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Ouachita Baptist University

“Content and Character: Modeling Christian Communication After Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount”

An Honors Senior Thesis

By
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April 20, 2015

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I. Introduction

The summer before my senior year of college, I had the privilege of spending two weeks in Israel on a biblical studies tour of the Holy Land. One evening, a few members of our group invited the rest of us to join them on a morning hike to watch the sun rise over the Sea of Galilee, where we were spending the first leg of our trip. Half of the group opted out of the adventure when they heard we would leave at 4:30 in the morning. The remaining ten or so, of which I was one, decided to take the trek with them. My alarm rang at 4:10, waking me from a deep, jet-lagged sleep. I almost hit “snooze,” but decided the hike would be worth it as I pulled on a t-shirt and shorts. I tiptoed across the room, throwing my Bible, some snacks, and a water bottle into my backpack, and snuck out the door. An empty hallway welcomed me and I sat down, wondering if anyone else had remembered to wake up. Luckily, after a few minutes, familiar faces filled the hallway. We counted heads, ten in all, and with all members accounted for, we left the hotel toward the Sea.

The leaders of our small pack, who had scouted out the hike the day before, led us into the dark morning. I recognized the distant waters in front of us as we ventured closer to the base of the hill we wanted to climb. Our two leaders had warned us of the fence we would have to hop and, though perfectly safe, I prayed as we each swung one leg, then the other, over the railing. We walked up a small hill and a much larger one lay directly beyond. The majority of our company sat down, facing the Sea as if the hike was over. Our two leaders said we could stop there, but they intended to climb the larger hill. Pointing to the peak looming in the distance, they asked if anyone wanted to join. Gazing at the view of the Sea, I realized it was no better than the view from my hotel window. Even though the brief walk left me huffing and puffing, I was motivated to keep going. I joined the two, the only one to do so, and we journeyed on.

Walking through a hilly cow pasture, we created our own path. Cows and bulls peppered the hillside. At one point, my feet slipped as the grazed-over ground crumbled beneath my shoes. For several feet, I slid, breaking the skin on my right leg. As I brushed myself off, I wondered if Jesus, too, had ever slid on these hills. I thought of how the Gospels describe Jesus' effort to find times of solitude around the Sea of Galilee and I made a mental note to remember the difficulty of this hike the next time I read those passages. As I continued to trail behind the other two, I stopped often, turning each time to remind myself of the scene behind me. After twenty minutes or so, we finally reached the top.

The Sea of Galilee sparkled beneath us as the rising sun shone through a blanket of clouds. The three of us dispersed to spend time reading and praying, and then came back together to pray aloud. From a distance, the group we left behind saw us and waved. One girl yelled to say they were heading back to the hotel and we were surprised by how clearly we could hear them. In the Life of Christ course we had taken to prepare for this trip, we studied how Jesus could speak to large crowds because of the acoustics of the hills around Galilee. We were skeptical, but hearing our friend from the base of the hill settled that debate. I remembered Jesus' sermons he had spoken on the hillsides of Galilee. A few days later, our group visited the Mount of the Beatitudes, the supposed site of the Sermon on the Mount, and one of the professors read the Beatitudes. Hearing Matthew 5 reminded me of the hike up the hill, the sounds and sights. This experience changed the way I understood the Sermon on the Mount and gave me a tangible memory to associate with that passage of Scripture. I became fascinated with Jesus' sermons after visiting Israel, which sparked the idea to pursue a further study of the Sermon on the Mount.

Earlier that same year, I had the privilege of attending the Sundance Film Festival along with several students and professors. We partnered with the Windrider Forum, a Christian forum designed to spark intentional conversation about films viewed at Sundance. To my surprise, I found myself deeply moved, just as I would be moved at the Mount of the Beatitudes months later. I learned God communicates with his people in creative and unique ways. For me, it was through the films I saw and the people I encountered. At Sundance, I realized Christianity and communication are not two separate forces working against each other, rather they work together to further the kingdom of God. As God communicates himself to us, we communicate to him through prayer and to others by sharing the Gospel. Sundance taught me there is an intimate connection between Christianity and communication and I decided I should pursue further study of this interaction.

My first semester of college, I memorized Plantinga's definition of *shalom*: "the webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight."¹ He argues for a holistic view of life, that the Christian walk should be characterized by working toward this *shalom*. Though I disliked memorizing that definition as a freshman, it sticks with me to this day. As a Christians Studies and Speech Communications major, it reminds me that these two categories of life should work together to create *shalom*. Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."² As Christians, we are to obey Christ and follow his example. If that is true, the Christian life should not be categorized and fragmented. To obey and follow Christ is a holistic commitment and this idea of holistic

¹ Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 10.

² Matthew 16:24.

obedience brought my interest in the Bible and communications together. I realized studying both fields would be a small act of furthering *shalom* in my own walk as a Christian and student.

In order to learn about Jesus' communication method, I decided to study the Sermon on the Mount. After doing an in-depth study of Jesus' method (how he taught, the devices he used, and his structure), I realized his method is only a part of his effectiveness as a speaker. Without credibility and integrity as well, Jesus' teaching would fall flat and cease to have authority. This realization especially struck me because, in the field of communications, method is emphasized over integrity and character. I decided to compare Jesus' method and character with what the communication field teaches about public speaking. Within Christian circles, I found that the character of the speaker is valued, while in secular circles it is hardly spoken about. In this study, I follow Jesus' method of teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and his credibility as a speaker. Then, I compare principles of Jesus' teaching with principles of the communication field to draw practical conclusions about how Christian speakers and preachers should model Christ's example. This study is a sampling of my own journey of trying to wed communications and following Christ, and my hope is that this study will better my own walk as well as the walks of many other Christians.

II. Sermon on the Mount

A. Introduction

The Sermon on the Mount is the largest section of Jesus' teaching recorded in the New Testament. This paper only focuses on Matthew's account in chapters 5-7, but Luke also includes a version of the Sermon in Luke 6 called the Sermon on the Plain. The purpose of this introduction is to explore the setting, audience, purpose, structure, and history of interpretation of

the Sermon on the Mount. Understanding these key elements before diving into Jesus' teaching method offers a more complete view of the Sermon.

Setting

Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount after ministering in Galilee for an extended period of time.³ His ministry included miracles and teaching to such a great extent that Matthew says “news about [Jesus] spread all over Syria.”⁴ The crowds surrounded Jesus, so he hiked up a hill, one of the many that surround the Sea of Galilee, and likely sat on the top facing the Sea to teach. Matthew's language to describe the mountain Jesus spoke from is vague, so the exact location where Jesus gave the Sermon is unknown.⁵ The fact that Jesus taught from a hill harkens back to Moses giving the Ten Commandments to the twelve tribes of Israel, even though Matthew does not explicitly draw the comparison. Jesus addressed and specified the Law of Moses for the people of the Kingdom of God, gave a Kingdom message to the twelve disciples (and by extension, those in the crowd who would follow him), and assumed the posture of a rabbi, with his disciples at his feet prepared to listen to and teach these Kingdom principles.⁶

Audience

Jesus spoke both to his disciples and to the crowds. Matthew mentioned a crowd in 4:25, but that is not the same crowd mentioned in 5:1, because the Sermon is a specific circumstance, and 4:23-25 is a general overview of Jesus' ministry in Galilee.⁷ His disciples, most likely the

³ Craig L. Blomberg, Matthew, in *The New American Commentary*, vol. 22, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 96. See Matt 4:23-25.

⁴ Matthew 4:24.

⁵ Blomberg, *NAC*, 97.

⁶ John R. W. Stott, The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), in *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1978), 20-21.

⁷ Blomberg, *NAC*, 96.

twelve mentioned later in Matthew 10, closely followed him. When it comes to the crowds mentioned in 5:1, Talbert explains three basic views. They are either neutral followers with little attachment to Jesus, sincere believers, or a mixed crowd of believers and nonbelievers. The crowds are best understood to be followers of Jesus to some degree among a definite presence of genuine disciples.⁸ Though amazed by Jesus' teaching (7:28), the crowds do not follow him as intimately as the disciples do. Jesus addressed a large crowd, but his direct message was for his disciples and true followers, as the Kingdom message he taught applied to those already dedicated to him and his message. He addressed members of the Kingdom of God.⁹ According to Guelich, Jesus gave this Sermon to his followers under the new covenant, so he gave no distinction between Jew and Gentile believers.¹⁰ Even so, the Sermon is not directed to all of humanity, but applies specifically to disciples of Jesus Christ. So for today's Christian readers, the Sermon still has complete relevance. It is for those who follow and obey Christ.¹¹

Purpose

Holistically, the grand purpose of the Bible is for God to draw his people to himself. His people are set apart for holy living, and the Sermon on the Mount is an extension of the overall purpose of the Bible.¹² The Sermon on the Mount communicates what life is like in the Kingdom of God, illustrating a life under the rule of God. To be a citizen of the Kingdom is to be set apart from the world and Jesus pulls direct contrasts between how the righteous and unrighteous live

⁸ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 13.

⁹ Stott, 29.

¹⁰ Robert Guelich, *A Foundation for Understanding the Sermon on the Mount* (Dallas: Word, 1982), 27.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 53; 59-60.

¹² Stott, 17.

throughout the Sermon.¹³ Augustine believed the Sermon was “‘the perfect measure of the Christian life’ and ‘filled with all the precepts by which the Christian life is formed.’”¹⁴ Talbert explains the purpose as twofold: to transform character and to direct ethical decision-making.¹⁵ While both are valid assertions, Jesus’ overall purpose in delivering the Sermon on the Mount is to explain the Kingdom of God.

Some scholars believe Jesus served as a new Moses, giving a new law as Moses gave on Sinai. Instead, Jesus interpreted God’s revealed law and therefore legitimized the Torah.¹⁶ Jesus’ purpose was not to change the law or to create a new law. In fact, He addressed this issue in 5:17, stating that his purpose was to fulfill the law. By doing so, Jesus modeled a Kingdom life. He upheld the law in order to show his followers what it means to live in the Kingdom of God. In addition to living a Kingdom life himself, Jesus preached about the Kingdom of God in the Sermon on the Mount.

Structure

The Sermon begins with the nine Beatitudes and the metaphor about salt and light. By opening with the Beatitudes, Jesus reminded listeners of God’s blessing before teaching about God’s commands.¹⁷ The thesis of the Sermon is contained in 5:17-20. The next section of the Sermon uses six contrasts to compare the law and Jesus’ teaching (5:21-48). Jesus contrasted fake and true piety in 6:1-18 and offered three examples. The rest of Matthew 6 deals with social issues such as money and earthly treasures. In the beginning of Matthew 7, Jesus gave more

¹³ Ibid., 18-19.

¹⁴ Guelich, 15.

¹⁵ Talbert, 29.

¹⁶ Blomberg, *NAC*, 96-97.

¹⁷ Ibid., 98.

instruction on how to treat others. The rest of the chapter concludes the Sermon by giving three illustrations and two responses.¹⁸ Guelich splits the Sermon into three key categories: the blessings of the kingdom (5:3-16), the greater righteousness (5:17-7:12), and the alternatives (7:13-27).¹⁹ Talbert sees the Sermon as consisting of the setting (4:18-5:2), the higher righteousness (5:17-7:12), and the conclusion (7:13-8:1).²⁰ The following is a proposed outline of the Sermon's structure:

I. Setting (5:1-2)

II. Description of the People of the Kingdom (5:3-16)

III. The Law in the Kingdom of God (5:17-48)

IV. Righteousness in the Kingdom of God (6:1-18)

V. The Present Focus and Future Hope of the Kingdom of God (6:19-7:27)

VI. Reaction of the Crowd (7:28-29)

History of Interpretation

Blomberg lists the eight most significant ways to interpret the Sermon on the Mount. The first is a medieval view that contained two levels of ethics that specifically outlined how to achieve a greater level of righteousness. The second is Luther's approach, which says the Sermon shows us our need for God and therefore drives us to repentance, similar to Paul's approach to the Law. Anabaptists hold the third view that takes the Sermon literally to the point of extreme pacifism. The fourth view is held by protestant liberals who see the Sermon as a call to bring about the Kingdom of God on Earth. Existentialists hold the fifth view, which rejects

¹⁸ Ibid., 95-96.

¹⁹ Guelich, 39.

²⁰ Talbert, 25-26.

seeing the ethics in the Sermon on the Mount as absolute, but instead see it as a challenge to be conscious of both human finiteness and the presence of God. As the sixth view, Schweitzer sees the urgency of the Sermon as reserved for the biblical audience, since they believed in Jesus' soon return, and not for current readers. Dispensationalists see the Sermon as outlining the future ethic during the Millennium in the seventh view. Finally, the eighth view recognizes an inaugurated eschatology. While it is true that the Kingdom of God is already inaugurated on earth, it is not yet entirely fulfilled. As Blomberg mentions, Christians can obey the commands given in the Sermon now through the power of the Holy Spirit, and the Sermon serves as a platform for the Church of Christ; but, since the world is still fallen, the Sermon cannot be completely fulfilled by any imperfect human.²¹

B. Communication Devices

One of the major attributes of Jesus' teaching is his structure and use of devices, which clarify his message. Jesus' method likewise aids clarification and is one attribute that makes Jesus' Sermon unique. The purpose of this section is to study Jesus' devices in the Sermon on the Mount in order to draw conclusions about Jesus' teaching style. To achieve this level of understanding, each section includes an explanation of the device and a few examples of where Jesus uses the device.

*Overstatement*²²

Jesus used the Semitic device of overstatement throughout the Sermon. Overstatement is a form of exaggeration to make a specific point. Jesus' overstatements may seem harsh or impossible without a clear understanding of his main point or message. Examples of Jesus

²¹ Blomberg, *NAC*, 95.

²² Robert H. Stein. *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 8-11. Jesus uses overstatement in 5:18, 23-24, 29-30, 38-42, 48; 6:6, 17, 24, and 7:7-8.

employing overstatement are contained in 5:23-24 and 5:29-30.²³ In 5:23-24, Jesus told the audience to leave Jerusalem and go back home to reconcile with a friend before returning to offer a gift at the temple. For many Jews, this would have been impossible because of how far they lived from Jerusalem.²⁴ The specific point Jesus was making was not to take constant trips from home to Jerusalem and back, but instead to seek reconciliation before sacrifice and worship.²⁵ Carson goes further to say Jesus' point was that reconciliation is more important than religious duty.²⁶

Another example of overstatement occurs in 5:29-30. One interpretation of this section of the Sermon is literal self-mutilation, as evidenced by Origen of Alexandria, who took this passage literally to the point of depriving himself of food, sleep, and even making himself a eunuch.²⁷ Plucking out one eye does not prevent someone from lusting; but, even though the literal application of this passage is not valid, Jesus' message is not jeopardized. It is important to note Jesus' overstatement. Otherwise, his message becomes warped. Jesus did not intend for his followers to dismember themselves or render themselves blind. Instead, he made a case for purity. To combat sin, disciples of Jesus must take every extreme measure to remove sin from their lives.²⁸ Stott says a believer should act as though their eyes, feet, or hands are no longer parts of their body. Instead of looking, they are to cover their eyes, and instead of going

²³ Ibid., 8-11.

²⁴ Stein, 11.

²⁵ Guelich, 189-190; Talbert, 71.

²⁶ D.A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 42.

²⁷ Ibid., 44; Stott, 89.

²⁸ Stein, 9.

somewhere that will lead to sin, they are to stand still.²⁹ Christians must take drastic measures to put sin to death in their lives, which is what Jesus taught in these two verses.³⁰

Hyperbole

Hyperbole is similar to overstatement since it too is a form of exaggeration. What distinguishes a hyperbole from an overstatement is that a hyperbole draws impossible conclusions or results. There are two instances of hyperbole in the Sermon on the Mount. The first occurs in 6:2-4, and the second in 7:3-5.³¹ In 6:2-4, Jesus taught his disciples to not let their left hand know what their right hand is doing. Right and left hands do not have minds of their own, so the point Jesus made was not stated literally.³² Jesus used this hyperbole of secrecy to contrast the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Spurgeon says, “To stand with a penny in one hand and a trumpet in the other is the posture of hypocrisy.”³³ Instead of doing good to promote themselves, followers of Jesus should give in secret and not flaunt their giving. Jesus’ instruction for almsgiving was that it should be done altruistically and from a humble heart.³⁴

The second example of hyperbole is in 7:3-5. Jesus’ point was not that people have literal logs in their eyes, as it is impossible for someone to have a literal log in his or her eye.³⁵ The point Jesus made was that his followers should examine themselves before confronting their brother or sister—to avoid hypocrisy by being self-aware first and criticizing second.

²⁹ Stott, 89-91.

³⁰ Carson, 44-45.

³¹ Stein, 11-12.

³² Stein, 12.

³³ Stott, 129.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 130.

³⁵ Stein, 12.

Simile

A simile is a direct comparison between two things strung together by ‘like’ or ‘as.’ Jesus utilized similes throughout his teachings, but only once in the Sermon. In 6:29, Jesus compared the beauty of the flowers to Solomon’s riches to emphasize the point he made in 6.30 about God’s provision for his people.³⁶ It is important to note that a parable can sometimes be mistaken for a simile. For example, when Jesus told a parable in 7:24-27, he drew comparisons between a wise man and a foolish man. Since the comparison occurs in parabolic form, it is not considered a simile.³⁷

Metaphor

A metaphor is also a direct comparison between two things or ideas. It differs from a simile in that a metaphor is an implicit comparison whereas a simile is an explicit comparison. Two examples where Jesus uses metaphors are contained in 5:13-16 and 7:13-14.³⁸ In 5:13-16, Jesus compared believers to salt and light. By comparing believers to salt, a compound that does not go sour or waste away, Jesus indicated that his followers will stand firm and persevere in this world. Then, Jesus pointed out that salt that loses its saltiness is useless. Though salt cannot actually lose its saltiness, it can become tainted from outside chemicals and elements. Jesus drew this comparison in order to warn believers against contamination from the world. Light was a common symbol for truth in Jesus’ day, so Jesus compared his disciples to light because they showed truth and love through their actions. Furthermore, the love and truth of Christ are as attractive as light. Just as a city on a hill and a lamp on a stand cannot be hidden, the love and

³⁶ Guelich, 340.

³⁷ Stein, 14-15.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 15-17. See Matthew 5:13-16; 6:22; 7:6, 13-14, and 15-20.

truth of believers cannot be hidden.³⁹ D. A. Carson explains these metaphors as a “picture [of] how [Jesus’] disciples must by their lives leave their stamp on the world which is so opposed to the norms of the kingdom.”⁴⁰

Another metaphor Jesus used is contained in 7:13-14. Here, Jesus compared following him with a narrow gate and following the world with a wide gate. There is an easy path through the wide gate, which leads to death, and a hard path through the narrow gate, which leads to life. Jesus used this comparison to illustrate that there are only two decisions in life: to follow him wholeheartedly or to not follow him. There is no middle ground.⁴¹

Proverb

In keeping with traditional Middle Eastern teaching traditions, Jesus spoke in proverbs, or short memorable sayings. These sayings were often paradoxes or phrases about ethical behavior. Two examples of proverbs in the Sermon are in 6:21 and 7:12.⁴² In 6:21, Jesus summarized the point of 6:19-20 with the simple proverb, “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” The proverb helps listeners remember Jesus’ point about storing up treasures in heaven and not on earth.⁴³ Likewise, Matthew 7:12 serves as a summary statement for 7:9-11. Jesus urged his listeners to consider how they would like to be treated and to do the same for others. This proverb is commonly known as the Golden Rule and to some, is the foundation of Christian

³⁹ Stott, 59-63; Carson, 29-30.

⁴⁰ Carson, 29.

⁴¹ Stott, 193-196.

⁴² Stein, 17-18. The remaining proverbs in the Sermon on the Mount are in: 5:14; 6:22, 24, 27, 34; 7:17-18.

⁴³ Stott, 157-158.

Ethics.⁴⁴ Since Jesus presented this proverb in a positive form, it moves believers “to action on behalf of others.”⁴⁵

Paradox

A paradox is a seemingly contradictory statement, which must be interpreted in light of the given context. In Jesus’ case, understanding the culture of his time is essential to grasping what Jesus meant by these paradoxes. He used paradoxes three times in the Sermon—in 5:5, 6:17, and 7:15.⁴⁶ In 5:5, the meek were said to inherit the earth. To be meek is to be humble, to have a right view of yourself in comparison to God, and to be gentle. The expected inheritance of the meek is little to nothing. By saying the meek will instead inherit the earth, Jesus made a paradoxical statement.⁴⁷ In 6:17, Jesus told the disciples to go against the cultural and religious norms of the day when they fast. His instructions were the opposite of what a traditional fast would have looked like in the contemporary Jewish culture. Those who fasted changed their appearance and demeanor to indicate to everyone that they were fasting. Jesus mandated a more secretive approach where the one fasting would instead go about their day normally.⁴⁸ Finally, in 7:15, Jesus warned against false prophets. The paradox exists between the nonthreatening sheep and the vicious wolf. Though they look good on the outside, their hearts are evil.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Blomber, *NAC*, 131; Guelich, 379.

⁴⁵ Blomberg, *NAC*, 131.

⁴⁶ Stein, 19-20.

⁴⁷ Stott, 42-43.

⁴⁸ Geulich, 299-300; 305-306.

⁴⁹ Blomberg, *NAC*, 132.

A Fortiori

A fortiori statements are arguments where the overall conclusion is more obvious and logical than the lesser conclusion of the premise. The premise draws a generally accepted conclusion and the argument following that premise draws an even clearer generally accepted conclusion. Jesus used this device in 6:23, 26, 28-30, and 7:9-11.⁵⁰ In 6:26, Jesus showed how God takes care of the birds as his first premise. Then, he drew the greater conclusion that God cares much more for his people and will likewise provide for them. The structure of the argument is as follows:

Lesser Conclusion: The birds of the air do not sow or reap, but God feeds them.

Greater Conclusion: God's children have more value than the birds, so God will care for them as much, if not better, than he does the birds.

The illustration concludes "by moving *a minore ad maius* to the worth of the human individual as part of God's creation."⁵¹ Human lives have so much value in the eyes of God that he cares and provides for them, even more so than he does the birds. Thus, the argument moves from a lesser conclusion to a greater conclusion.

Jesus also employed *a fortiori* in 7:9-11. He concluded that, because those who are evil by nature can give good gifts to their children, then God, who is good by nature, gives and does what is good for his children.⁵² The structure is:

Lesser Conclusion: People give good gifts, even though they are evil.

Greater Conclusion: God gives good gifts and much more because he is good.

⁵⁰ Stein, 20-21.

⁵¹ Guelich, 338.

⁵² Stein, 21.

Guelich draws the same conclusion about this argument moving *a minore ad maius* from the level of earthly fathers to God the Father.⁵³ The purpose of this argument is to show the great distinction between an earthly father's provision and God the Father's provision. Since the argument moves from a lesser conclusion to a greater conclusion, it is also *a fortiori*.

Questions

Jesus used questions in his teaching in various ways, but in the Sermon on the Mount, he used a specific type. These were rhetorical questions, which do not demand a direct response from the audience and these specifically also had an implied or obvious answer. There are several rhetorical questions peppered throughout the Sermon, two of which are in 5:46-47 and 6:25-30.⁵⁴ In 5:46-47, Jesus asked a series of four questions pertaining to loving enemies. The implied answer of the first question is that only loving those who love you will produce little to no reward. The follow up question indicates even the worst of sinners love those who love them. Next, Jesus suggested that only greeting certain people is no different than what other people, specifically the pagans, do. Jesus asked these questions to show that believers should seek to love all people and not discriminate like the pagans and tax collectors.⁵⁵

In 6:25-30, Jesus asked five questions to encourage believers to not worry. His first question implied life is more than food and clothes. Then, he implied humans are of more value than the birds, and since God provides for the birds, he most certainly will provide for his people. Continuing, in 6:27, he suggested humans cannot add a single moment to their life by worrying.

⁵³ Guelich, 359.

⁵⁴ Stein, 23-25. See Matthew 5:13, 46-47; 6:25-30; 7:3-4, 9-10, 16.

⁵⁵ Blomberg, *NAC*, 114-115.

He asked why his audience worries about clothes, implying that it is a pointless worry. And finally, Jesus implied God will clothe his people with much more beauty than the fields.⁵⁶

Poetry- Synonymous Parallelism

Synonymous parallelism is a poetic form where the lines or strophes in a poem repeat the meaning of the first line. There are five examples of this type of parallelism in the Sermon on the Mount two of which are in 5:39-40 and 7:7-8.⁵⁷ The parallelism in 5:39-40 is synonymous because in the first verse, Jesus told his audience to go above and beyond the normal standard by being submissive to evil people instead of retaliating, which he also illustrated in the following verse. Though the examples he gave were not specifically synonymous, the underlying meaning of each verse was synonymous. Jesus used this type of repetition to reemphasize his point about living to a higher standard of righteousness, where enemies are treated well and not with retaliation.⁵⁸

In 7:7-8, the three components of the first verse parallel the three components of the second verse.⁵⁹ Verse 7 talks about asking, seeking, and knocking and in 7:8, Jesus repeated asking, seeking, and knocking to reemphasize his point about prayer. He was not saying everything a believer asks for will be given to him. He spoke in context of the Lord's Prayer, which emphasizes God's will being done on earth. God answers the prayers of his people who cry out for his will on earth.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ibid., 125-126.

⁵⁷ Stein, 27-28. See Matthew 5:39-40, 46-47; 6:25; 7:6, 7-8.

⁵⁸ Blomberg, *NAC*, 113-114.

⁵⁹ Stein, 27.

⁶⁰ Blomberg, *NAC*, 129-130.

Poetry- Antithetical Parallelism

Antithetical parallelism is also a poetic device, but instead of the second line paralleling the first, the second line contrasts the first. There are six examples in the Sermon where Jesus used this form of antithetical repetition.⁶¹ One example is in 5:19. Jesus first stated that those who disregard even the smallest of commandments will be least in the kingdom of God. Then, he said whoever practices and teaches his commandments will be the greatest in the kingdom. This contrast of least and greatest emphasizes the difference between the righteous and unrighteous. The last time Jesus used this form of repetition is in 7:17-18. The first and second lines in 7:17 contrast, as do the first and second lines in 7:18. In addition, 7:17 and 7:18 contrast each other. So each individual verse is a form of antithetical parallelism, and the two verses together are also an example. The format is as follows:

A: Likewise, every **good tree** bears *good fruit*,

B: But a **bad tree** bears *bad fruit*.

A': A **good tree** cannot bear *bad fruit*,

B': And a **bad tree** cannot bear *good fruit*.⁶²

Poetry- Step or Climatic Parallelism

The poetic form of step or climatic parallelism takes the conclusions from the first line up one step to draw a following conclusion. Jesus used this form of parallelism in 5:17 and 6:34. In 5:17, Jesus made an initial statement about how he did not come to abolish the law, and the remainder of the verse restates he has not come to abolish the law but to instead fulfill it.⁶³

⁶¹ Stein, 28. See Matthew 5:19; 6:2-3, 5-6, 22-23, 24; 7:17-18.

⁶² Stein, 28.

⁶³ Ibid., 29-30. See Matthew 5:17; 6:6, 22, 23, 34.

The steps in 5:17 are as follows:

Step one: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets.”

Here, Jesus established the ground step of the argument.

Step two: “I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”⁶⁴

Jesus finished the argument by stepping up from the previous statement, indicating he was fulfilling the Law, not eradicating it.

In a similar fashion, 6:34 is also a form of step parallelism. The steps are:

Step one: “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow.”

Step two (climax): “For tomorrow will worry about itself.”

Step three: “Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Each level escalates to the climax of Jesus’ final statement about worry, which is in the second step. The third step serves as the denouement before Jesus transitioned to a new section on judging others.

Poetry- Chiasmic Parallelism

Chiasmic parallelism occurs twice in the Sermon on the Mount.⁶⁵ The poetic form is a, b, B, A. In 6:24, the chiasm is:

a. “No one can serve two masters.”

b. “Either you will hate one and love the other,”

B. “or you will be devoted to one and despise the other.”

A. “You cannot serve both God and money.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Stein, 30.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 30-31.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 31.

The focus of this chiasm is not on the center points, but on a and A. By using this method of parallelism, Jesus emphasized his initial point and made it more specific in A.

In 7:6, the chiasm is as follows:

- a. “Do not give dogs what is sacred;”
- b. “do not throw your pearls to the pigs.”
- B. “If you do, they may trample them under their feet,”
- A. “and turn to tear you to pieces.”⁶⁷

The parallelism in this chiasm occurs on the level of cause and effect. A is the effect of a, and B is the effect of b. Jesus used this strong illustration to stress the importance of wisdom among the righteous. The righteous do not throw themselves to harmful people or disregard spiritual treasure, but instead cherish and protect those things.

C. Cultural References

Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a small town by the Sea of Galilee with no more than 500 inhabitants, most of which farmed for a living. Since the larger town of Sepphoris was within walking distance of Nazareth, it is likely that Jesus and Joseph worked as carpenters and stone masons there while Jesus was growing up.⁶⁸ Submerged in Jewish life, Jesus built a foundation for engaging with the culture throughout his ministry. He observed festivals and obeyed the Law. When he taught, he connected with his audience through familiar references. He particularly recognized the culture of his audience in the Sermon on the Mount, referencing familiar objects, people, and animals to further his message. In addition, he used language his audience would understand and alluded to the Old Testament, a familiar text.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Tremper Longman III, *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, “Nazareth” (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 119-1200.

Objects

Jesus referred to believers as the “salt of the earth” in 5:13. Salt had several uses in the Greco-Roman world. It preserved meat, added flavor, and had medicinal properties. By illustrating with this important, widely-traded good, Jesus communicated to his followers that they are essential to the wellbeing of the world.⁶⁹ In 5:14, Jesus called his followers “the light of the world.” In the Greco-Roman world, light was scarce. Keeping a lamp lit took diligence, as oil in a lamp only lasted a few hours. In a world where light was often difficult to create, Jesus used the image of light to communicate how the obedience of his followers will appear to the world. They will be like lamps, attracting the attention of those in darkness.⁷⁰ In that same passage, Jesus called his disciples a city on a hill, too visible to be hidden. Cities during this time were built over the ruins of another, which made cities higher than the surrounding area. The mental images of Jesus’ audience would have immediately gone to one of these elevated, impossible-to-miss cities.⁷¹

A gate was a main entrance to a city, often having a broad entrance, a middle passageway where the elders of the town sat, and a final entryway into the city. Gates were not wooden doors along a fence, as in today’s culture, but were tall, official entries into a major city or town. Larger towns like Jerusalem had multiple gates while smaller towns had one main gate. So when Jesus talked about the wide and narrow gates in 7:13-14, any person from a substantial town would have formed a connection to this image.⁷² Since the vast majority of his audience was

⁶⁹ Baker Dictionary, “Salt,” 1465-1466.

⁷⁰ Baker Dictionary, “lamp, lampstand,” 1029-1030; “Light,” 1060-1061.

⁷¹ Clinton E. Arnold and Michael J. Wilkins, “Matthew,” In *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, Volume I, Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 36.

⁷² Baker Dictionary, “Gate,” 1640.

Jewish, they would have entered into Jerusalem at some point for a festival, even if they did not permanently live in a multi-gate city. Jesus drew this image about gates to illustrate how difficult it is to enter the Kingdom of God.

Animals

Jesus also used animals to make certain points in the Sermon on the Mount. In 7:6, Jesus alluded to dogs and pigs. Unlike the groomed and domesticated dogs of today, dogs wandered through city streets and lived in filth. To call someone a dog was a major insult to their social standing. When Jesus said to “not give to dogs what is sacred,” he referenced a cultural taboo that would have helped the audience understand the gravity of the situation.⁷³ Pigs, which wandered and scavenged for food like dogs, were unclean to the Jewish people, and equally offensive and disgusting. Again, Jesus referenced a cultural taboo to relay the importance of not casting “your pearls to pigs.”⁷⁴ In other words, Jesus warned his listeners against throwing away what is sacred. Later in 7:17, Jesus warned his disciples about people who are wolves disguised in sheep’s clothing. Sheep symbolized purity and cleanliness in the Jewish culture, whereas wolves represented threat and danger. When Jesus said false prophets would come like wolves in sheep’s clothing, he meant they would seem innocent but would actually be cruel and evil.⁷⁵ Jesus appealed to what specific animals symbolized to relate his message to his audience.

People

Jesus used two types of people as examples of extreme patterns of behavior in the Sermon. In 5:20, Jesus first referenced the Pharisees as those who appear to be righteous. The

⁷³ Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, 51.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Baker Dictionary, “Sheep,” 1515; “Wolf,” 1721.

Pharisees were a group of Jews with political and religious significance, valuing the law and observing it to an extreme. After 5:20 Jesus repeatedly called them hypocrites, which must have come as a shock to his audience, since they probably saw the Pharisees as the most righteous Jews.⁷⁶ Another extreme type of person Jesus talked about in the Sermon, starting in 5:46, was tax collectors. Tax collectors were despised and seen as traitors. They were usually dishonest and robbed their fellow Jews of hard-earned money. Jesus used tax collectors as an image of great sinners to show his listeners the difference between the righteous and the unrighteous.⁷⁷ Throughout the Sermon, Jesus referenced both of these types of people to exemplify hypocrisy and unrighteousness.

Speech

Since Jesus grew up in Galilee, he understood the language of his audience, most likely speaking both Aramaic and Hebrew and possibly some Greek and Latin.⁷⁸ In 5:22, Jesus used the term “raca.” This was an Aramaic insult meaning “fool” or “good-for-nothing.” By referencing this common insult, Jesus illustrated the reason the condition of the heart matters to God. To Jesus, the motivation behind hurling an insult and committing a murder were the same.⁷⁹

Allusions

In Jewish tradition, children started learning the Tanak at a young age. For a Jewish boy, education was the responsibility of the mother until age three, at which point the father took over to teach about God and trade. Jesus, likewise, would have learned from Mary for a time but also

⁷⁶ Baker Dictionary, “Pharisees,” 1312.

⁷⁷ Baker Dictionary, “Tax Collector,” 1605.

⁷⁸ Stein, 5.

⁷⁹ Baker Dictionary, “Raca,” 1393-1394.

would have learned much about the world from Joseph.⁸⁰ His education would have included the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings in a house of the book, a form of Jewish schooling. The students learned by verbal and written repetition of the Old Testament.⁸¹ Jesus therefore had the educational background to engage the Old Testament texts in his teachings. In fact, Jesus referenced the Old Testament often. In Luke's account of the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Jesus quoted from Isaiah directly (Luke 4.18-19). Sometimes Jesus blatantly quoted Scripture as in Luke's account, while other times he alluded to the law, Israel, the prophets, or the psalms. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus quotes the Old Testament 65 times.⁸²

Jesus' use of culture in the Sermon on the Mount shows how well he knew his Jewish audience. He used everyday objects, images, and people to teach about the Kingdom of God. As a native Galilean, he was able to incorporate specific images to draw comparisons that would help his audience understand his main message. He knew the Old Testament and was able to make both direct and indirect references and he tied these references into his teachings about the Kingdom of God.

D. Credibility and Authority

Jesus' authority came primarily from the Father. When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in Matthew 3:13-17, the Father acknowledged Jesus' authority as his Son. When Jesus taught, he spoke with the authority of his Father in heaven. In terms of the Sermon on the Mount, Stott says, "the ultimate issue posed by the whole Sermon concerns the authority of the

⁸⁰ Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of the Bible Times* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 79.

⁸¹ Gower, 83.

⁸² See Appendix 1 for a list of all references verse by verse.

preacher.”⁸³ Jesus spoke with such authority that by 7:28-29, the crowds were amazed. Matthew said the crowds recognized Jesus’ teachings as authoritative, unlike the teachers of the law.

Jesus’ authority came not only from his Father in heaven but also from how he lived his life. In ancient Mediterranean culture, the expectation of a rabbi or teacher was for them to live out the principles they taught.⁸⁴ Ignatius of Antioch said, “It is better to be silent and be, than to talk and not be. Teaching is good if the teacher does what he says.”⁸⁵ Unlike the Pharisees of the day, whom Jesus often described as hypocrites, Jesus’ life modeled his teachings. In 6:6, Jesus told his disciples to pray in secret. The gospel writers gave several accounts of Jesus following this instruction, withdrawing to pray alone.⁸⁶ This often happened before important decisions, such as when he chose the twelve disciples (Luke 6:12). Jesus also commanded his followers to love their enemies in 5:43-48. He lived this to the point of asking God to forgive those who performed his execution and cast lots over his clothing (Luke 23:34). When he spoke to the woman at the well, he stepped across cultural boundaries for an “enemy” and outcast (John 4). In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus instructed his listeners to ask for God’s will on earth. As Jesus neared the cross, he prayed for God’s will in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42). He asked for, sought out, and lived God’s will on earth, just as he asked his disciples to do. Unlike the Pharisees and teachers of the law, Jesus lived a life that perfectly reflected what he taught.

⁸³ Stott, 26.

⁸⁴ Talbert, 20.

⁸⁵ Talbert, 20.

⁸⁶ Matthew 14.23; Mark 1.35, 6.46; Luke 6.12.

E. Communication Principles from the Sermon on the Mount

Knew his audience and their context

Jesus grew up among the people he regularly taught and spent the first thirty years of his life learning about the culture around him. He did not remove himself from his surroundings but instead engaged them on an intimate level. He worked and played and learned as he grew up in Nazareth. He knew the Greco-Roman context because of his proximity to Sepphoris, and he also knew the Jewish context because Joseph and Mary raised him in a Jewish home. Jesus was well equipped to speak to his audience because he understood them. He knew the work schedule of shepherds, the daily value of money, how the people farmed and used grapes, and why sheep and wolves had specific symbolic meanings in storytelling. When he gave the Sermon on the Mount, he used what he knew to relate to his audience, pulling images and metaphors from every day life to relate to his followers and relay his message.

Jesus also understood his Jewish context and knew the Torah so well that he could readily employ its principles in his teaching. Jesus rarely made an explicit reference to the Old Testament, but in the Sermon on the Mount, he often transitioned with the phrase, “you have heard it said,” in reference to Old Testament teachings. Instead of mundanely quoting Old Testament commands and demanding devout obedience, Jesus presented Old Testament principles with much grace. He understood how deeply the Torah was engrained in the culture, so he used it to convey his message. He came to fulfill the law, as he said in the Sermon, but this did not excuse him from referencing the law or devoting himself to it. It is evident he was well versed in and dedicated to the teachings of the Old Testament by how often he directly and indirectly referenced it in the Sermon on the Mount.

Spoke at their level

Jesus did not speak with lofty language. He knew and spoke in the common tongue of the people. Though many spoke Hebrew, the more common language was Aramaic, so Jesus spoke in Aramaic. He referenced common insults and used well-known phrases. He employed teaching tactics of other rabbis and teachers of the day, such as repetition and speaking in proverbs. When Jesus gave a command, it was often paired with an illustration, metaphor, or image to help his disciples understand his message. Jesus did not jeopardize his authority with his language, though. Instead of being flippant with his words or speaking with slang, Jesus maintained structure and control throughout his message. He related to his audience in a way they could understand while remaining authoritative.

Used Communication Devices

Repetition is one of the main teaching elements Jesus used in the Sermon on the Mount. To emphasize his main point and to aid memorization, Jesus often repeated a command or principle. Jesus' repetition helped his audience remember his main points. Since the culture of this time relied on oral tradition, Jesus knew how to speak so his audience could remember his message. He also paired commands with counter examples to explain what not to do. In the Beatitudes for example, he repeated the phrase "blessed are the" to discuss what a righteous person is like. Since the culture Jesus addressed was primarily one of oral traditions, Jesus used techniques that enabled the audience to remember what he said.

Jesus also drew comparisons in order to convey his message with clarity. Each comparison was tangible in the sense that most of the audience could relate to the images presented. These comparisons were also easy to comprehend because of their simplicity and strong ties to daily living and the Old Testament. Jesus logically paired his comparisons with

principle he taught, never forming an irrational connection. Each of his illustrations made sense and clarified his message.

Jesus also asked his audience good questions. These questions were rhetorical and purposeful and Jesus posed each question to help his audience come to a desired conclusion. His questions were not overly emotional or useless. Instead, each question accented his teaching by moving his argument forward. Questions also allowed Jesus to personalize his message and relate to his audience. The audience could draw conclusions in their minds and, in a sense, participate with the Sermon. Jesus never asked a vague question with an unattainable answer. His questions were concise and direct, which helped his overall message.

Spoke with Authority and Virtue

Matthew's entire purpose in placing the Sermon on the Mount in this section of his gospel was to emphasize and clarify Jesus' authority. The concluding narrative verses of Matthew 7 point out how the crowds noticed his authority by the closing of the Sermon. Jesus' delivery must have included components that alluded to his authority, such as how loud he spoke and the tone or pitch his voice. However, Matthew only gave an account of the audience's reaction, not Jesus' delivery style. In addition, the source of Jesus' authority is the Father, which cannot go unrecognized. The Father announced that authority belonged to Jesus when John baptized Jesus.⁸⁷ While the authority of the Father cannot be analyzed, its impact in Jesus' life and teaching can be considered. There are several elements of Jesus' character and the Sermon itself that speak to his authority.

As previously mentioned, Jesus practiced what he taught. One of the main reasons Jesus stood apart from the Pharisees and teachers of the law was his lack of hypocrisy. The Pharisees

⁸⁷ Matthew 3:13-17.

tended to say and do great religious things, but their hearts were not genuine. Jesus taught the Torah and obeyed it completely. He also introduced new Kingdom principles, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, that he upheld. Jesus exhibited Kingdom characteristics throughout his ministry in the way he interacted with people and through his teachings. He loved his enemies and prayed for them even as they nailed him to a cross. He asked for God's will to be done on earth. He withdrew to solitary places to pray. These are just a few examples of how Jesus implemented the principles he taught.

Jesus also spoke the truth and corrected falsehood in his Sermon. He spoke about the standards of the law and brought about a new standard. He taught that the people of God obey him because they love God, not because they must meet a certain standard. Sins committed in the heart are just as evil and hurtful to God as external sins. Jesus showed how Kingdom people live by elevating the standard of the law. Jesus corrected cultural sayings of the day as well. While he used cultural references to illustrate his points, he did not allow the culture to dictate truth. Jesus remained grounded in the truth of Scripture, yet also left room in his teaching to relate to his audience's culture without compensating his authority.

III. Content, Character, and Communication

The academic study of public speaking focuses primarily on method. Textbooks on public speaking spend chapters on defining public speaking, how to construct a speech, delivery, types of speeches, and visual aids. Stephen E. Lucas of the University of Wisconsin-Madison breaks his textbook into five parts: speaking and listening, speech preparation: getting started, speech preparation: organizing and outlining, presenting the speech, and varieties of public speaking. Of his nineteen chapters, only one chapter talks about the character of the speaker and

half of this ethics chapter talks about how to avoid plagiarism rather than the character of the speaker outside of composition.⁸⁸ William Keith and Christian O. Lundberg's textbook has only one chapter on ethics, and it focuses more on what the speaker does than who the speaker is.⁸⁹ Joseph M. Valenzano III and Stephen W. Braden's textbook only devotes four pages (out of 346) to ethical speaking.⁹⁰ From this small sampling of academic textbooks on public speaking, it is evident that there is a greater emphasis on how to construct and deliver a speech than on the character of the speaker.

How a speech is structured and delivered is important. A speaker can have a good message yet fail to communicate that message if his or her structure or delivery is poor. As the first part of this paper pointed out, Jesus had an intricate style and structure to his Sermon. He did not neglect method. The fact that academic texts emphasize method is not intrinsically bad. But the overemphasis on method causes the personal development of the speaker to fall to the wayside. The Sermon on the Mount demonstrates that how a speaker's character can be as important as the content of a speech. Similarly, a defining characteristic of Jesus is his absolute connection of character and content. Jesus' content matched his integrity as a speaker. Augustine recognized the need for Christians to follow Jesus' example by having good content and good character. He drew the conclusion that Christian rhetoricians needed to rise above the practices of disingenuous rhetoricians who were deceptive, thought audience impact was the same as eloquence, and believed that the character of a speaker was irrelevant to communication.⁹¹ To

⁸⁸ Stephen E. Lucas, *The Art of Public Speaking* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012), iv.

⁸⁹ William Keith and Christian O. Lundberg, *Public Speaking: Choices and Responsibilities* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2014), 27-45.

⁹⁰ Joseph M. Valenzano and Stephen W. Braden, *The Speaker: The Tradition and Practice of Public Speaking* (Southlake, TX: Fountainhead Press, 2012), 41-45.

⁹¹ Quentin Schultze, *An Essential Guide to Public Speaking* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 9-10.

follow Augustine’s suggestion, Christian communicators should seek the opposite of the insincere speakers Augustine described. Christian speakers should flee from deception, realize eloquence is not the same as audience impact, and see the relevance of character to communication.

Quentin Schultze, a communication scholar, expounds on Augustine’s ideas in his book *An Essential Guide to Public Speaking*. Schultze says Christian communicators should “faithfully serve audiences as neighbors,” be “virtuous speakers,” and “skillfully use verbal and nonverbal methods.”⁹² He binds service, virtue, and skill together and highlights the importance of all three in what he calls a servant speaker. Schultze recognizes the superficial nature of the theory behind secular speaking. Secular texts often encourage students to believe in themselves or their audiences. Schultze disagrees, saying a speaker’s faith in God is essential to finding satisfaction as a servant speaker.⁹³ For Schultze, public speaking is as much about virtue and faith as it is about structure and method. He draws a distinction between ethos and persona. The internal character of a speaker is foundational, according to Schultze. A virtuous speaker is virtuous and acts virtuously. A speaker loses credibility if he or she does not act according to the principles they teach.⁹⁴

Schultze also makes a point to show how servant speakers further *shalom* through Christian speech. Schultze says Christian speech includes defining reality by the Word of God (John 7:18, 1 Peter 4:11), having accountability with others, self, and God (Eph 4:25, 1 Pet 4:11),

⁹² Ibid., 10.

⁹³ Ibid., 94.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 86.

and imitating Jesus (1 Cor 11:1).⁹⁵ Schultze defines *shalom* as “relational harmony among people, between people and God, between people and physical creation, and between individuals and their own selves.”⁹⁶ To further *shalom* is to further God’s kingdom on earth. In terms of speech-making, a speaker should seek *shalom* by bringing about harmony among people. Schultze argues the best way to bring about harmony in a speech is through serving the audience as neighbors. Serving the audience is Schultze’s primary goal for communicators. He argues that the audience, and not the speaker, should be the focus of any speech. As the speaker forgets herself, she is able to serve the audience to a fuller capacity. Schultze says being a virtuous speaker is essential to bringing about *shalom* as well. A speaker could have an excellent message given with the audience in mind, but if the speaker does not have any virtue, their message will not translate.

Schultze warns speakers about pride. Pride corrupts even the best of speeches. Augustine admitted he tried to further himself by being an “orator for a damnable conceited purpose, namely to delight in human vanity.”⁹⁷ In *Life Together*, German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer argued Christian speakers should seek to serve God alone and not themselves. He said if he spoke for his own fame, he would be “directing the listeners’ attention to [him]self instead of to the Word.” He claimed “this is to commit the worst of sins in presenting the Scriptures.”⁹⁸

Schultze says servant speakers realize their gift of speaking is not from themselves. The gift is

⁹⁵ Ibid., 28.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 88.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 38.

⁹⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: HarperOne, 1954), 56.

from God, and speakers do not teach themselves how to be great speakers. When servant speakers recognize speaking is a gift, “they joyfully serve their audiences as neighbors.”⁹⁹

The principles Schultz emphasizes are similar to the Sermon on the Mount principles. Jesus furthered *shalom* by serving his audience, speaking at their level, and by being a virtuous speaker. Since Matthew did not give a description of Jesus’ delivery, it is difficult to draw concrete conclusions about how Jesus presented the Sermon. It is safe to assume he spoke with authority that made a lasting impression among the crowds, and an even more solid impression with Matthew, since he remembered and recorded the Sermon. Jesus therefore upholds the three guidelines Schultz teaches Christian communicators to uphold. There are principles from the Sermon Schultz does not point out, namely the principle about engaging culture. While Schultz is clear about serving the audience, he does not give explicit instruction about culture. Jesus clearly engages the culture while still holding truth to a high standard, which is something Schultz did not emphasize as strongly.

IV. Conclusion

A. Implications about Communication

Through this study, I learned that to pursue the practice of communicating like Jesus is to be his disciple. I see communication as a service to God, the church, the world, and myself. Jesus served the will of the Father as he walked this earth. I believe Jesus fulfilled the will of God by giving the Sermon on the Mount, and through all his teachings. As a follower of Christ, my goal and desire is to serve God with the entirety of my life. So as I seek to communicate his Word, I seek to serve him. The same is true for any Christian who desires to communicate with others on

⁹⁹ Schultz, 87.

any level. We can worship and honor God through our communication. We must allow him to work in us and through us as we ask for his will to be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

Communication is also a service to the church and the world. The church needs grounded teaching that is authoritative, corrective, and does not shy away from culture. If we follow Jesus' example, we will speak to serve the church, to provide for her needs, to correct falsehood, and to encourage health. Communication also serves the world. As we seek to further God's Kingdom on earth through our small act of communication, the world will see change. After all, how will the nations know about the Good News if we do not communicate it to them? When we serve God and the church through communication, the world will reap the benefits.

When we communicate, we serve ourselves. Jesus exemplified a virtuous speaker. When we seek to be like him in how we communicate, we grow in virtue and character. To attempt to model Jesus' teaching style is to be his disciple. Allowing him to transform, shape, mold, and modify our hearts, minds, and tongue is to follow him wholeheartedly. We become better disciples when we submit to his teaching. Communicating like Jesus is all about him, but he still chooses to use us to communicate to others. And when he uses us, he transforms us. There is no greater service we can do for ourselves than to give ourselves entirely to Jesus.

B. Practical Application

How do communicators committed to following Jesus apply this study to their lives? To answer that question, this section will walk through how to apply each principle from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus knew his audience and their context, spoke at their level, used communication devices, and spoke with authority.

Know your audience and their context

Knowing your audience is vitally important. For pastors and ministers, this means living with the people you minister to. It means engaging in their lives, asking good questions, and walking alongside them. Preaching should never be done solely from a pulpit. A preacher cannot serve the people of his congregation if he does not know and love the people he serves. This does not mean pastors should become gossips or get overinvolved in peoples lives but it does mean genuinely caring for and loving the congregation. This is the only way a preacher or communicator can know the struggles and needs of the community he or she serves. This approach calls into question the celebrity pastor. Can a celebrity pastor truly serve the needs of his audience if he does not know and love those he serves? Perhaps to some degree. But his service will only be able to go so far, while a local pastor can fine-tune a sermon for the exact needs of his congregation. For communicators who travel around from audience to audience, a practical way to serve the audience is to do research about the places you go and to ask questions about the audience. Travelling communicators should allow room in their message to adjust to the needs of a particular audience.

Communicators should not shy away from cultural context. Just as Jesus used examples and illustrations from his culture, we should feel the freedom to do the same. However, using examples from culture is not the same as commending or approving of culture. We need to maintain a correct sense of the truth while still acknowledging the culture around us. Christian communicators often dwell in the extremes in terms of culture. Some avoid culture altogether, deeming it of the devil. Others embrace culture to a fault, trading the rich truth of the gospel for cheap grace and attractive buildings. Christian communicators, and Christians in general, need to learn to live in between these two extremes. Not all culture is evil, but that does not mean we

trade truth for trendiness. Christian communicators need to be grounded in Scripture and aware of the world around them.

Speak at their level

Jesus spoke to his audience in a way they could understand. In the same way, Christian communicators need to speak at the level of their audiences. Some communicators lose their audiences in a sea of Greek terms and philosophical phrases, while others simplify their messages too much and lose the truth. As mentioned above, communication and the Christian walk are about balance. We cannot neglect the richness of Scripture, but we cannot speak over our audience's heads. Jesus could have spoken at a much higher level, but he chose to speak in a way the audience understood. On the other side of the scale, we cannot oversimplify truth. Jesus did not oversimplify the truth, but he explained it by giving examples and illustrations and by telling stories. We can follow his example by learning the level of understanding in our audience and choosing to speak to them there.

Use Communication Devices

Jesus used structure, repetition, and questions to further the message of the Sermon. As Christian communicators, structure, repetition, and questions are key to an effective delivery. A sermon or message with no structure at all loses the audience so some form of structure is necessary to serving the audience. Repetition helps the audience remember the key ideas of the message. In addition, questions allow the audience to piece together the message themselves and keep them on track with the speaker. I would not say each message a speaker gives has to contain each of these elements. Generally speaking though, each communicator should employ structure, repetition, questions, and other devices of some kind throughout a speech for the sake of their message and audience.

Authority and Virtue

Finally, Christian communicators should speak with authority. If you are a follower of Christ, you have the Holy Spirit guiding you and providing gifting and authority from the Father. He also refines you and changes your character by adding virtue to your life. To be a speaker with authority is to rely on the Holy Spirit for complete guidance. It also means to live a genuine and sincere life. As you model Christ, you will mimic his lifestyle of practicing what he preached. You will love others more and learn to relate to them more. Working towards improving your authority over an audience is not a way to gain power or glory. It is a humble act of pursuing Jesus and his heart for the people you serve.

Speaking with authority also requires boldness. Jesus spoke shocking truth in the Sermon on the Mount. Christian communicators should seek to do the same. This does not mean looking for ways to shock people or offend them. It does mean having the courage to identify or point out sin and falsehood as the Holy Spirit prompts. A leader with humility and love for the audience will be able to give a startling message with care, grace, and boldness, as they seek to be used to proclaim Scriptural and Spirit-filled teaching patterned after the example set by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

Above all, Christian communicators should seek to further God's Kingdom on earth by pursuing *shalom*. We should marry our passion for following Jesus and our passion for communication to best serve God and others. Jesus is our perfect example of teacher and Lord, and we should follow him in every aspect of our lives. As I reflect on my own walk as a Christian and a communicator, I long to serve God, the church, the world, and myself by following Jesus' example.

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Appendix 1: Jesus' Use of the Old Testament in the Sermon on the Mount

- 5.4: Is. 61.2-3
- 5.5: Ps. 37.11
- 5.6: Is. 55.1-2
- 5.8: Ps. 17.15, 24.3-4, 42.2, 73.6
- 5.11: Is. 51.7
- 5.12: Ps. 9.2
- 5.18: Ps. 119.89; Is. 40.8, 55.11
- 5.20: Is. 26.2
- 5.21: Ex. 20.13, 21.12; Dt. 5.17
- 5.22: Ecc. 7.9
- 5.27: Ex. 20.14; Dt. 5.18
- 5.28: Pr. 6.25
- 5.31: Dt. 24.1-4
- 5.33: Lev. 19.12, Nu. 30.2, Dt. 23.21
- 5.34: Is. 66.1
- 5.35: Ps. 48.2
- 5.38: Ex. 21.24; Lev. 24.20; Dt. 19.21
- 5.42: Dt. 5.18
- 5.43: Lv. 19.18; Dt. 23.6; Ps. 139.21-22
- 5.45: Job 62.53
- 5.48: Lev. 19.2
- 6.6: 2 Ki. 4.33
- 6.7: Ecc. 5.2; 1 Ki. 18.26-29
- 6.9: Jer. 3.19; Mal. 2.10
- 6.11: Pr. 30.8
- 6.16: Lev. 6.29, 31, 33, 23.27-32; Nu. 29.7; Is. 58.5; Zec. 7.5, 8.19
- 6.19: Pr. 23.4
- 6.26: Job 38.41; Ps. 104.21, 136.25, 145.15, 147.9
- 6.27: Ps. 39.5
- 6.29: 1 Ki. 10. 4-7
- 7.2: Ecc. 35.11
- 7.7: 1 Ki. 3.5
- 7.8: Pr. 8.7; Jer. 29.12-13
- 7.15: Jer. 23.16; Ez. 22.27
- 7.21: Hos. 8.2
- 7.23: Ps. 6.8

65 OT References