

An Understanding of the Sermon on the Mount for African Ecclesiology

Emmanuel Oyemomi, Ph.D

I. INTRODUCTION

The Bible has been recognized as a great work of literature, which is divided into two major sections namely: the Old and the New Testaments. The New Testament starts with what is popularly referred to as the Synoptic Gospel, while the Old Testament started with the Pentateuch. Serially, Matthew is the first book of the Synoptic and really the first book of the New Testament canon.

All the Gospels tell almost a similar historical structure, but with similarities, and differences. This is peculiar to the Synoptic. The Fourth Gospel actually poll apart from the three. Even, among the three, there are sections in which two agree in wordings and style “as compared with the third.”

In other instances, the arrangement and vocabulary differs considerably.⁶⁵¹ Each of the Synoptic has sections that are exclusive to it. This is common with Matthew and Luke.⁶⁵²

Matthew and Luke sometimes agree against the third evangelist. An example is the section of the Sermon on the Mount⁶⁵³ (will be referred to hereafter as: the Sermon on the Mount), which is recorded by both, and not

⁶⁵¹ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Illinois: Intersity Press, 1970), 121-122.

⁶⁵² Guthrie.

⁶⁵³ Ernest Best, “Recent Foreign New Testament Literature” *The Expository Time*, 96, 11, 185, 332-333. J. Lambrecht examines the parallels between Matthew and Luke sections of the Sermon on the Mount. He isolates the material of the double tradition, by accepting a two source synoptic theory, and the special material of each evangelist Matthew 5-7; Lk. 6:20-49.

by the other Evangelist, yet with peculiarities. Matthew's Gospel has been regarded as a unified literary work.⁶⁵⁴ A structural examination of Matthew will reflect a liturgical adaptability, which "exerted a powerful influence" throughout Christian history especially by the presentation of the famous Sermon on the Mountain.⁶⁵⁵ Against this background, this paper seeks an understanding of the Sermon on the Mount for African Ecclesiology.

If it is accepted that the Bible, the Synoptic or Matthew is a literature, we need to remind ourselves that there are many ways to interpret and understand literature. Literature of the Bible has been variously interpreted for the purpose of the church.⁶⁵⁶ Hence, the hermeneutics called Biblical Criticism emerged in the eighteenth century. It has also given birth to various methods like: Source, Form Redaction Criticism. With these methods, the Bible especially the Gospels has been seen as "a patchwork of isolated segments" put together by a writer, or a group of writers.⁶⁵⁷

Redaction Criticism has made it easy to recognize each Gospel as the work of an author who has a specific interest and purpose.⁶⁵⁸ Against this background the Sermon has been recognized as a sub-unit of a whole of the Gospel of Matthew, and invariably, of the synoptic tradition.

⁶⁵⁴ Oscar Stephen Brooks, *The Sermon on the Mount*. (New York: University Press of America, 1985), ix. J.D. Kingsbury has written in support of the literary unity of the Gospel of Matthew centring on its structure, Christology, and Kingdom in his book: *Matthew: Structure, Christology; Kingdom*. (Minneapolis Fortress Press, 1989. In his book: *Studies in Matthew, the King and the Kingdom*, Roland Q Leavell has remarked that Matthew is one of the noblest books in any literature either sacred or secular. His reason of course is that the work is scholarly written "topically arranged, logically developed, and triumphantly concluded, 1. Also Ernst von Dobschutz, Otto Michel, Nils Alstrup Dahl, K. Stendhl, G. Strecker, G. Bornkamm, U. Luz and E. Schweizer have submitted their contributions in *The Interpretation of Matthew* (Philadelphia: (Fortress Press, 1983. Also Janice Capel Anderson, "Matthew: Sermon and story" *Seminar Paper*. 1988, 494-496 has remarked that the sermon on the Mount plays an integral role in the Gospel as narrative. Hence several inseparable connections between sermon and story were highlighted.

⁶⁵⁵ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 21.

⁶⁵⁶ Brooks, *The Sermon on the Mount*, vii

⁶⁵⁷ Brooks, vii-viii.

⁶⁵⁸ Brooks, ix

Warren S. Kissinger remarks a general agreement among scholars that the Sermon is a compendium of the teachings of Jesus Christ. Also it is generally held that the sermon is lofty in expression, powerful in essence and theologically sound. It is an ideal moral value in life, which has attracted a universal admiration. It is also significantly representing the ethics of Jesus.⁶⁵⁹ This paper will therefore seek an understanding of the Sermon on the Mount through a critical examination of history of its interpretation of the structure, and its context for African ecclesiology.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE SERMON

The Sermon on the Mount has been variously interpreted in history. It has also received so much attention probably than any other text in the world literature. Against this backdrop, this paper seeks an overview of the background history of the Sermon, but then let us start with the historical setting of the Sermon.

A. Setting of the Sermon

The historical context that shapes the *sitz im leben* or setting of the Gospel of Matthew is paramount at this juncture, for our understanding. Dale Allison found resort in the triadic form found in the “*Abot* especially in the chapter of the *Mishnah*, which renders a general maxim from the great rabbis of days gone by,”⁶⁶⁰ and the wisdom of each rabbi was passed on in a summarizing triad. Among the most famous general maxims preserved is that which was attributed to Simeon the Just, a rabbi during the Maccabean period. He was said to have declared that the world stands on three things namely: Torah, Temple service and *gemilut hasadim* or “deeds of loving-kindness”.⁶⁶¹

However, J. Goldin reinterpreted the Sermon to mean a “pious act of a social or religious character.” He reworked Simeon’s ideas to mean: the law, the cult, and social or religious acts of benevolence. W.D. Davies has observed Goldin’s position as a parallel to the Sermon on the Mount – a

⁶⁵⁹ Warren S. Kissinger, *The Sermon on the Mount: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography*. (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 1975), xi.

⁶⁶⁰ Dale Allison, “The Structure of the Sermon on the Mount” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 106, 3, 1987, 443.

⁶⁶¹ Allison, 444.

remarkable note made in his monumental work on *the setting of the Sermon on the Mount*.⁶⁶² This is against the background that the Sermon addressed: the law, the cult, and social behaviour. This order is not far from that of Simeon the Just.⁶⁶³

Judging from this analysis, we may conclude that Matthew's Gospel is out to "create a Christian interpretation of the three classical pillars."⁶⁶⁴ A good support for this is that Matthew 5-7 is found in a telling effect that the Evangelist was composed at a time when Rabbi Simeon's three famous pillars were being discussed and re-interpreted in rabbinic circles.⁶⁶⁵

It seems that Matthew was modelling Jesus' tradition in a way that will establish a Christian version of the discussion. Hence, the first Evangelist version of the three rabbinic pillars that sustained the world hang on the teachings of Jesus on the Torah: Almsgiving, Prayer, Fasting, a Command concerning mammon and the right attitude towards neighbour.⁶⁶⁶ The idea of the Sermon's division into three has been unquestionably accepted by many scholars. Among them, and others is Davies, who posits that Torah 5:17-48, Christian cult 6:1-18, and the Social issues 6:19-7:12, are the main outline of the Sermon.⁶⁶⁷ Now let us turn to the history of interpretation of the Sermon.

B. History of Interpretation

An historical survey has been done by some eminent scholars like G. Barth, C. Bauman, U. Berner, H. Frankemolle, R. M. Grant, W.S. Kissinger, U.

⁶⁶² W.D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*. (Cambridge: University Press, 1964), 305-307.

⁶⁶³ Allison, "The Structure of the Sermon on the Mount," 444.

⁶⁶⁴ Allison.

⁶⁶⁵ Davies, "Reflections on the Sermon on the Mount" *Scotish Journal of Theology*, 44, 1991, 294.

⁶⁶⁶ Allison.

⁶⁶⁷ Davies, "Reflection on the Sermon," 295.

Luz, H.A. McArthur and others.⁶⁶⁸ We shall therefore consider a re-survey, very briefly, of the sermon's interpretation.⁶⁶⁹

The Ante-Nicene writers quoted the Sermon on the Mount than any other passage in the Bible. The *Didache*, an earliest "extant post biblical writings"⁶⁷⁰ is saturated with the Golden Rule part of the Sermon. Justin Martyr, a second century apologist quotes freely from the Sermon on the Mount.⁶⁷¹ Irenaeus, a Presbyter, whose major work on new and old law centers on Matthew 5:21 also employed the Sermon to daily issues of life. Tertullian used the Sermon to refute Marcion's heresy, while Origen, most prolific among the Ante-Nicene writers, quoted the Sermon referring to it as a definition of Christ's teachings. John Chrysostom believed that the Sermon is relevant to every Christian. His homilies represent a balance restrained exegetical method.⁶⁷²

Augustine's theological influence cut across all periods ever since his acknowledgement of the Sermon on the Mount. He referred to it "as the highest standard of morality and as the perfect measure of the Christian life."⁶⁷³ The Medieval Period otherwise known as a "Dark Age" or "the Golden Age of faith" is characterized by great system of theology, scholarship, Gothic art and feudal life. Paul Tillich identified this period with what is known as "transcendent reality."⁶⁷⁴

Thomas Aquinas wrote a treatise on Law with a focus on the Sermon on the Mount. Even then, new law had been expressed and understood as applying to all Christians. Passages from the *Didache* confirm this,⁶⁷⁵ but in his new

⁶⁶⁸ Davies, 283.

⁶⁶⁹ David Crump, "Applying the Sermon on the Mount: once You have Read it What do you do with it?" *Criswell Theological Review*, 6, 1, 1992, 46, has given a summary of the history from the angle of the church Fathers, the Middle Ages, the Reformation, the reformed scholasticism, the Protestant Liberalism and the traditional Dispensationalism, but we shall follow the submission of Kissinger.

⁶⁷⁰ Kissinger, *The Sermon on the Mount...*, 5-8.

⁶⁷¹ Kissinger.

⁶⁷² Kissinger, 12.

⁶⁷³ Kissinger, 13.

⁶⁷⁴ Kissinger, 16-17.

⁶⁷⁵ Kissinger, 19.

commentary on the Sermon, P.E. Lapide introduced another dimension relating to Trinity, Incarnation, Church and sacraments.⁶⁷⁶

Martin Luther's view of the two kingdoms was developed from the Sermon on the Mount. He delivered series of sermons from Matthew 5-7 in Wittenberg through which he differentiates between secular and divine realm. He maintains that a Christian can be a citizen of the kingdom of God without renouncing his responsibility to the state.⁶⁷⁷ Huldreich Zwingli, a chief reformer in German speaking Switzerland, was at variance with the Anabaptist on the issue of infant baptism, giving of judgement and swearing oaths. He believed the OT or by the words of Christ. Christ says our Yes must be Yes rather than a prohibition of oath in a court forum or in a magistracy.⁶⁷⁸

John Calvin also a Swiss reformer, in his own interpretation, advocates that the Sermon should not be taken literally. Commenting on whether a lawsuit is forbidden. Calvin, against the ethical radicalism of the Anabaptist, says: no. The Anabaptists take the Sermon as a charter for the true Christian life. Their fundamental concern is to pattern their lives after the teaching and precepts of Jesus even when the price is martyrdom.⁶⁷⁹

In the Post Reformation, the Puritans adhered to Calvinistic tradition, while the Quakers pattern themselves after the Anabaptist. For example G. Fox was imprisoned for refusal to take oath. The Quakers also found support in the Sermon on the Mount on the issue of non-resistance and war. John Wesley in agreement with the Reformation doctrine of justification believed that the Sermon on the Mount is given to all men and in-fact it is a description of total religion.⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁶ Kissinger. The point here is a comment on Christ's fulfilling of the law. "For Christ added to the Law precepts of the explicit belief concerning and the three in one, and concerning Christ's incarnation, passion, and redemption".

⁶⁷⁷ Kissinger, 22-23.

⁶⁷⁸ Kissinger, 24-25.

⁶⁷⁹ Kissinger, 31-34

⁶⁸⁰ Kissinger, 35,38.

The Protestant Liberalism or “Liberal Theology is characterized by biblical criticism. The Bible is subjected to the same analysis like any other literature. This period is generally identified by a close characterization of the kingdom of God with a “social ethical ideal” Among them are people like Adolf Von Harnack and Willielm Herrmann. Notable work on the Sermon had been done by Friedrich August Tholuck, Sqren W. Kierkegard, and Leo Tolstoy.⁶⁸¹

Some of them who identified with consistent eschatological aspect of Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom of God are Johannes Weiss, and Albert Schweitzer. The dispensationist “finds no church truth in the Sermon on the Mount, but law directed primarily to the future kingdom.” That is to say it is future oriented. This interpretation has aroused a stimulating debate among the “fundamentalist, evangelical, and liberal circles. Carl Stange, Gerhard Kittel, Hans Windisch also interpreted the Sermon on the Mount in their own right.⁶⁸²

Furthermore, some scholars, especially in the twentieth century sought for “relevance of an impossible ethical ideal”⁶⁸³ This is against the backdrop, the school of thought, that the Sermon is impracticable. C.H. Dodd speaking therefore of a realized eschatology, that is to say that “the kingdom of God has come upon you” followed by the concept of the *kerygma*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer presents a balance between faith and works. Martin Dibelius posited that the Sermon is not an ideal, but an eschatological stimulus intended to make men well acquainted with the pure will of God.⁶⁸⁴

For Leonhard Ragaz, Sermon on the Mount must be understood in terms of Christ himself. He posits that the Sermon transcends any Christology, dogma, ethics or religion. The Mansons summarise the Sermon as Jewish spiritual heritage. This is divided into the New Law in Matthew 5:17-48. The new standard of worship stated in Matthew 6:1-34 and the new standard of corporate solidarity in 7:1-12. Other meaningful contributors are Amos Wilder, A.M. Hunter, J.W. Bowman, C.F. McArthur, J. Jeremias, and W.D.

⁶⁸¹ Kissinger, 42,55

⁶⁸² Kissinger, 79.

⁶⁸³ Kissinger.

⁶⁸⁴ Kissinger, 91

Davies. Jewish interpreters like Claude G. Montefiore and Gerald Friedlander, are not left out. It should be noted that the brief historical survey reveals several attempted solutions in resolving critical and ethical problems, raised by the Sermon on the Mount. The periods covered will show us that the Sermon on the Mount is not only stirring New Testament scholarship, rather it has a universal concern.⁶⁸⁵

A brief summary of the traditional approaches to the Sermon is therefore attempted. This is to reveal some exegetical history, which often takes the Sermon in isolation as if the Matthew 5-7 is complete by itself. It should be noted that a genuine interpretation of the Sermon must keep the entire book of Matthew in focus. Hence the submission of Oscar Brooks that the Sermon must be interpreted in the light of the preceding narrative well in mind is relevant. Let us consider some traditional approaches to the Sermon.⁶⁸⁶

C. Traditional Approaches to the Sermon

1. *The Monastic Approach*

Matthew 5:48 is central to this approach. Perfection is enjoined in this verse and most Catholic scholars have taken it to be in the light of “if you would be perfect, go, sell what you have and give it to the poor, then you will have treasure in heaven” 19:20. This erroneous view has led to a wide dichotomy, even among the monks, ascetics, nuns etc; and “the run-of-the-mill Christian”⁶⁸⁷

2. *The Absolutist Approach*

These are literalist, who essentially identified with the Anabaptist groups. Leo Tolstoi, Francis of Assisi, M. Gandhi, M. Luther King etc belong in this tradition. Fundamental to this approach is taking the scripture at face value.

⁶⁸⁵ Kissinger, 92-122.

⁶⁸⁶ Oscar Brooks, *The Sermon on the Mount*. (New York: University Press, 1985), 13.

⁶⁸⁷ Davies, 284.

For example Tolsti criticised the Russian Orthodox Church for watering down the law of Christ, and he was excommunicated.⁶⁸⁸

3. The Doctrine of the two kingdom Approach

This approach identify with Lutheranism. It distinguishes between spiritual and civil order; private and public realm. However the Sermon on the Mount concern itself with spiritual and civil order rather than with the Government. It is basically written to Christians.⁶⁸⁹

4. *The Impossible Ideal*

This is also loyal to Lutheranism. It is the theory of the impossible ideal which presupposes that no one can really fulfil the ethical ideals of the Sermon on the Mount. This view held that the Sermon on the Mount is actually teaching the necessity of grace for those who have actually decided to obey the commandments.⁶⁹⁰

5. *The Ethic of Intention*

This approach holds that the Sermon on the Mount is not written to the church nor the world. Rather, it speaks to individuals about attitudes and internal dispositions. Among the views of this approach is that the Sermon is not about what we should do but about what we should be; it is about thinking and willing and feeling, which is about a new way of being spiritual. Some who identify with this thought are H.J. Holtzmann and W. Hermann.⁶⁹¹

6. *Christological Approach*

This view holds that the Sermon on the Mount is a self portrait of Christ. It is a way of preaching Christ. Christ brings the kingdom, accomplish the law

⁶⁸⁸ Davies, 286-287.

⁶⁸⁹ Davies, 288.

⁶⁹⁰ Davies, 290.

⁶⁹¹ Davies, 291.

and lives his own words. So he is the content of his sayings. A close associate of Karl Barth, E. Thurneysen is the proponent of this view.⁶⁹²

7. Historical Critical Approach

Since the last century, scholars have been applying the historical critical tools to the study of the Sermon on the Mount. Their fundamental efforts are geared toward sources behind the gospels. Recent debates confirm that most scholars agree that the Sermon is Matthew's expansion of a discourse in Q, and Matthew. A close parallel though unabridged, is found in Lk. 6:20-49. Most scholars believe that Evangelist Matthew creatively remoulded the passage by adding passages from M, Q, and from his own redactional skills.⁶⁹³ Now let us examine the structure of the Sermon on the Mount.

III. STRUCTURE OF THE SERMON

The Sermon occupies Matthew 5-7, but then Matthew 1-4 occupies the beginning of the Gospel, while 8-28 constitute the remaining part of the book. This we must keep in view because the Sermon is not in isolation. Previous studies are surveyed. W.J. Ferrar, W. Davies and so on thought the Sermon is based on the three pillars of Simeon the Just, while Grundmann, Schweizer, G. Bornkamnn, Grndry and Lambrecht who somewhat agree that the Sermon is the organizing principle of the Lord's prayer. The list is inexhaustive.⁶⁹⁴

J.A. Books structured the Sermon in three principal ways namely: the introduction (4:23-5:2; the Sermon proper 5:3-7:27, and the conclusion 7:28-8:1. Brooks remarks the correspondence between the introduction and the conclusion, especially in the phrase: "great crowds followed him" 4:25 cf 8:1; "the crowds" 5:1 7:28; the mountain, 5:1; 8:1 "going up" 5:1; going

⁶⁹² Davies.

⁶⁹³ R.D. Worden, "The Q Sermon on the Mount/Plain Variants and Reconstruction" *Seminar Paper SBL*, 1983, 445; Ulrich Luz, "Sermon on the Plain: Reconstruction of QMT and QLuke" *Seminar Paper SBL*, 1983, 473f; and also J.M. Robinson, "The Sermon on the Mount/Plain: Work Sheets for the Reconstruction of Q" *Seminar Paper SBL*, 1983, 451. All these mentioned scholars and some others have examined this issue variously.

⁶⁹⁴ Allison, "The Stucture of the Sermon on the Mount" 424-429.

down 8:1; teaching 5:2 cf 7:28; and the opening of his mouth 5:2 and when Jesus finished these words (7:28).⁶⁹⁵ Both Brooks and Allison agree on this structure, but then Allison goes further to restructure the Sermon into seven categories as follows: The introduction and the conclusion agree as outlined above. The analysis of the discourse proper 5:3-7:27 and some general statement are contained in 5:13-7:12. The exegetical conundrums in 5:17-48, the middle portion of Matthew's cult-didache 6:5-15. The structure of a general introductory section in 6:1-18, and the disparity among scholars, who care to fathom the structure and the theme 6:19-7:12.⁶⁹⁶ Now let us consider the context of the Sermon.

IV. CONTEXT OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The narrative that is antecedent to the Sermon must be borne in mind as one seeks to understand the Sermon.⁶⁹⁷ This is against the framework that the sermon is an incomplete summation of Matthean faith and religion. This is rooted in the fact that the Sermon is standing in the midst of a whole, and it is never in isolation.⁶⁹⁸ The chapters one through four introduce Jesus, proclaims him as Saviour and portray Him as healer. It is followed by chapter eight and nine where record of more grace abound. Also noted is the fact that the Sermon belongs to the book where the Son of God offers himself a sacrifice for men, and even promise his ever abiding presence. In

⁶⁹⁵ James A. Brooks, "The Unity and Structure of the Sermon on the Mount," *Criswell Theological Review*, 6, 1, 1992, 25-26. He also submits that the core of the Sermon consists of 5:13-7:12. It deals with the task of the people of God in the world. Matthew 5:13-16 is considered introductory summary, which is a transition from the blessedness of the future to the demands of the present. Chapter 5:17-7:12 clearly divides into Jesus and the Torah while 5:17-48 speaks of the Christian cult, 6:1-18, 6:19-7:12; 5:17ff should be considered as introduction, both to the section on Torah and also to 5:17-7:12 forming a whole with the concluding summary of 7:12.

⁶⁹⁶ David L. Turner, "Whom Does God Approve? The Context, Structure, Purpose, and Exegesis of Matthew's Beatitudes," *Criswell Theological Review*, 6,1, 1992, 33-34; and David E. Lanier, "Matthew 6\9-13 – A thematic and Semantic – Structural Analysis," *Criswell Theological Review*, 6, 1, 1992, 57.

⁶⁹⁷ Brooks, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 13.

⁶⁹⁸ Davies, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 299.

its entirety, the Sermon is more than ethics, rather that Jesus bring to bear the benefit of the law and the grace.⁶⁹⁹

The sermon is related to Matthew 1-4, and 8-28, because a major part of the work is sermonic. Jesus sitting on a mountain to teach 5:1 alludes to the Mosaic motif in 1-4, which must be a recall of the Sinai experience: “Blessed are the poor in Spirit” 5:3-4 compared Isaiah 61:1-2. And this alludes to 11:5, so that “the same OT text is drawn on in two different places.”⁷⁰⁰

Furthermore, let us see the context of the Sermon in its immediate and larger context. The immediate context of the Sermon surrounds the theme of the Sermon. Jesus expectations on how his disciples should behave, obedience to what he commands them and the ethics he has thought them. His followers are expected to have absolute, unwavering trust in God’s goodness vis-à-vis an absolute trust in him. The larger context on the other hand is to establish the rule of God firmly among his people. Incidentally the rule of God is limited since there are people who knew not God or care to know him, fail to acknowledge him who created the world and sustains it.⁷⁰¹

The pagan domination of Israel with evil, tyranny, and injustice prevail in God’s world, hence the establishment of righteousness must accompany the earth with the knowledge of the glory of God even as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:4).⁷⁰² Let us consider the summary of D. L. Turner that the introductory narrative framework in 5:1-2, the introduction to the sermon, the Beatitudes in 5:3-16, the body of the Sermon 5:17-7:12, beginning with Jesus announces 5:17-20 and disciples relationship to the law with six

⁶⁹⁹ Davies.

⁷⁰⁰ Davies, 300.

⁷⁰¹ Stephen Westerholm, “The Law in the Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5:17-48,” *Criswell Theological Review*, 6, 1, 1992, 44-52. J.C. Anderson, “Matthew: Sermon and Story” *Seminar Paper*, 1988, 496f. He posited also an inseparable connections between the Sermon and other stories of the Evangelist. The Sermon plays an integral role in the Gospel as a narrative. This is also noted by E. Kretz, “Community and Character,” *Seminar Paper*, 1987, 567; J. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986, and D. Edwards, *Matthew’s Story of Jesus*. (Jesus Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986.

⁷⁰² Westerholm.

contrast 5:21-48. The hypocritical and genuine religious practice (6:1-18). Materialism and anxiety 6:19-34, and relationship with people 7:1-12.⁷⁰³

It should be noted that Matthew 7:12 provides a complementary theme of obeying the Law and the prophets, which started with 5:17. The Sermon is concluded 7:13-27 with three contrasting challenges e.g taking the narrow way 13-14, avoid false prophets, 15-23 and living or building lives on the words and teachings that Jesus has taught 24-27. The concluding narrative framework ends with the crowd's amazement that Jesus teaches with authority. Let us now attempt a meaning of the Sermon.

V. MEANING OF THE SERMON

The hermeneutical implication of the Sermon on the Mount basically concerns the problem of law and grace. Generally the Sermon speaks about three characters i.e God, neighbour and self. The order is that God and his will take priority in anything, then come others and lastly self.⁷⁰⁴ The Sermon has been placed in a Mosaic context especially the Torah.⁷⁰⁵ Jesus sitting on the Mountain is remarked to be a reference to his role as a teacher since it is customary for Rabbis and other teacher of the Law to sit when they teach.⁷⁰⁶

The Sermon on the Mount has been characterized as a design for man's happiness. Any man who cares to be happy has guidelines for happiness in

⁷⁰³ David L. Turner, "Whom Does God Approve? The Context, Structure, Purpose, and Exegesis of Matthew's Beatitudes," *Criswell Theological Review*, 6, 1, 1992, 33. Several other scholars have done this summary-context differently as each sees the Sermon, but we want to consider Turner here. However, others are: Oscar Brooks, W. Farmer, J. A. Brooks, D.A. Carson etc.

⁷⁰⁴ Davies, "The Sermon on the Mount," 305.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid, 297. This is against the milieu that the first few chapters of Matthew precisely 1-5 contain an extended typology, which is an indication that Jesus comes from the world in the situations that so much resembling those accompanied the birth of Moses. Most scholars are not at variance with this submission e.g D. Allison, "Jesus and Moses" *The Expository Times*, 98, 7, 1987, 203.

⁷⁰⁶ Allison.

the Sermon.⁷⁰⁷ Hence, Hans Windisch considered the Sermon practically, imperatively, eschatologically and theologically.

Practically, the possibility of Christian men and women fulfilling God's commands has been considered. Are men able to do and fulfil God's rule? This riddle is against the backdrop that if the Sermon is taken literally, understood and obeyed, "they would threaten our legal and civil orders. Therefore, the Sermon should be understood as individualistic relating to his neighbour, brother, enemy, and the judge, rather than to a fellow country man, fellow citizen, superior, employer or government."⁷⁰⁸

Imperatively, the Sermon on the Mount has a general overview of an element of probability that the counsels and the regulations are to be followed and obeyed. Yes, the Sermon on the Mount is an ethic of obedience hanging on two propositions: God proclaims his will through Jesus, the willing man must obey.⁷⁰⁹

Eschatologically, the Matthean Gospel is flavoured with eschatological expectations. The Sermon could be seen therefore as great speeches conditioned by eschatological expectations. This is against the framework of Jesus messages being fundamentally characterized by eschatology. Other scholars like J. Weiss, A. Schweitzer and others have made this remark. Eschatological meaning is rooted in the catastrophe foretold by Daniel and other prophets, would bring all earthly kindom to an end. New ones would be inaugurated, and only those who are saved will be part of it. The new age is referred to as the kingdom of God and that is the fundamental theme of the Sermon on the Mount.⁷¹⁰

⁷⁰⁷ William V. Myres, *Design for Happiness: The Psychological Common Sense of the Sermon on the Mount*. (Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1961), 9. Among other things are the fact that a man can be happy if he will examine his personal attitudes, grow up socially, eliminate spiritual camouflage, defeat neurotic anxiety, avoid negative habit hazards, then life's real security and happiness will be realized. A.M. Hunter, *A Pattern for Life: An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* (Philadelphia: Westmister Press, 1965). He devoted a section to exegete the Sermon to design for life in the kingdom.

⁷⁰⁸ Hans Windisch, *The Meaning of the Sermon on the Mount*. (Philadelphia: Westmister Press, 1937), 23, 96, 122.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 65, 120.

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid*, 120, 26-27.

Theologically, the relationship of historical exegesis to theological exegesis has been examined. To understand what lies closest to the hearts of the NT writers for the purpose of sharing faith with respect to detailed dogmatic and didactic expression of the message, is therefore considered that knowledge of the philologist and historian can advance our understanding of the history and exegesis of the NT especially in a situation where training equipment necessary for scientific work in this field” is available. The exegete will do well to mind factors that will affect his work.⁷¹¹

By way of summary, the Sermon is a doctrine of righteousness, the fulfilment which guarantees acquittal on the judgement day and also an admittance into the kingdom or fellowship with God. It characterized the fulfilment and completion of Jewish religion. Since the sermon presupposes a religion of obedience which man is capable of doing: like forgiving others, reconciling with others, loving enemies, shun filial relationship with God rather hunger for righteousness.⁷¹²

VI CONCLUSION

The Sermon on the Mount is a challenge to all. The challenge has engaged intellectual minds till date. In this paper however, it is established that the Sermon on the Mount should be seen as a literary product rather than, the text being a transcript of Jesus’ teaching. This is an acceptable solution Gospel criticism has offered to enhance our understanding. Therefore, we must concentrate on the available tools to determine the underline traditional import of the text.

Again, a credible socio-religious setting of the early church will lend credence to the uniqueness of the Sermon on the Mount. In seeking an understanding of the Sermon, our interpretation must be congruent with the wholistic biblical witness.⁷¹³

The view of Reinhold Neibuhr that the Sermon is individualistic should be rejected, because it is an existential position, the Sermon does not encourage

⁷¹¹ Ibid, 155-156

⁷¹² Ibid, 168-169

⁷¹³ Robert A. Guelich, “Interpreting the Sermon on the Mount” *Interpretation* XLI, 1, 1987, 117.

heroic individualism, rather it was addressed to the disciples in-fact to the crowds 5:1-2. Kissinger's historical analysis of the interpretation of the Sermon should be appreciated, but the view of E. Schweitzer's interim ethic must be rejected outright if we accept the theory of realized eschatology.⁷¹⁴ Luther's view is in order, because believers are citizens of two worlds. H. Zwingli's position sound paradoxical. It should not be taken at the face value because "Sacred obligation and magistracy" are two different unrelated issues. Our decisions must be informed by situation ethics and sanctified common sense.⁷¹⁵

Anabaptist position is extreme and rigid, but the eschatological position of John Weiss and A Schweitzer agree with Windisch should be acceptable to us. C.H. Dodd's realized eschatology is helpful, but that does not remove the fact that we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:13).

The Monastic Approach is erroneous, the Absolutist is extreme but the two kingdom approach is consistent. The impossible ideal is too loose and it is out of focus, while the ethic of intention is too trivial. Of course the Christological view align with the Biblical witness. The historical critical approach is subject to debate should the Sermon be Matthew's addition or creativity? The Dispensationalist futuristic position on the Sermon should be considered out of focus, because it fails to address the now. The two kingdom hypothesis, though is in order, it is imbalance. If the Sermon is basically written to Christians, which is acceptable, but do Christian life exclusively in their own world?

Structurally, the Sermon covers almost all areas of human relationship. That should inform us that the Sermon is for all. Contextually Jesus' expectation that disciples must obey and follow his teachings is basically the same assumed expectation today. Everybody must decide for himself. After all Apostle John says the anointing you receive from him teaches you all things and you need no man to teach you. Paul says; work out your own salvation with fear and trembling because God is walking in you to do and to will of his good pleasure.

⁷¹⁴ S. Hanerwas & W.H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 76-77.

⁷¹⁵ Kissinger, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 125.

The Sermon is given to all men as model for total life. John Chrysostom believed the Sermon is relevant to every Christian. Every believer must explore and live the Sermon.⁷¹⁶ Hence, the writer believes that followers of Jesus must therefore set their affections on and strive after spiritual treasures, faithful exercise of spiritual gift, and obedience to the total counsel of God's word, because it will be disastrous if Jesus shall say: I never knew you, depart from me to a minister at the end of the age 7:23. Therefore African ecclesiology will thrive in striving after spiritual treasure.

⁷¹⁶ G.L. Blomberg, "On Wealth and Worry: Matthew 6:19-34: Meaning and Significance," *Criswell Theological Review*, 6,1, 1992.