

77 Site of the Discourse on the Mount

Names (also known as)

‘Mount of the beatitudes’

Location/Description



Matthew places Jesus in Galilee when he delivers the discourse on the mount (Matt. 4:23-25).

A separate discourse in Luke 6 (‘the discourse on the plain’) places Jesus close to Capernaum (Luke 7:1). It seems the two locations were not far from one another.

Before the Discourse on the Mount, Jesus had been ‘all about Galilee’ preaching (Matt. 4:23), and ‘great crowds followed him’ from all around the area.

The setting for this discourse is given in Matt. 5:1-2 when Jesus sees the multitude and goes up into a mountain – he is followed by his disciples, and begins to preach.

The multitude consisted of both Jews (‘Jerusalem and Judea’) and Gentiles from ‘Decapolis’ (Matt. 4:25).

Scriptural references

New Testament

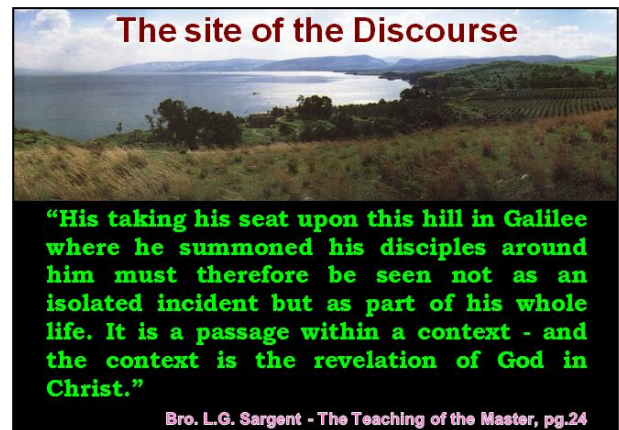
Matthew 5-7

The King’s manifesto for life

From Matt. 5:1 we see that Christ ‘went up into a mountain’ and it was here that he

delivered the loosely termed ‘beatitudes’ (the discourse on the mount). The term Beatitudes simply refers to the 8 blessings which begin the lengthy discourse. These blessings present a portrait of a true citizen of Zion, of which Christ himself was the prime and perfect example.

The 8 blessings present a single character. To lack any of the attributes of this character is to be deficient. The attributes are arranged in a special sequence – i.e. a logical order of development. All must be developed to attain the fullness of the stature of Christ.



This was no ‘sermon’ given the common understanding of that word. Christ was setting forth the characteristics of a true disciple that will lead one to entrance of God’s Kingdom. Hence, this is a manifesto, not a sermon.

What is a manifesto? According to Webster’s Dictionary “a manifesto [Latin - *manifestus*] is a public declaration, usually of a prince or sovereign, showing his intentions, or proclaiming his opinions and motives; as a manifesto declaring the purpose of a prince to begin war, and explaining his motives.”

The 8 blessings given at the beginning of the Discourse on the Mount are matched by 8 woes in Matt. 23, and each woe echoes the principles of its numerical counterpart in the 8 blessings, providing its antithesis.

The overall framework of the discourse is based on Ps. 15 – its structure, principles and context among the Psalms. This psalm is about the character of those who will finally ascend the hill of Yahweh in immortality.

Ps. 15 is in the “Genesis” book of Psalms. It introduces the Perfect Man in contrast with “the man of the earth” – Ps. 9-14 (see Ps.10:15-18), and sets forth the true citizen of Zion.

This leads to Ps. 16 to 41 which deal with “the man Christ Jesus”.

Christ on a mountain

Why did Christ go up into a mountain for one discourse (Matt. 5-7) and remain on the plain for another (Luke 6)?

The answer lies in the attitude and response of those who came to him. The Lord was sent to redeem mankind. There is a clear method to achieve that goal illustrated in the Lord’s encounter with the palsied man let down through the roof by his four friends (Luke 5:17-24). Mankind has two great needs – the first is moral, the second is physical. Belief leading to the forgiveness of sins will ultimately lead to a change of nature. This is what the Lord aimed to accomplish in the events leading to the discourse on the mount, but he was frustrated by human fickleness and self-interest.

We read in Matt. 4:23-25 - “And Jesus went about all Galilee, **teaching** in their synagogues, and **preaching** the gospel of the kingdom, **and healing** all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.”

Note the emphasis on teaching and preaching – to achieve a moral objective. Then came healing – a physical outcome (and cameo of the ultimate healing – a change of nature).

So why did the multitude come to Christ in Matt. 24? “And his fame went throughout all Syria: and **they brought unto him all sick people** that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he **healed** them” (Matt. 4:24). These people came to be healed, not to listen!

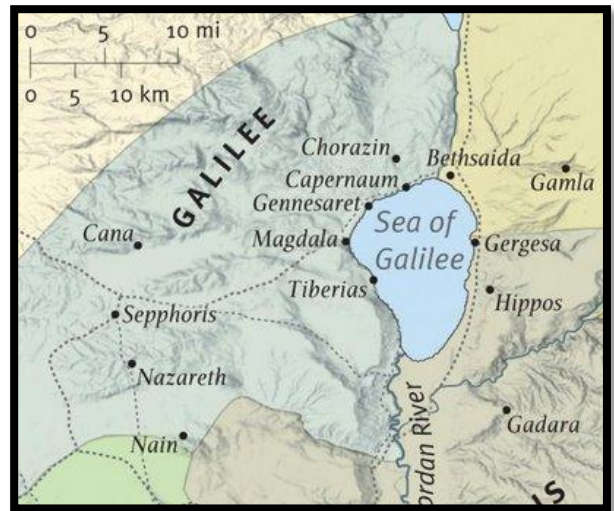
Hence, the Lord climbs the slope to the mountain of the discourse. He required men to make an effort to hear. “Faith comes by **hearing, and hearing by the word of God**” (Rom. 10:17). They needed to ascend towards God first if they wanted true healing in the end.

However, in Luke 6 the discourse on the plain is quite different. He had been on a mountain praying all night (Luke 6:12). He comes down in the morning:

“And he came down with them (the disciples), and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judaea and

Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, **which came to hear him, and to be healed** of their diseases” (Luke 6:17).

This multitude had their priorities right. They came primarily to hear Christ, and then to be healed, and a temporary healing of physical ailment was the final outcome for many. Hence, Christ does not return to the mountain to preach. He delivers a similar, though seemingly shorter, version of the discourse on the mount. There was no need to drive home the lesson of Matt. 5:1 that interest in hearing and making an effort to do so is critical to salvation – the ultimate healing.



The lesson of this place

Will we hearken to Ps. 15:1 and 24:3-5 and ascend the mountain? Will we purify our heart and exhibit the qualities listed in the discourse on the mount to ‘receive the blessing from Yahweh’? Each individual must make that choice for themselves.

Sources:

King James Bible
-www.esvonline.org/Matthew
-www.bibleplaces.com/mtbeatitudes.

(Compilers – Stephen Macfarlane/Jim Cowie)