

I. A BACKGROUND REVIEW:

Obviously, Scripture is a written document. The natural tendency is to read small bites or passages in the Bible and not large portions. When we do this, to gain a correct understanding of the author's original meaning, we must be sure to establish the context for the passage first. Context always determines meaning.

There are various types of context. There is the life context, the geographical context, the context for the chronological position of the passage in the narrative of a specific book of the Bible, such as Matthew's positioning of passages. In the case of MT 5-7, which is traditionally referred to as "the Sermon on the Mount," it is positioned near the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Matthew positions it after some critically important events that occur in chapter 4 that throws further light on Jesus' meanings for what follows.

In MT 4:1-11, Jesus has established what may be thought of as his foundational commitments. These govern his life and his decision-making. Therefore, Jesus also would be teaching and training any followers to live by these same commitments. These commitments could be called Jesus' "teaching context." Jesus' core commitments are:

- #1. ***"Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God,"*** DT 8:3, MT 4:4.
- #2. ***"Do not put the Lord your God to the test,"*** DT 6:16, MT 4:7.
- #3. ***"Worship the Lord your God and serve him only,"*** DT 6:13; MT 4:10.

Another context to establish is the geographical setting where events occur. After making the above core commitments, and learning that John has been put in prison, Jesus leaves Nazareth and moves to Capernaum to live. The geographical context of Capernaum is the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Matthew realizes that this move by Jesus fulfills one of the important prophecies of Isaiah 9:1-2 and says so. It is from that time that Jesus begins to proclaim John's message in Capernaum: ***"repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near,"*** MT 3:2, 4:17. Matthew does not tell us how long he had been doing this or who heard his proclamation. We simply can conclude the citizens of Capernaum had heard and responded to Jesus proclamation. So when MT 4:18 reports that ***"Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of***

Galilee," he is walking along the eastern edge of the village of Capernaum.

A special feature of all four Gospel accounts is that they are what may be referred to as "compressed narratives." For example, Matthew compressed Jesus' life and three plus year ministry into twenty-eight chapters. Thus, Matthew leaves out some details. Instead, he focuses on what he considers the main facts. For instance, he reports nothing about the first disciples' prior contact and relationships with Jesus as Luke does (4:38-44) and as John does (1:29-31). However, because Jesus had been proclaiming the kingdom and calling people to repent in Capernaum for a period of time, we may safely assume that those first disciples had heard him. Before he challenges them to "**Come, follow me...**" MT 4:18-20, there is a high probability they had repented.

You may remember that the original word translated by the English word, "**repent,**" literally means "**to change one's mind.**" The OT implication for all the references of the prophets calling people to "**repent**" centered upon "changing their minds, their thinking and their mental orientation" to focus on pleasing the Lord God by trusting and obeying him and his words in Scripture. John the Baptist and what he says to the Pharisees and Sadducees in MT 3 confirms this meaning as it carries over into the rest of the New Testament's usages.

When we come to chapter 5 in Matthew's account, the life context is that these first disciples have traveled throughout Galilee with Jesus. They have heard him "**teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of heaven.**" They have also witnessed firsthand Jesus "**healing every disease and sickness among the people,**" MT 4:23. They have seen the crowds grow in size. They have noted, and Matthew remembers years later when he writes his account, the various places from which people have come to see, listen, experience healings and follow Jesus as he traveled about Galilee.

This background review is all a part of the context for what unfolds in Matthew 5 through 7. Matthew also is clearly written to people from a Hebrew background and to people who are familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures and prophecies. Additionally, Matthew contains words referring to ancient Hebrew social institutions and processes.

II. Instruction: Now plow slowly through Matthew 5 through 7 and answer the following questions from what Matthew writes in these three chapters.

1, According to 5:1

- a. To what place did Jesus go?
- b. Why did he sit down there?
- c. Who came to Jesus at this location?
- d. What did he do with them?

2. Read MT 5:1-12 and describe what you think Jesus is establishing for his listeners in these verses?

3. In 5:13-16, to whom is Jesus speaking and what is he charging disciples to be?

4. In 5:17-20 and specifically in 5:19, what does Jesus emphasize is the main thing his followers are to do?

5. In 5:21-25,

- a. What does Jesus indicate is the underlying issue that causes murder?
- b. What escalating forms of this issue does Jesus describe?
- c. From words in this passage, such as "judgment," "court," "gehenna = hell," "judge," "officer," and "prison," in what Hebrew social institution, i.e., the social context and social system, does Jesus say to address this underlying issue?
- d. From 5:23-24, what does Jesus say our priority must be in our relationships?

6. In 5: 27-30,

- a. What is the underlying cause of adultery?
- b. What causes you to stumble in trusting and obeying the Lord?
- b. What does Jesus instruct us to do with the causes of stumbling and sin?

7. In 5: 31-32,

- a. What was being taught that a person must do if they wanted to divorce? (See DT. 24:1)

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- b. What does Jesus indicate about this teaching?
8. In 5:33-37,
 - a. What was being taught about making oaths and vows?
 - b. In contrast, what does Jesus say is "***all you need to say***"?
9. In 5:38-48,
 - a. What was being taught at that time concerning whom to love?
 - b. What does Jesus say to do with our enemies?
 - c. If we do this, whose child will we become?
 - d. How does our Father in heaven treat his enemies?
 - e. The context for 5:48 is "***love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you***" and how the heavenly Father treats his enemies. What light does this context throw on the meaning of "***be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect***"?
10. In 6:1-18,
 - a. About what does Jesus alert us to be careful?
 - b. What three practices of "righteousness" does Jesus name?
 - c. In all three cases what method does Jesus prescribe to avoid this danger?
 - d. What does Jesus promise will result if we follow his prescription?
11. In 6:19- 21, where does Jesus instruct you to store up treasures and why?
12. In 6:22-23, what does Jesus tell you to make sure you keep "healthy" and why?
13. In 6:24-34,
 - a. What two "masters" vie for our loyalty?
 - b. What do we usually worry about?
 - c. When Jesus asks, "Why do you worry," what is your answer?
 - d. In 6:33, what is Jesus prescription to arrest our worrying tendencies?
14. In 7:1-6,
 - a. Why does Jesus say you are not to judge/condemn others?

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b. Why do we have the tendency to recognize what is wrong in someone else and be blind to what is wrong in us?

c. What does Jesus say to do first in order to see clearly to correct someone else?

d. According to 7:6, what is the usual reaction of most people when you try to correct them with your "pearls" of wisdom and "sacred" counsel?

15. In 7:7-12,

a. What process does Jesus prescribe that we follow when we recognize something or someone that needs correcting?

b. What does he promise will happen if we follow this process?

c. What is Jesus main rule for how to treat others, especially those we recognize need some correcting?

16. In 7:13-14, what gate are disciples of Jesus to enter and which road are we to travel along? If we do not follow Jesus' instruction, what results?

17. In 7:15-23, for what do we need to watch out? And how are we to recognize them?

18: In 7:24-27, what is Jesus main emphasis to us in this word picture, i.e., what is to be the foundation of our lives and actions toward people?

III. FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:

1. What is the most significant thing you encountered in Jesus' foundational sayings?
2. Which of Jesus' "sayings" have you consistently learned to practice and are now a part of the foundation of your life?
3. Which of these "sayings" gives you the most difficulty?
4. Which of Jesus' sayings have you never committed to practice?
5. It normally takes a minimum of 3 months of trial and error practice to change a habit. Which of Jesus' sayings are you prepared to work on practicing for the next 3 months until it too becomes a part of the foundation of your life?