

Lesson One Article

Sermon on the Mount

The King's new message was closely related to the message of the Old Testament and was, in fact, a reaffirmation of it. Yet the emphasis of the gospel (which means "good news") was radically different from the current understanding of the Old Testament—an astounding clarification of what Moses, David, the prophets, and other inspired writers of God's Word had revealed. In addition to that, Christ's message struck violently against the Jewish tradition of His day.

The last message in the Old Testament is, "And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse" (Mal. 4:6). By contrast, this first great sermon of the New Testament begins with a series of blessings, which we call the Beatitudes (5:3–12). The Old Testament ends with the warning of a curse; the New Testament begins with the promise of blessing. The Old Testament was characterized by Mount Sinai, with its law, its thunder and lightning, and its warnings of judgment and cursing. The New Testament is characterized by Mount Zion, with its grace, its salvation and healing, and its promises of peace and blessing (cf. Heb. 12:18–24).

The Old Testament law demonstrates man's need of salvation, and the New Testament message offers the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord had to begin with a proper presentation of the law, so the people would recognize their sin—then could come the offer of salvation. The Sermon on the Mount clarifies the reasons for the curse and shows that man has no righteousness that can survive the scrutiny of God. The new message offers blessing, and that is the Lord's opening offer.

As will be developed in the next chapter, however, the blessedness Christ offers is not dependent on self-effort or self-righteousness, but on the new nature God gives. In God's Son man comes to share God's very nature, which is characterized by true righteousness and its consequence—blessedness, or happiness. In Christ we partake of the very bliss of God Himself! That is the kind and the extent of the contentment God wants His children to have—His very own peace and happiness. So the Lord begins with the offer of blessedness and then proceeds to demonstrate that human righteousness, such as the Jews sought, cannot produce it. The good news is that of blessing. The bad news is that man cannot achieve it, no matter how self-righteous and religious he is.

The Old Testament is the book of Adam, whose story is tragic. Adam not only was the first man on earth but the first king. He was given dominion over all the earth, to subdue and rule it (Gen. 1:28). But that first monarch fell soon after he began to rule, and his fall brought a curse—the curse with which the Old Testament both begins and ends.

The New Testament begins with the presentation of the new sovereign Man, One who will not fall and One who brings blessing rather than cursing. The second Adam is also the last Adam, and after Him will come no other ruler, no other sovereign. The first king sinned and left a curse; the second King was sinless and leaves a blessing. As one writer has put it, the first Adam was tested in a beautiful garden and failed; the last Adam was tested in a threatening wilderness and succeeded. Because the first Adam was a thief, he was cast out of paradise; but the last Adam turned to a thief on a cross and said, "Today you shall be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). The Old Testament, the book of the generations of Adam, ends with a curse; the New Testament, the book of the generations of Jesus Christ, ends with the promise, "There shall no longer be any curse" (Rev. 22:3). The Old Testament gave the law to show man in his misery, and the New Testament gives life to show man in his bliss.

cf. *confer* (Lat.), compare