

## Denver Snuffer on the Law of Christ

This Sermon is first a description of Him.

It is also a description of His disciples.

It is a formula for returning to His presence.

It is the basis for the coming Zion.<sup>1</sup>

Early Christians were very diverse, but they agreed on two things: Christ's doctrine...and Christ's law...Once Christians have these two essential teachings in common, you can have differences on other issues – just like the early Christians.<sup>2 3</sup>

The greatest instruction that I know of, given by God at any time, to any generation, is a rule of community found in the Sermon on the Mount and in the Sermon at Bountiful. Now we have the answer to the prayer for Covenant, that not only resonates with the message of those two sermons but applies it directly to us in our peculiar circumstances, to fix our peculiar defects and urge us to be more like Him.<sup>4</sup> [It is] one, complete statement of what we are to become. It is not merely direction to us. It is also a revelation of what kind of person Christ was.<sup>5</sup>

What matters is whether or not you take Christ at His word and then you try to do what He tells us to do in the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is a blueprint for Zion, it's not a blueprint for just having a low crime society with people in vastly different economic strata, in which some are given extraordinary advantages because of their education and the wealth of their family and some are deprived.<sup>67</sup> Given the tendency of wicked men to exploit the weak, society has made it impossible to live the Sermon on the Mount or Sermon at Bountiful as a solitary individual. In a godly society

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<sup>1</sup> "3 Ne 13:16-18," blog post.

<sup>2</sup> Christian Talk 2, pg 11.

<sup>3</sup> "Christ gave many commandments, precepts, teachings. He also gave a law. His law can be found in Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7. That is how you and I should practice our Christianity." Christian Talk 1, pg 12.

<sup>4</sup> Opening remarks at the Covenant of Christ conference 2017, pg 3.

<sup>5</sup> "3 Ne 11:41," blog post.

<sup>6</sup> Cursed: denied Priesthood, pg 16.

<sup>7</sup> "This sermon is a blue-print of the Lord's new charter for mankind. It is the new, higher way of living. It is intended to result in a new spiritual life for those willing to live it." ("3 Ne 12:6," blog post) "I have little doubt that the Lord's teachings are impractical in this world. But, then again, we are not called to live for this world, are we? The reason Zion always flees from this world is precisely because the Lord will not permit the world to overwhelm those who would surely be overthrown if not for His grace and protection. He will fight their battles to spare those in Zion from the necessity of becoming warlike. ("3 Nephi 12:38-39," blog post.)

where people 'do unto others other than as they wish to have done to them,' it is possible to live in peace. Those Sermons by the Lord are meant to change a culture. It is the blueprint for a community that can grow in understanding until they have one heart and one mind. The Lord's teachings lead inevitably to having "no poor among them" because the society is able to learn to have peace with one another.<sup>89</sup>

The question is what happens when a society continues to suffer from all the ills of our own, but a single individual chooses to live these principles. What then? Can a person really live like this when he or she alone is guided by these principles?

Common agreement is that this sermon's admonitions are impractical. They won't work. They can't be lived by a single person acting alone, or a small group acting together, because a larger corrupt society will overwhelm and exploit them. Therefore, Christ is teaching what cannot be done. At least cannot be done by anyone who is unwilling to try it. Occasionally we get a Mother Teresa or a Saint Francis, but they're Catholic. Surely it can't work with Latter-day Saints who are busy studying Steven Covey's books, polishing their resumes and looking to find a secure middle-management position from which to launch their successful careers. Maybe a handful of good, believing Catholics will found Zion. Then we can come in and help manage the results after it becomes well enough established. After all, we have the true franchise from which Zion will be built. We even own a bank already named for the venture.

It makes you wonder why Christ would preach something which only a handful of Catholics have successfully accomplished in an individual setting.<sup>10</sup>

The sermon delivered by Christ is the foundation of how man ought to relate to fellow-man. It is the pattern on which it becomes possible to dwell in peace with one another. It is the groundwork for Zion.

We need to look at this sermon as the guideline for changing our internal lives, so we may become a fit and proper resident with others who are Saints. Even Saints will give inadvertent offenses. Even Saints will disappoint one another from time to time. To become "one" in the sense required for redeeming a people and restoring them again to Zion is beyond any person's reach if they cannot internalize this sermon.

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<sup>8</sup> Covenant People blog post, July 21, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> "Marriage is the perfect opportunity for learning to live the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is the blueprint for being like Christ." (Marriage blog post, Nov 18, 2013.)

<sup>10</sup> "3 Ne 12:40-42," blog post.

The purpose of this sermon is not to equip you to judge others. It has no use for that. It is designed to change you. You need to become something different, something higher, something more holy. That will require you to reexamine your heart, your motivations, and your thoughts. It will require you to take offenses and deliberately lay them down without retaliation. When you do, you become someone who can live in peace with others. Living in peace with others is the rudimentary beginning of Zion. It will not culminate in a City set on the hilltop until there is a population worthy of dwelling in the high places, in peace, without poor among them.<sup>11</sup>

Devotion to Him requires that what you do, say, and think be aligned with Him. Conversion is a progressive process where you develop to be more like Him throughout life. You can't just "get a testimony" and then not be completely converted to Him. He expects to completely remake you. This sermon is the blueprint for the new creation you are to become...Those who think the Lord is announcing a new, easier system to replace the earlier, more demanding Law of Moses do not understand His teachings. This is far more exact and moves the battleground into your heart. He is asking you to transform the soul. He is asking you to become like Him. This is not outward observances. However troubling and wearisome those may have been, they were at least something that could be done without battling in your heart with motive, intent and desires. Here Christ wants you to conform everything, even your desires, to be instruments of your salvation.

This is a call to a much higher way of life. It is a much deeper and more meaningful way to approach God. It is inside you.<sup>12</sup>

How much of the gospel of Christ would not have been possible for Him to preach if He'd gone about contending? He chose not to. In that respect, perhaps His most godly example was the patience with which He dealt with those around him; kindly, patiently, correcting them when they largely came to Him with questions trying to trap Him, but affirmatively stating in the Sermon on the Mount how you could take any group of people and turn them into Zion itself, if we would live the Sermon on the Mount."<sup>13</sup>

Christ tried to explain what it was that would make us right in the Sermon on the Mount. He says, Here is the commandment: thou shalt not commit adultery but I say to you, you can walk around all day not committing adultery and still be a lustful,

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<sup>11</sup> "3 Nephi 12:25-26," blog post.

<sup>12</sup> "3 Ne 13:24," blog post.

<sup>13</sup> That we Might be one, pg 8.

wretched, perverse, undesirable, unlovely, unbecoming, depraved soul. So, don't lust in your heart. You have read and it's been told you 'thou shalt not kill'. You can do a lot of damage to another human being without killing them. Words can be weapons. You can do a lot of damage with the words you speak, and never inflict a single bruise on another person's body but you can break their heart. And Christ says love your enemies. Do good to those that hate you and despitefully abuse you. Don't be angry with your brother. Don't call them names. Return good for evil.

Christ was saying the problem isn't your conduct, the problem is your heart. Christ is telling us, I want to take that heart that you've got and I want to break it. I want you to have a broken heart and I want you to have a contrite spirit because the only way you're going to let me come in is if what you are doing to surround yourself is broken down enough to permit me to come in.<sup>14</sup>

Christ's great Sermon on the Mount was based on the Law of Moses. The law of retaliation (*lex talionis*) set out in the prior law was contrasted with what the Lord now established as the underlying meaning for that law. Instead of striking back, bear the blow and forgive. Instead of refraining from adultery, remove lust from your heart. Instead of rebuking, harbor no ill will toward your brother.<sup>15</sup> Christ was denounced as a "sinner" because He violated the commandments – repeatedly and openly. His explanation was not that He wasn't a sinner, but that the law was based on a higher set of principles that were more important than the law itself. And if the observant soul could see the higher principles, then they were to be preferred and followed. His Sermon on the Mount was an extensive exposition on the higher principles underlying the commandments – they were more important, so much so, that if one followed the commandments all his life but failed to notice the underlying principles, then he was truly ungodly and failed to understand the reason God provided the Law to Moses.<sup>16</sup>

Jesus took the Law of Moses as the standard. What the Sermon on the Mount does is say, Here is the standard, but your conduct should not be merely this. *Thou shalt not kill* (Exodus 20:13 KJV) is not enough – you must avoid being angry with your brother; you must forgive those who offend you; you must pray for those who despitefully use you. Just refraining from murdering one another, with a reluctant heart, bearing malice at them – "Well, I didn't kill the guy, but I got even!" – that's not enough! That's not the standard that Christ is advancing. *Thou shalt not commit adultery* (Exodus 20:14 KJV) is not good enough. Don't look upon a woman to lust after her in your heart! Jesus is

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<sup>14</sup> Remarks at the First Annual Joseph Smith Restoration Conference, Pg 12.

<sup>15</sup> "Joseph Smith History part 3" blog post.

<sup>16</sup> Glossary: Iniquity.

saying, “Here’s the law. And you can do all of those things and be malevolent; you can be angry; you can be bitter; you can be contemptible; you can hold each other out as objects of ridicule. Its purpose is to make you something more lovely, more wonderful, more kindly, more Christian.

Christ says to be like Him. The Sermon on the Mount is an explanation of what it’s like to be like Him. St. Francis made the effort of trying that, of doing that. I suspect that the first time St. Francis gave away a coat in the middle of winter to someone else, that it pained him. He probably felt the biting sting of the cold and thought, “How wise is this that I’m doing?” Because it’s always hard to accept a higher standard and to implement it for the first time. But I suspect by the hundredth time he’d done that, he didn’t feel the cold anymore; he felt the warmth in his heart of having relieved the suffering of another person—because the practice of Christian faith involves the development of Christian skill and the development of Christian charity in a way that changes you. You don’t remain the same character that you were when you began the journey! You become someone absolutely and fundamentally different.<sup>17</sup>

Christ may have come to fulfil the Law of Moses, and He did so, but in the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon at Bountiful He explained how you don’t need the Law of Moses. You will not take an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth and you will not slay your brother **if** you’ll show kindness and love to one another. **If** instead of being angry with your brother, you kill that anger within you, you never get to the point that there is some violent outbreak if you police what’s going on in your heart. The Sermon on the Mount is the way to make the Law of Moses obsolete, irrelevant, because instead of lust in your heart you are checking that beforehand. You will never have a King David fall with Bathsheba from grace because he never gets to the point of saying: “Well the only thing I have to stop short of is adultery.” Instead, he’s saying: “I have to check in my heart lust.” The Sermon on the Mount is a way of evading the temptation by not going there. And so enter into the covenant and keep the terms, and God will keep His promises.<sup>18</sup>

I used to think having the right heart must precede action to be of any worth. What I have found instead is that action can lead the heart. Christ’s Sermon on the Mount is a call to action. Do the things asked by Him and the heart will follow. The mind can lead the heart. The heart does not always have to go first.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Christian Talk 8, pg 7-8.

<sup>18</sup> Youth conference 2017, pg 8-9.

<sup>19</sup> Glossary: Sacrifice.

If you follow this teaching by Christ, you will convert yourself first, then others. No-one can doubt the goodness of a life lived as this teaching commends. Though such a life may not convert others immediately, it will triumph.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "3 Ne 12:43-45," Blog post.