

## PREFACE

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT is the quintessence of the teachings of Jesus Christ. It is not the text of a long sermon: even if Jesus were the speaker the audience would have slept off halfway through!. It is a collection of sayings. Matthew gives it as a Sermon on the Mount but Luke gives it as a sort of "Sermon in the Valley". The substance is more or less the same.

Matthew's sermon contains 107 verses. Of these all but 47 are quoted by Luke also, either in one block or scattered in different places. However Matthew teaches better as far as his scheme of the gospel goes and therefore we are perfectly right in guessing that it is safer for students to follow Matthew's text.

Matthew makes it clear that Jesus was teaching like a Rabbi. He does this by the clever use of three expressions which would remind any Jewish reader of those days about authentic rabbinic teaching. Matthew specifically states that Jesus sat down. Now that is the normal, regular posture for a teacher. I am amused when I watch some 'firebrand' preachers running all over the stage to shout and jump repeating the words our Lord may have said ever so softly. In our universities we still refer to Chair, when we mean a senior professor. Therefore Matthew asserts that Jesus was exercising His authority as a Teacher. Second indication is that, as Matthew records it, *He opened His mouth*. Nobody can speak properly without opening his mouth, of course, but in Koine Greek it signified two specific points. In the first place it makes the statements that follow more important than they would otherwise be understood to be. Secondly there is also another aspect, contrary to such formality, hidden here. That is that this expression was indicative of certain closeness. Together these two show that Jesus was teaching his chosen disciples. Matthew and Luke, both, indicate that this was a kind of training. In Matthew it comes after the selection of the

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disciples and in Luke it is even clearer, recall Luke 6:13. In short the Sermon on the Mount has been rightly called THE COMPENDIUM OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE, KING'S MANIFESTO and THE KINGDOM'S MAGNA CARTA. We can safely assume that these 107 verses are the living memory of the disciple who left his taxation books behind but took the pen with him as he left his job to follow the Call.

We know that the Beatitudes begin with the expression, Blessed. What may not be obvious to the layman is that the word that Jesus used is the same word that we find in Psalm 1:1. That means it is not a Pious wish for the distant future but the positive reality that is obvious in the present, here and now. Blessed Teresa of Kolkata said somewhere, "the past belongs to His mercy, the future to His providence, and the present to His love." The Semitic view of history is one of linear progression, from a beginning to an eschatological end. That is why the church is described as a pilgrim church. It is on pilgrimage through the generations. In this march to eternity we operate in the human sense only during the short sojourn on earth. That is 'the present'. And Mother Teresa said that it comes from His love. That is the expression in the Beatitudes also: blessed, here and now. And there is another dimension to this word. In the original, I am told, it is makarios. Makarios means joy that is self-sufficient. Cyprus was known as *he makaria* long before Archbishop Makarios became its president. The idea was that it was an island of joy and self sufficiency. Like we describe Kerala in the copywriter's coinage as God's Own Country. (This expression often credited to me wrongly was used by one Mendez, an ad-man that we in Kerala Tourism commissioned two decades ago; he borrowed it from an old New Zealand advertisement of early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but it is a quote from some English poem glorifying New Zealand. Kerala, *he makaria*!!) Blessedness cannot be taken away by external factors. That is what makes it distinct from, and greater than, happiness which may be taken away:

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the word happiness etymologically hides the threat of losing it with the root hap which means chance, a chance to have and a chance to lose, external to the enjoyer. Not so the blessedness; none can take it away, recall John 16:32. In short the Beatitudes indicate a relationship, a relationship with God which defines the relationship with man.

And the entire Sermon is in a way an explanation of the Beatitudes. The Sermon on the Mount has influenced almost every great soul that lighted a candle for mankind through the darkness of history ever since they were spoken. Many of the statements made by Jesus had been made by others before him. However Jesus made all things in relation to Man's God-experience. Remember that both the commandments that Jesus said would summarise the Ten were already available to the Jews in the Hebrew Bible (as fashionable to refer to the Old Testament now). The contribution of Jesus was to bring them together and to make one the standard to judge how the other was obeyed. Likewise it is not the statements in the Sermon *per se* but the total ambience generated that makes the Sermon on the Mount the highlight of His manifest love that defines our present.

Mahatma Gandhi was no doubt influenced by the Sermon. In fact the Bhagavad-Gita may have been used by him as a beacon light but the basic thrust of non-violence and satyagraha could have come only from the Sermon on the Mount. It is the tragedy of the church today that we preach Christianity without preaching Christ. I am basically a pluralist in my theological position but that does not free me from the duty to preach Christ, as distinct from Christianity of course. To preach Christ one has to live Christ. While that is easier said than done we are called to try, and our assurance of a fair chance to do that comes from the promised blessedness that is of the present imminence. In short I feel that with all his weaknesses and failures (he had enough of them, and I am no

blind admirer of the Mahatma!, forgive me) Gandhiji impresses me day after day for achieving what most of us Christians fail to achieve, namely the humility to walk His path realizing God in the present. And it is the Sermon on the Mount that made this possible for him. I congratulate my friend of many years, Prof. E.M. Paulose the erudite teacher, for the initiative taken to draw attention to a concept crucial to the understanding of the Mahatma which at the same time is crucial to the understanding of the Sermon on the Mount in modern times. A lot of literature is already available for a traveller on this road but Paulose's work is a street light on the road to Damascus. I hope he finds time to enlarge the study, perhaps in collaboration with some chair of Gandhian Studies.