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## MATTHEW 5 1 AND RELATED PASSAGES

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**I**N this paper an examination is made of those passages in the Gospels which purport to give the setting of the so-called Sermon on the Mount. The discussion revolves chiefly around the following questions:

1. What is the meaning of Mt. 5 1?
2. Has Mt. 5 1 a Marcan Source?
3. Why does Lk. represent the sermon as having been delivered on a level place instead of on a mountain, as Mt. does?
4. Is either of these two representations trustworthy? If so, which one?
5. If neither is trustworthy, can we determine the circumstances under which the sermon was delivered?
6. To whom was the sermon addressed?
7. At what point in Jesus' ministry was the sermon probably delivered?

Mt. 5 1-2 reads: "And seeing the multitudes, he went up into the mountain, and when he had sat down his disciples came unto him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying."

If these verses stood alone, their simplest meaning would be: When he saw the multitudes, he made his escape from them by going up into the mountain, or onto the hill, or plateau, and, after he had arrived there and had sat down, his disciples drew near to him and he opened his mouth, and taught them saying. If this be the meaning of the verses, Jesus' ascent of the mountain

was a retreat, a successful move for getting away from the crowds, and the discourse which followed was addressed to the disciples alone.

On the other hand, if these verses be read in the light of their context, their meaning is just the opposite of the foregoing, and is as follows: When he saw the multitudes, and realized that he could not conveniently address them on the low, or level ground, on which he and they were at that time, he led the way to a more convenient place, namely, a mountain top, hilltop, or plateau. The multitudes followed, and, when he had sat down in the presence of the multitudes, his disciples drew near to him, and he opened his mouth, and spoke the following discourse to the disciples in the presence of the multitudes.

The item in the context which makes possible this second meaning is the comment which is appended to the discourse and which reads as follows: "And it came to pass when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." Mt. 7 28-29.

Of these two opposite meanings the second is evidently that which the author intends the reader to take. But this is not to say that the author, or more properly speaking, the editor, whom for convenience we shall refer to as Mt., has correctly, or historically, represented the situation.

Mt. 7 28-29 is an editorial addition, taken from Mk. 1 22, with which it is in complete verbal agreement, except for the presence in Mt. of the words *οἱ ὄχλοι* and *αὐτῶν*. We therefore leave it out of account, and surrender the second interpretation offered above, since it rests chiefly on Mt. 7 28-29. We are thus thrown back on the first interpretation, according to which the verses constitute a report of a retreat, or retirement from the multitudes, preparatory to the delivery of the sermon to the disciples.

But we can strengthen our confidence in this simple, natural, reading of the passage, if we can show that Mt. 5 1 was constructed by Mt. out of Mk. 3 13, and that the latter reports a retreat on the part of Jesus from the multitudes. We proceed now to examine these two passages with a view to determining these points.

### **MK. 3 13 A REPORT OF A RETREAT**

That Mk. 3 13 reports a retreat on the part of Jesus from the multitudes which had just been thronging him by the sea (Mk. 3 7-12), is borne out by more than one fact.

1. The first and the most important of these facts is that Mk. represents that Jesus in ascending the mountain was not accompanied by the multitudes, or by many, if, indeed, by any, of his sympathetic followers, or even by the Twelve, for the Twelve had not yet been chosen, but were among those whom Jesus summoned, and were selected from that number. That some of the Twelve, possibly the four who were earlier called (Mk. 1 16-20), accompanied him is probable, since he must have had some one with him, through whom, after he had reached the elevated point away from the multitudes, he summoned the particular ones whom he himself desired to have with him there. Those who were summoned are said to have "gone away to him," presumably from the seashore and from the multitudes to the mountain. Thus, they, and not the multitude, were with Jesus on the mountain.

2. The idea of a retreat from the multitudes is further registered in the reasons assigned for the appointment of the Twelve, which took place, according to Mk., when Jesus had reached the mountain, or plateau. The reasons given are that they might be with him, that he might send them forth to herald, and to have power to cast out demons. This three-fold purpose in their appointment indicates that Jesus was preparing to carry on through them, in part at least, his work of heralding the nearness of the Kingdom and of casting out demons, while he remained more in seclusion than heretofore. That Jesus would select the Twelve, and instruct them for the carrying out of this program while he was surrounded by the multitudes is not likely.

3. That Mk. 3 13 reports a retreat from the multitudes is further supported by Lk.'s parallel, Lk. 6 12-13: "And it came to pass in these days that he went out into the mountain to pray; and he continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day he called his disciples, and he chose from them twelve, whom also he named apostles."

Lk. makes it even more clear than does Mk. that Jesus went up into the mountain unattended by the multitudes, because the multitudes are not in evidence immediately preceding the ascent of the mountain, Lk. having omitted the scene by the sea, in connection with which Mk. reports the presence of the multitudes from which Jesus made his escape by ascending the mountain. This omission is not due to Lk.'s ignorance of the seashore scene for he shows his acquaintance with that scene through the use which he makes of the crowds which formed a part of it. They constitute a part of the audience for the sermon, which he represents as having been delivered on a level place. The verbal agreements between Lk. 6 17-19 and Mk. 3 7-12 leave no doubt that they report the same incident. Lk. has therefore omitted a specific reference to the sea, has introduced a reference to an indefinite level place, and transposed the notice of the multitude, putting it after the ascent to the mountain rather than before it as Mk. and Mt. do.

Furthermore, Lk.'s omission of the seashore scene and the transfer of his reference to the multitudes, which formed a part of it, to the moment immediately following Jesus' descent from the mountain of retirement is not an accident, but is a part of Lk.'s uniform plan of altering the Marcan situation whenever Mk. reports a retreat from, or inconvenience at the hands of, the multitudes. Lk. represents Jesus as being sought after by the multitudes, as welcoming them, and as desirous of serving them, whereas Mk. represents him as being sought after by the multitudes, but as withdrawing from them to secluded spots, or to regions where they would not be apt to find him.

Inasmuch as Mt. and Lk. agree on this point, as against Mk., and since it is an important point to which reference will be made later, we cite the pertinent passages from the three Gospels. Compare Mk. 1 35-38 with Lk. 4 42-43 (no parallel in Mt.); compare Mk. 1 45 with Lk. 5 16 (no parallel in Mt.); compare Mk. 2 1-5 with Mt. 9 1-2 and Lk. 5 17-19; compare Mk. 3 9 with Mt. 12 15 and Lk. 6 17-18; compare Mk. 3 20-22 with Mt. 12 22-23 and Lk. 11 14-15; compare Mk. 6 31-33 with Mt. 14 13 and Lk. 9 10-11; compare Mk. 7 24 with Mt. 15 21 (no parallel in Lk.).

Having removed entirely the connection which, according to Mk., existed between the retreat to the mountain and the multitude by the sea, Lk. makes compensation therefor in two ways. First, he inserts the indefinite time designation, "And it came to pass in these days," thus showing that he does not regard the retirement to the mountain as a sequence to the synagogue incident, Lk. 6 6-11, with which it is brought into juxtaposition through the elimination of the seashore scene. His second compensation consists of an improvised reason for Jesus' retirement to the mountain, namely, that he might pray. There being now no apparent reason why Jesus should go to the mountain, Lk. creates one. We have another illustration of Lk.'s conversion of a Marcan notice of Jesus' retreat from the multitudes into a retirement for prayer in Lk. 5 16, cf. Mk. 1 45, where he seems to use Mk.'s reference to Jesus' retirement for prayer, Mk. 1 35, for from his parallel to that passage he omits it, Lk. 4 42.

Through his reconstruction of the Marcan material Lk. accomplishes three distinct objects. First, he avoids the implication that Jesus' retirement to the mountain was a retreat from the multitude. Secondly, he represents Jesus as seeking the multitudes rather than avoiding them. Thirdly, he provides an audience for the Sermon. But his editorial process only serves to strengthen our confidence in the greater originality of Mk.'s representation that Jesus' ascent of the mountain was a retreat from the multitudes.

4. Additional proof that Mk. 3 13 reports a retreat from the multitude, if such were needed, is found in the frequency with which this idea is recorded by Mk. See 1 35-39; 1 45; 2 1-2; 7 24. Reference to this point will be made later.

#### THE DEPENDENCE OF MT. 5 1 ON MK. 3 13

Having shown that Mk. 3 13 reports a retreat on the part of Jesus from the multitude to a mountain, or plateau, we proceed to show that Mt. 5 1 is dependent on Mk. 3 13, that it had originally nothing to do with the sermon, and that its use by Mt. to give the setting for the sermon is due to his editorial interest.

1. Mt.'s utilization of Mk. 3 13 in the construction of 5 1 is rendered probable by the fact that he is dependent, in part at least, on the immediate context of Mk. 3 13 for the material out of which he constructs his approach to the so-called Sermon on the Mount. Compare Mt. 4 25 with Mk. 3 7<sup>b</sup>-8.

2. Mt.'s dependence on Mk. 3 13 is rendered probable in the next place, by the fact that in the Marcan notice following this description of the crowds that sought Jesus, Mt. found the setting that suited the sermon, Mk. 3 13-19. But that which rendered it a suitable setting for the sermon was not the fact that it reported Jesus as being on a mountain, but that it reported the selection of the Twelve. The fact that this selection took place on a mountain was given to him by Mk., and was of itself probably not of paramount importance in determining the location for the sermon, as is held, for example, by H. J. Holtzmann, Loisy and Montefiore, who maintain that Mt. represents the Sermon as having been delivered on a mountain because he regards it as the counterpart in the new dispensation to the Mosaic law in the old, which was given on a mountain. But against our hypothesis it may be urged that, if it was the selection of the Twelve rather than the fact that the selection took place on a mountain that gave Mt. his preferred setting for the sermon, then Mt. would have followed Mk. more closely, and would have made of 5 1 an unambiguous record of a retreat from the multitude, and in so doing would have made it perfectly certain that the sermon was directed to the disciples and not to the multitudes, just as the form and contents of the sermon indicate.

In order to reply to this objection it is necessary to revert to the fact, already noted, that Mt. and Lk. uniformly alter Mk.'s reports of Jesus' retreat from the multitudes, whenever they make use of the material which forms a part of such reports (see page 42). These changes are not accidental; they show that Mt. and Lk. studiously avoided reproducing Mk.'s idea that Jesus retreated from the multitudes that were eager to see and hear him. This line of cleavage between Mt. and Lk. on the one hand and Mk. on the other in handling the problem of Jesus' relation to the enthusiastic multitude is one of the most

remarkable phenomena presented by the Synoptic Problem, and lies at the center of the Wrede hypothesis regarding Mk. If the attitude of Mt. and Lk. were accidental, or if it were uniformly reflected, or if it were registered simply by omissions on their part of the Marcan notices, the problem would not be of such great moment, but the evidence, which space will not permit us to give here, shows that their attitude was not accidental, that it was constant and that it is registered, not in omissions simply, but in editorial changes of Marcan material at the hands of Mt. and Lk.

The most important question raised by this phenomenon is that of the historicity of the Marcan point of view, against which Wrede decides. Upon a discussion of this question, however, we shall not enter, but shall content ourselves with considering only the line of cleavage between Mt. and Lk. on the one hand and Mk. on the other.

The natural explanation of this fact is that, since Mt. and Lk. are later than Mk., they represent a later view of the Church on this point than does Mk. That Jesus did not permit the common people who were aroused to a high pitch of enthusiasm by his ministry to show it, but retreated to desert places, to the hill country and resorted to travel incognito was presumably repulsive to the later Christian apologetic.

Now, since this post-Markan attitude, reflected in Mt. and Lk., represented Jesus as courting the crowds rather than as retreating from them, it naturally follows that he should be represented as addressing them in formal discourse. This is just what both Mt. and Lk. do by implication in the case of the so-called Sermon on the Mount, Mt. 5 1; 7 28-29; Lk. 6 17-20a. But if this be their purpose, why do they limit themselves to implications? Why do they not state plainly that Jesus addressed the multitudes, just as they state unequivocally that Jesus addressed the disciples? The answer is that they were endeavoring to harmonize two conflicting points of view, namely, their own and that of their sermon source, Q. Just as Mk., their source for the activities of Jesus, represented an earlier point of view in the matter of Jesus' relation to the multitudes, so Q reflected an earlier point of view in the matter of the



persons addressed in the Sermon. This view, judging by the contents of the sermon, must have been that it was addressed not to the multitudes but to the disciples, possibly to the Twelve alone.

The situation presented by Mk. 3 13 was most appropriate for such a discourse. Jesus had about him on the mountain those whom he had summoned, namely "those whom he himself would". Mt. then was true to the tradition of his source, Q, in placing the sermon here.

3. Mt.'s use of Mk. 3 13 as the basis of 5 1 is rendered probable, in the third place, because of his omission of the call of the Twelve, Mk. 3 13-15. The fact that he later names the Twelve (Mt. 10 2-4) indicates his acquaintance with Mk. 3 16-19a. His omission of Mk. 3 14-15 is to be accounted for on the ground that he considers the sermon as a register of their appointment.

4. A fourth reason for holding that Mt. 5 1 is based on Mk. 3 13 is found in Mt.'s statement that Jesus' disciples approached him. This item is duplicated in Mk. 3 13 except that Mt. has *προσῆλθον* in place of Mk.'s *ἀπῆλθον*, and *αὐτῶν* for Mk.'s *πρὸς αὐτόν*. Mt. has no real need for this notice, as Mk. had. If the multitudes went to the mountain with Jesus, it is not necessary to say that the disciples were present. That fact goes without saying, as in Mk. 4 1, 10. Again if the multitudes did not go to the mountain with him it is equally unnecessary to say that the disciples approached him. The most reasonable explanation of Mt.'s use of this unnecessary item is that it is due to the fact that it was present in his source, that it is Mk. 3 13, and that he changed it to conform to the situation which he created.

## CONCLUSION

The results of our study may be summarized as follows:

1. Mt. 5 1 reports a retreat on the part of Jesus and of his disciples from the thronging multitudes, rather than a transfer of the scene of his operations from a plain, or valley, to a

mountain or plateau, where surrounded by the multitudes and his disciples he could address to better advantage his large audience.

2. Mt. 5 1 is not independent of Mt.'s narrative source, but represents an adaptation of Mk. 3 13.

3. Lk. represents the sermon as having been delivered on a level place, after Jesus and his disciples had descended from the mountain, because he had no knowledge of Jesus being on a mountain with a multitude. But the discourse was associated with the mountain to which Jesus, according to Lk.'s representation, retired for prayer, and to which on the following morning he summoned his disciples that he might select the Twelve. This ceremony over, Jesus descended the mountain to the plain, or level ground, where the multitude was, and there in their presence he pronounced the discourse.

4. Neither Mt. 5 1, nor Lk. 6 17-20<sup>a</sup> is historically trustworthy. Hence we are without the data necessary to determine the circumstances under which the sermon was delivered. The probability is that it was not delivered on a mountain, or specifically in a plain. It might have been delivered on the lake, in a synagogue, or at any other convenient place.

5. The sermon was addressed to the disciples, possibly to the Twelve, apart from the multitude.

6. Harnack's view that Q represented the sermon as having been delivered to the disciples in the presence of the people because Mt. and Lk. do so (*"The Sayings of Jesus,"* E. T., page 203) can not be maintained successfully.

7. We cannot determine at what point in Jesus' Ministry the sermon was delivered, but our study indicates that, as far as the Marcan narrative is concerned, its place seems to be immediately after the calling and the appointment of the Twelve, Mk. 3 13-19<sup>a</sup>. Both the Matthaean and Lucan versions of it are so placed by Burton and Goodspeed (*"A Harmony of the Synoptic Gospels in Greek,"* Scribners, 1920), while only the Lucan version is located there by Huck, who places the Matthaean version immediately after Mk. 1 39 (*Synopse der drei ersten Evangelien*, 5. Aufl., Tübingen). Allen places it immediately after Mk. 1 21 (*I. C. C.*, p. XV).

8. Whether or not there was such a sermon as Mt. and Lk. record we have not discussed. It may be simply a collection of originally disconnected sayings of Jesus.

9. Whether Mk. 3 13 belongs to the original Gospel tradition or to the editorial part of Mk. we have not thought it necessary to discuss in this connection.