Background and Outline of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew 5:1-7:29
For the 2014 Lenten Study Group by Jack Irwin, M. Div.

Background

The Conflict between Jesus and the Jewish Leaders—Who Teaches the True Jewish Religion?
The great conflict in Jesus’ ministry is with the leaders of the Jewish Religion, who were in several groups, named by Matthew as the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the elders, the chief priests and High Priest, and those called “the teachers of the law.”

Jesus denounced the religious ways of these leaders and called them hypocrites, wicked, and adulterous. He cautioned the people to be on their guard against the teaching of these leaders. (see Matthew 9:12-13, 12:38-39, 15:1-9, 16:5-6, and the whole chapter 23) When Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, “You have heard it said...”, Jesus is referring to the teachings of these leaders. In the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus says your righteousness is to be greater than that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law at 5:2, you must remember that Jesus severely condemned their style of “righteousness.” At 6:1-18 Jesus explains their hypocrisy and self-centeredness. The contrast is summed up in Jesus’ words to Satan, “Away from me, Satan, for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’” (4:10)

In return, these religious leaders attacked Jesus, saying he was of the devil (9:34 and 12:22-24), saying Jesus was breaking the “traditions of the elders” of the Jewish religion (15:1-9), asking Jesus for a sign to prove himself (12:38-39, 15:19), trying to trap Jesus with questions about the laws and traditions of the Jewish religion (see 15:1-9, 19:3 ff, 21:23 ff, 22:23, 22:34). They accuse Jesus of perverting the Jewish religion. Finally, they plotted the arrest and killing of Jesus (12:11-14, 16:21, 19:3, 20:18, 26:3-15) and finally tried Jesus before the Jewish high court called the “Sanhedrin” made up of the High Priest, the teachers of the law and the elders (26:57 ff).

Intro to the Sermon on the Mount: Jesus’ Inaugural Address – The Purpose

Jesus lays out his religious program and themes in the Sermon on the Mount and contrasts it with the religion practiced by the Jewish leaders.

The most important parts of any talk or instructions are the “imperatives” or commands. There are many in the Sermon on the Mount, but these stand as keys to Jesus’ message and program:

5:16 “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and praise your Father in Heaven.”
5:48 “Be perfect, therefore, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.” That is, do good works.
7:12 “So in everything do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” That is, do good works.
7:24 Although not stated as a command, it certainly implies one: “Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on a rock.” Restated as a command: Be hearers and doers of my words.

What is the purpose of Jesus’ program? That all people will praise God the Heavenly Father. And how is this to be accomplished? By people who live out not just the letter of the Law, but the intent or spirit of the Law. Jesus says his words fulfill, complete the meaning and intent of the Law.

Outline of the Sermon on the Mount

The Intro: 5:1-12 The Beatitudes Jesus initial audience grabber. If you want to be in the Kingdom of Heaven, then be a seeker and follower of the Kingdom. Here’s what you will receive from God, our heavenly Father. Pastor Bill said that Matthew modeled the Gospel as a
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comparison of Jesus with Moses. How can we compare Jesus’ 9 blessings with Moses’ 10 commandments on stone?

The Purpose 5:13-16 Be Salt and Light in the World These words are the purpose of Jesus’ ministry – that others may come to praise the heavenly Father. This echoes Jesus words when calling his disciples immediately before the Sermon on the Mount, when he said, “Come and follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (4:19)

5:17-19 Let your righteousness be the good works that attract others to God. Your righteousness should be like that of the Law and the Prophets, and not like that of the Pharisees and the “teachers of the law.”

5:20 to 6:18 How to fulfill the Law and be righteous in contrast to the righteousness of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Act in the spirit of the Law, not just in the letter!

5:21-26 Murder
5:27-30 Adultery
5:31-32 Divorce
5:33-37 Oaths
5:38-42 Eye for an Eye
5:43-47 Love your neighbor and Hate your enemy

5:48 “Be perfect, therefore, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Repeats 5:17-19 theme. Now Jesus continues how to fulfill the Law and be righteous.

6:1-4 Good Works
6:5-15 Prayer
6:16-18 Fasting

6:19-7:11 How are you to do this?
6:19-24 Set your mind on treasures in heaven and not on earth
6:25-34 Don’t worry about earthly things, but seek to do God’s will, and he will take care of your earthly needs.
7:1-6 Don’t judge others, judge yourself and then help others.
7:7-11 Finally, when you are stuck, Ask God your heavenly Father!

7:12 Summary of his teaching on righteousness: “So in everything do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

7:13-27 The Choice is Yours!
7:13-14 Choose the narrow gate, not the broad gate
7:15-23 Watch out for false prophets
7:24-27 Choose the permanent way of life by being hearer and doers of Jesus’ words, which are the Law.