill a vow</li> <li>• The wife’s voice was heard from outside or by a neighbor</li> <li>• Another man’s shoes were found under the wife’s bed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The couple had been married for ten years without conception of a child</li> <li>• The husband found another woman fairer than the wife</li> <li>• The husband had a change of feeling</li> <li>• The wife burnt the husband’s toast or dinner</li> <li>• In a public setting, the wife: spoke, nursed a child, or spun thread (the public included those standing in her front doorway)</li> </ul>

**Mt 5:32. “fornication.”** The Greek word translated as “fornication,” *porneia*, refers to all sexual sins. In the Greco-Roman world, divorce among the wealthy was rampant. The rate was lower among Jews, but rabbinic law did not allow a divorced wife to return to the marriage. The sanctity of marriage is God’s priority—yet many generations have lost God’s perspective. This is another example of Jesus’s tearing down the false traditions that permeated His culture to restore the original, Edenic law.

In the current restored Church, we are not living Jesus’s preeminent law either because we do not live in an Edenic, perfect world. We believe that God honors all members of the Church who live their covenants with full fellowship, whether divorced or not.

*Oaths sworn by saying yes or no—Mt 5:33–37*

**Mt 5:33–36. “Swear not at all.”** It appears that Jesus references Num 30:2, which teaches that we are to fulfill all our oaths. The Old Testament taught not to swear by God (Ex 20:16; Lev 19:12). Jesus asks us to speak only truths. Notice that when Jesus wanted to teach something, He quoted the scriptures. The same is true when angels come—they often quote scripture. Perhaps when we look for answers to our prayers, we should first look in the scriptures. Here Jesus cites Isa 66:1; Deu 23:22, 35; and Ps 48:2. Everything created by God should be hallowed and treated with respect. Even verbal abuse of God’s creations is inappropriate. Many, if not all, swear words fall into this category. Outside of taboo words, even phrases like “For heaven’s sake!” or “Oh my word!” are inappropriate biblical references to Jesus as the Word of God and His kingdom in heaven. Purity includes sanctifying all things that God has created.

**Mt 5:37. “communication.”** *Logos*, the Greek word used here (the same used in Jn 1:1 for the “Word”) can also mean “discourse, decree, reason, divine plan, council, and so forth.” Jesus is trying to develop a holy people. To join Him in His work, we must watch what we say every hour of every day.

*Love even enemies—Mt 5:38–46; Lk 6:27–36*

**Mt 5:38–39. “turn to him the other.”** In the old law, an “eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (Ex 21:24), the Israelites learned an elementary form of God’s plan. These laws help keep order. But Christ’s higher law leads to a Zion society in which we learn to love everyone, even our enemies. The hardest people to love are those who abuse and spitefully use us. Through example, Jesus showed us how to do that, as Isa 50:6–7 prophesied: Jesus endured the smiters and gave His “cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me.” With God’s help, we can act without retribution.

**Lk 6:29 (JST). “unto him who smiteth . . . or, in other words, it is better to offer the other than to revile again.”** The JST explains that the problem of reviling or responding with contention is worse than being hit. The victim has the responsibility to act without anger. The Lord knows that anger can fester into a worse plague than the original offense. He uses these examples to teach about controlling one’s temper and forgiving others.

**Lk 6:29. “him who taketh away thy cloak, forbid not to take thy coat also.”** A cloak refers to a coat or outerwear. The coat in Greek means one’s shirt, or that time, a tunic. A cloak or the outer garment was the most valuable piece of clothing.

**Mt 5:40; Lk 6:29–31. “let him have.”** Jesus references Ex 20:26: “If thou at all take thy neighbor’s raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down.” This practice gave way to lawsuits. We, too, live in a society plagued with lawsuits. Jesus asks us to forgive, avoid contention, and be generous with all. Generosity is essential in the Lord’s law (even to robbers, the poor, and solicitors). These acts of mercy speak of charity as Paul taught in 1 Cor 13. The verb used connotes a lifelong pattern.

**Mt 5:41. “compel.”** In a culture where social hierarchy reigned and a third of the population was in servitude or enslaved, lower-class people were forced to do work for others regularly. Culturally a royal mail carrier could press another into his service to carry the mail.<sup>7</sup> Josephus included that a soldier could force someone to carry his stores for a mile.<sup>8</sup> Jesus rises above the social order to ask disciples to live a form of love that even extends to serving those who compel us.

**Mt 5:41 (JST).** **“whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him a mile; and whosoever shall compel thee to go with him twain, thou shalt go with him twain.”** The JST change teaches that we can cooperate with those in authority and do what they ask. In nineteenth-century America, military laws were different from those in the Greco-Roman world. Interestingly, this change is not found in 3 Ne 12:41.

**Mt 5:43–44; Lk 6:27–28. “love.”** Jesus’s higher law takes loving your neighbor to a new level. The word here—*agapao*—is the most noble form of love in Greek and is often translated as “charity” in the KJV. Christian disciples not only are good to their friends and neighbors but also pray for their enemies who “despitefully use [them].” Jesus is citing Old Testament scriptures such as Num 10:35 and Deu 30:7.<sup>9</sup> Jesus is also preparing His audience for the “new” commandment to love as Christ loves (Jn 21:34).

**Mt 5:45–46. “children of your Father.”** To be included among God’s children, we must love our enemies. The JST chastises those who love only their friends. Jesus wants us to love those who do not reciprocate our love.

**Mt 5:46–47. “publicans.”** Appropriately, these two verses on loving publicans are not in 3 Ne 12, as publicans are relevant only in the Jewish world. Instead, 3 Nephi explains fulfilling (rendering complete, accomplishing) the law.

Table 7. Comparison of Mt 5:46–47 and 3 Ne 12:46–47

Mt 5:46–47	3 Ne 12:46–47
For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?	Therefore, those things which were of old time, which were under the law, in me are all fulfilled.
And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?	Old things are done away, and all things have become new.

### Transition to a Higher Order

**Mt 5:48 (JST).** **“Ye are therefore commanded to be perfect.”** The JST addition of “commanded” explains that Jesus gave this as a mandate. In Greek, *teleios*, the word translated as “perfect,” means “complete, finished, consummate human integrity and virtue, adult, and so forth.” The injunction to “be ye therefore perfect” did not mean that we need to be 100 percent. The ancients did not even have that

number. *Perfect* meant “toward an end or completion.” Something was perfect when it was finished or if it was good enough for its purposes. Jesus had several things in mind with this commandment. The first involves the idea of becoming like God. As God taught Joseph Smith, we are “instructed more perfectly” to become more like Him in temples (D&C 88:78). John W. Welch sees that as direction to becoming in completing our endowment.<sup>10</sup>

The second Gospel of Mark, or secret Gospel of Mark, was prepared “for the use of those who were being perfected.” The copy was read “only to those who are being initiated into the great mysteries.”<sup>11</sup> The scriptures mention many people, like Seth and Adam, who had perfect attributes (D&C 107:43).

**3 Ne 12:48.** “*I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father.*” The resurrected Jesus added Himself as a perfect being alongside Heavenly Father. The Lord does not add His name in Matthew, even though He was a perfect man. Not until His atoning mission was complete did He include “even as I.” He invites us to strive for becoming complete or whole, finished in this covenant-making setting. Some take Jesus’s command to mean that we are to be perfect in the intent of our hearts. Through Christ’s grace and Spirit, we have power over our intentions. In 1831 the Lord observed, “Ye are not able to abide the presence of God now, neither the ministering of angels; wherefore, continue in patience until ye are perfected” (D&C 67:13). I see this as referring to completing our mortal missions. It is only then that we can live with God.

## **Book of Mormon Parallels with the Sermon on the Mount**

It should not surprise us that Jesus chose to teach His higher law to prepared children of Israel outside of the Holy Land. Those Nephites gathered at the temple in Bountiful nearly a year after the great destruction affiliated with Jesus’s death (compare 3 Ne 8:5; 10:18–19), from which they had been saved because they were repentant and “more righteous,” or in other words, were prepared to learn the higher law (3 Ne 9:13). The Nephite record offers higher Christology by augmenting the messages of Jesus’s divinity. We find these New Testament parallels outlined by John W. Welch, focusing on the Sermon at the Temple as a sacred and covenant temple text: “I invite readers to ponder the prospects of the exceptional view of the Sermon that the Book of Mormon presents to us, for that view has far-reaching implications.”<sup>12</sup>

And with that, Mt 6 ends, and the Sermon on the Mount continues next week.

## **Notes**

1 John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount: An Approach to 3 Nephi 11–18 and Matthew 5–7* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999), 3: “It would be hard to overstate the value of the Sermon on the Mount in shaping Christian ethics and in conveying to the world the teachings of Jesus and of early Christianity. It is known as the Great Sermon, . . . an ‘unparalleled address,’

and thousands of books and articles have analyzed it extensively and minutely. It stands unsurpassed as the sermon of the Master par excellence.”

2 Kent Jackson and Robert Millet, eds., *Studies in Scriptures*, vol. 5, *The Gospels* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1986), 239.

3 Jesus may have chosen to reiterate parts of this sermon because it is an important teaching. See John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount: A Latter-Day Saint Approach* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1990); 3 Ne 12–16, 20–22.

4 William W. Phelps, “The Spirit of God,” in *Hymns* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985, no. 2).

5 W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 51.

6 John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount: A Latter-Day Saint Approach* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1990), 63.

7 W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 69.

8 Josephus, *Antiquities*, 13.52.

9 But there are other Old Testament scriptures that emphasize loving our enemies too: Lev 19:18; Ex 23:4; Pro 25:21; Deu 14:1.

10 John W. Welch, *The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount: A Latter-Day Saint Approach* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1990), 74–75: “It seems to me that, in this verse, Jesus is expressing his desire that the disciples now advance from one level to the next, to go on to become ‘perfect,’ ‘finished,’ or ‘completed’ in their instruction and endowment. In addition to the ritual context of the Sermon, the context usually determining the sense in which the intended ‘completeness’ consists.”

11 Welch, *Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount*, 75, 76, citing the early Christian Clément of Alexandria, writing around 200 AD. (Clement used the same phrase used by Plutarch, a Greek Middle Platonist philosopher who wrote: “To die is to be initiated into the great mysteries,” yet, Clement added a Christian meaning to the same phrase.

12 John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount: An Approach to 3 Nephi 11–18 and Matthew 5–7* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999), 5.