

“Life and death are in the power of the tongue.”

This ancient Proverb in the Bible is rarely more present than in a timely, well-delivered oration. Famous speeches have lifted hearts in dark times, given hope in the midst of despair, refined the character of men and women, inspired brave feats, given courage to the weary, honored the dead, and ultimately – changed the course of history.

History is littered with significant speeches:

Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream.”

Abe Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address.”

Patrick Henry’s “Give me liberty or give me death.”

JFK’s speech on going to the moon.

Ronald Reagan’s speech after the Challenger tragedy.

But if I was to make not of the most significant oration of all time – it would have to be Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.

You could argue that no speech has ever been more pondered. More quoted.

Its content has sparked sermons, debate, and discussion for centuries since.

From the moment of its delivery until now its ethical and moral teachings has galvanized people of all backgrounds.

Gandhi was influenced by it as he worked for India’s freedom through nonviolent revolution.

MLK Jr. worked to make the basis of the teachings the foundation of his political program of nonviolence and civil disobedience.

The prayer laid out in the Our Father is recognizable and recited around the world – across borders from battlefields to bedsides.

The title of it speaks to its setting: “The Sermon on the Mount.”

The setting of historic speeches is what often lends to their power. These aren’t water cooler, shoptalk, speeches. They were made in critical moments, after tragedy, and before daring attempts.

Sermon on the Mount’s setting:

Rome had conquered and was occupying Palestine, the Holy Land, and Jerusalem.

The Jews were waiting on a Messiah who would be a political savior.

The “**Kingdom of God**” is mentioned throughout the prophets of the OT, pointing to how God would install this kingdom on Earth, and lead his people back to glory.

Matthew 4:17- Jesus began to preach [1st words of his ministry]: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near”

Matthew 4:23- Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

“God’s kingdom was his theme” (MSG)

From these accounts that Jesus launches into his Sermon on the Mount. These Jews listening- whose loved ones had lived and died under Roman rule waiting for this coming kingdom- would have hung on his every word.

READ MATTHEW 5:1-2

“seeing the multitudes”

The first aspect of the setting we see is that Christ was near the peak of His popularity. He was being followed by a massive crowd.

Christ noticed the crowd. Christ had a heart for the individuals within it. He had empathy. Eventually he'd die on a cross for each and every one of them. But he had a tenuous relationship with crowds themselves.

It says often, and it says here: he withdrew from them.

In a move that's totally counter to our culture of likes and applause - he pulled away from the crowd before opening his mouth to teach.

“He went up on a mountain”

This oration isn't done in a massive venue or one of the ancient Roman amphitheaters. Jesus doesn't try to maximize his crowd or voice.

But it's significant and notable this sermon goes down as “The Sermon on The Mount.” Mountains being a special place of divine revelation through scripture.

The last time God had spoken to a crowd from a mountain was Mt. Sinai in Exodus.

Moses was his mouthpiece who passed on God's commands and instructions.

But here we have God in the flesh, Jesus, speaking with His own mouth.

As Hebrews puts it, Moses was a servant in God's House. Jesus is head over the whole thing. There's extreme significance to just WHO is speaking.

The significance of a speech is often correlated to who is giving it.

“People don't care what you know until they know that you care”

“He was seated”

So Jesus isn't giving this like so many modern orations of significance are given – standing at a podium.

This is culturally significant, because rabbis would teach while seated.

This was the posture of a religious leader and teacher.

Meaning these aren't offhand comments made in passing.

For emphasis, Matthew begins the Sermon on the Mount not with “Jesus said,” but with:

“He opened his mouth...”

This expression in the Greek was used to describe the words of a prophet.

It means something very important was about to be uttered.

This isn't the Suggestions on the Mount. Nor is it Considerations on the Mount.

It's a teaching on transformation from the inside out that Jesus' followers were to take to heart.

Jesus taught these truths seated as a rabbi to those who would listen.
And this scene wouldn't have been all that uncommon in this culture.

People of that time didn't just listen to religious teaching to gain insight and live better.
They listened to religious teachers share for sheer entertainment value. It sounds outlandish but eliminate TVs, movies, smartphones or any phones at all, what do you do? Go picnic and listen to an orator or teacher.

We see familiar scenes when the prophet Ezekiel would prophecy:
Your people talk about you in their houses and whisper about you at the doors. They say to each other, 'Come on, let's go hear the prophet tell us what the Lord is saying!'
You are very entertaining to them, like someone who sings love songs with a beautiful voice or plays fine music on an instrument... (Ezekiel 33:30-32)

Throughout history we've had a dangerous tendency to see Jesus as a great teacher without considering his role as Savior or His clear claims to be God.
He becomes entertaining, enlightening, but never redeeming.

It feeds right into our cultural complacency when it comes to Jesus.
We as a culture love to put him off as a teacher. An all around great guy.
Jesus taught us how to live nice and compassionate
So if you want to follow Jesus to be a better person, that's good for you.

We give into lazy religious indifference that never truly examines and decides for itself whether Jesus is who He clearly said He was – GOD.
It ignores the fact that Jesus gave people an all or nothing approach to himself.

"I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to." – CS Lewis in Mere Christianity

Throughout the Gospels Jesus creates an all or nothing approach to Himself.
And it doesn't hinge on our application of His good teachings.
It hinges on whether or not we accept him as LORD.

WE ALL MUST ANSWER THE QUESTION : WHO IS JESUS TO YOU?
Indifference and complacency and "to each his own" isn't an option.
Faith or rejection are our two possible responses to Jesus, and indifference doesn't fall in line with faith.

And faith without works is dead.
Show me your life, and I'll show you who Jesus is to you.

Jesus doesn't want us to study him and his teachings like some academic project.
He wants us to approach him and receive him as Lord and Savior.
We aren't changed and transformed by living according to his teachings.
We are changed and transformed by HIM.

Bishop Augustine of Hippo puts it this way – *“Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore, seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand.”*

He isn't giving info about the way, the truth, and the life so we can understand and then believe.
HE IS the way the truth and the life.
And all his teachings and all our hope flows from this primary reality.
We all must answer the question: WHO IS JESUS TO YOU?

“His disciples came to him”

This oration wasn't given to the great crowd. There was no microphone so the whole area could hear him. It says that Jesus saw the crowd, and then he withdrew up on a mountain. The only people that would have been able to hear him were the people that followed him.

Only one group came to him – the disciples.
The word *“disciple”* is used for the first time here by Matthew.

But the question I get as a pastor – how do I grow? How do I mature?
Want to grow up? Show up.
If you don't show up, you won't grow.

2011 – Lifeway Research did a massive study and survey to assess discipleship in the Church
They interviewed 28 experts globally, theologians and pastors on growth and discipleship.
They then conducted surveys with 1000 pastors. Finally, they surveyed 4000 churchgoers.
First they assessed the desired fruit in people's life. What is the desired output for a disciple?
Second- What's the input for those that were growing most in these areas?

They found 3 clear answers:

Reading the Bible.

Attending a worship service at church.

Participating in a small group or class.

Two of the first three steps to take? Involve showing up.
Want to grow up? Show up.

A second question we all must answer: WHO ARE YOU TO CHRIST?
Are you a disciple. Or are you a part of the crowd.
The crowd is curious and hangs around. But the disciple is committed.

Not everyone heard the greatest sermon of all time.
Some people missed it because they- unlike the disciples- didn't come.

Ephesians 1:22-23 Paul talks about the church- this word for a local gathering of believers- *The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence.*

Right before that he says *"At the center of [the universe], Christ rules the church. The church you see, is not peripheral to the world, the world is peripheral to the church."*

Christ is at the center. The core.
Everything else orbits around Christ.
We get to choose where we place ourselves.

The crowd keeps its distance, too far to experience the fullness of life.
Further in orbit is community.
Further in from there- the core.

Jesus had a crowd.
Jesus had followers and disciples.
And Jesus had his core of intimate friends- Peter, James and John.
WHO ARE YOU TO JESUS?

Jesus loved people at every level. He died for people at every level.
But Jesus was keenly aware of who was merely curious, and who was committed.

One of the greatest dangers for believers is to get lost in the crowd.
The crowd eventually falls away when times get hard.
The crowd responds to "follow me" with excuses and reasons to stay.

Jesus didn't call us to be a part of the crowd.
He called us to be disciples.
And as disciples, Jesus didn't call us to just gather a crowd. To fill a building.
He's called us to make disciples.
To invite the crowd in.

The Sermon on the Mount is primarily instruction for disciples- anyone who calls themselves a Christian and follower of Christ.
But secondarily it holds out an invitation to the crowds to enter.
We see by the end of his teaching that the crowds that Jesus had withdrawn from at the beginning of the sermon appear at the end of the sermon, exclaiming that Jesus was teaching them with an authority.
Even when teaching his disciples, Jesus always has an eye on the lost in the crowd.

America has a crowd.

Roughly 80% of Americans self-report as Christian in polls yet their answers vary widely when asked how they would respond if asked at the gates of Heaven- "Why should I let you in?" Most replied to that question with *"I never (did certain bad things)..."* or *"I always tried to (do certain nice things)..."*

To the crowd Jesus is a teacher. *“I’ve done my best to apply his teachings.”*

Conversion isn’t about cleaning up, it’s about clinging to Christ.

Not as a teacher.

But as savior.

Without knowing Christ as savior, the Sermon on the Mount will be futile and frustrating, like walking out directions with broken legs.

The Sermon on the Mount is an **ordination sermon** for his disciples.

For his disciples present and every disciple to follow.

For me. And for you.

To do what?

Reach the crowd.

THE GREAT COMMISSION – the end of Matthew. Jesus’ final words.

“make disciples, teaching them to obey everything I’ve commanded you.”

His first commands – right here in the Sermon on the Mount.

May we mind the setting...

“Jesus saw the multitudes...”

Elsewhere Jesus saw the crowds and wept for them.

Likened them to sheep without a shepherd.

And here he begins to ordain the disciples to reach them.