

PREACHING THE LAW TO CHRISTIANS: INSIGHTS ON THE PARALLELS
BETWEEN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT AND THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

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ABSTRACT

When one becomes well-acquainted with the scholarship on the book of James, it becomes clear that the epistle has an uncanny amount of similarities with the sayings of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount in particular. These similarities are literary, vocabularic, thematic, and conceptual. In studying the parallels between these two sections of Scripture, it becomes clear that their existence can be attributed to more than just coincidence. This paper will examine the role of using the parallels in biblical interpretation. Because of differing genres and scopes, this paper concludes that both James and Matthew are early Jewish-Christian works of biblical literature which are independent from one another. This independence gives credence to a unified Scripture. In addition, because the works are independent, they are to be interpreted as such. Namely, the Epistle of James and the Sermon on the Mount are both beautiful expositions of preaching the Law to Christians. James primarily uses the Law as Mirror, whereas Matthew primarily uses the Law as Guide in the Sermon on the Mount.

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What are the most famous words of Jesus? The answer to this question is somewhat subjective. However, the case could be made that the words from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount have historically been the most famous. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God... If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also... Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you... Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin... Ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (ESV).¹ If these sayings of Jesus are not the most famous, they are arguably the most commented on.² These words are simple and beautiful, yet deeply profound. Even non-Christians can see the beauty in these timeless words.

What is the most famous epistle? Again, this is a subjective question. For the purposes of this paper, a more thought-provoking question would be: what is the most infamous epistle? The answer to that question is not as subjective, especially in Lutheran circles. Given the fact that Martin Luther called James an "epistle of straw" coupled with the sheer amount of scholarship on this book,³ the answer becomes clear: James is arguably the most controversial epistle in the history of the Christian Church, and if not in the Christian Church, at least among Protestantism.

Not only are these two texts independently well-known and the subject of lots of scholarly attention, they also happen to share many similarities in language, themes, and even word choice. Both sections of Scripture emphasize the blessedness of the poor. Matthew 5:3 states: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (ESV). James 2:5 states: "Listen my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?" (ESV)

Both emphasize persecution in trials. Matthew 5:11 states: "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account" (ESV). James 5:10-11a states: "As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained

¹ The references for these passages appear in this order: Mt. 5:3, 9, 39, 44; 6:28; 7:7.

² Cf. heading below entitled "James and the Sermon: Rich Histories of Interpretation."

³ Cf. heading below entitled "James and the Sermon: Rich Histories of Interpretation."

steadfast” (ESV). These are just two examples of many of the parallels between the Sermon and the Epistle. For a more exhaustive list, see Kurt A. Richardson’s commentary.⁴

Because of the sheer amount of similarities, in any evaluation of either section of Scripture there is hermeneutical value in analyzing them together. In applying proper hermeneutics to the parallels, one will see a wealth of insight in how Jesus and James both applied Law in a unified Scripture. In this analysis, there is a narrow ground one must walk. An over-application of these similarities can lead to shaky conclusions. The argument has been made that the Epistle of James is literarily dependent on the sayings in the Sermon on the Mount, and this affects the dating of the epistle.⁵ Also, the similarities have been used as “evidence” for the existence of the “Q” document.⁶ This paper will briefly explore instances of over-applying the parallels in the Sermon and the Epistle of James. Then, it will demonstrate the value and the depth of insight a proper hermeneutic application can give to these parallels. The ways in which Jesus and James applied the same themes to early Christians are at the forefront of these insights, specifically in Law presentation. By taking the same themes and concepts and applying them to specific situations, the similarities in and of themselves not only give testament to early application of scriptural truths, but can also be used as evidence for a unified Scripture.

For the purposes of this paper, four key presumptions will shape an analysis of Matthew 5-7 and the Epistle of James. First, both Matthew and James were written by single authors.

⁴ Cf. Kurt A. Richardson, *James* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1997), “Especially from Matthew the following texts contain vocabulary and concepts similar to that of James: Matt 4:17, the nearness of the kingdom of heaven (cf. Jas 5:8); Matt 5:3 the blessedness of the poor (cf. Jas 2:5); Matt 5:7, the blessedness of the merciful (cf. Jas 2:13); Matt 5:8, purity of heart (cf. Jas 4:8); Matt 5:9, peacemaking (cf. Jas 3:18); Matt 5:11-12, persecution and trials (cf. Jas 1:1; 5:10-11); Matt 5:16, the light of good works glorifying the Father (cf. Jas 1:17); Matt 5:17, the law fulfilled in Jesus (cf. Jas 1:25 and the perfect law); Matt 5:34-37, the command against oaths (cf. Jas 5:12); Matt 5:48, the command to be perfect (cf. Jas 1:4; 3:2); Matt 6:11, the petition for daily bread (cf. Jas 2:15-16); Matt 6:19, the counsel against hoarding wealth, which will decay (cf. Jas 5:2-3); Matt 6:22, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ eyes, which reveal the heart (cf. Jas 4:4,8); Matt 6:29, the perishability of earthly goods (cf. Jas 1:11); Matt 6:34, the uncertainty of tomorrow (cf. Jas 4:13-14); Matt 7:1, the prohibition against judging (cf. Jas 4:11-12); Matt 7:7-8, the command to ask God (cf. Jas 1:5; 4:3); Matt 7:16, fruit that reveals true character (cf. Jas 1:21; 3:10-13, 18); Matt 7:21-23, the warning against mere profession (cf. Jas 1:26-27; 2:14-26; 3:13-14); Matt 7:24, the security of a life built upon Christ’s commands (cf. Jas 1:22-25)” (34-35).

⁵ Cf. Virgil V. Porter Jr., “The Sermon on the Mount in the book of James Part 2.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162, no. 648 (October 2005): 470-482, comments “The theological parallels serve to support the conclusion that the book does rely on the Sermon and that Epistle of James was written by Jesus’ brother at an early date.” 470.

⁶ P. J. Hartin, *James and the Q Sayings of Jesus* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

Second, those authors both wrote their works according to the doctrine of divine verbal inspiration. Third, all Scripture will have similar themes, in the sense that the cross of Christ is the center and scope of all biblical truth. Fourth, this paper assumes a distinction between the scriptural teachings of the Law and the Gospel.

JAMES AND THE SERMON: RICH HISTORIES OF INTERPRETATION

The Epistle of James has received an expansive amount of both positive and negative attention throughout the whole of the New Testament era. “Few books of the NT are better known or more often quoted than James. It is probably one of the two or three most popular NT books in the church.”⁷

This attention toward the epistle started in the early church:

An early Christian writer, Cassiodorus, claims that Clement, head of the catechetical school in Alexandria, wrote a commentary on James. But it has never been discovered, and Clement’s successor in Alexandria, Origen, is the first to cite James by name...Several other third-century Christian writings allude to James, and the letter is quoted as scriptural in the pseudo-Clementine tractate *Ad Virgines*. In the early fourth century, the historian Eusebius both cites James and regards the letter as canonical...It is quoted with approval by two other giants of the eastern church: Chrysostom (d. 407) and Theodoret (d. 458).⁸

The popularity and controversy surrounding the epistle of James continued through the Middle Ages to the time of Martin Luther. “The humanist scholar Erasmus raised doubts about the letter’s apostolic origin, questioning whether a brother of Jesus could have written a letter composed in such good Greek. Luther also doubted the apostolic status of the letter.”⁹ In Lutheran circles, the most noted comment on James is that Martin Luther called it “an epistle of straw.” This is because of the apparent lack of explicit reference to the teaching of the Gospel within the text of the epistle itself.

An expansive list of writings about the epistle continue even into the era of modern scholarship. The bibliography of this paper is merely a glimpse of the writings even from the last

⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 1.

⁸ Moo, 3.

⁹ Moo, 5.

fifty years that have commented on the epistle. It is in this more recent scholarship that the similarities between James and the sayings of Jesus have been explicitly referenced and examined side by side.

The Sermon on the Mount also has a very expansive and dense history of interpretation, which spans all the way back to the Didache, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus, and continues into the modern era of biblical scholarship.¹⁰ In fact, the Sermon may be the most commented on section of New Testament Scripture. Jeffrey A. Gibbs states, “If a comprehensive survey of the commentaries on different parts of Holy Scripture were written, that survey might very well reveal that Matthew 5-7 has received more attention and generated more controversy than any other portion in the entire Bible.”¹¹

To sort through this expansive history of scholarship on both the Epistle and the Sermon on the Mount is no small or easy task. As evidenced by the quotations above, many with much experience and scholarship have analyzed the similarities between James and the Sermon on the Mount.

Excursus: Verbal Inspiration and Works Cited

Before examining the scholarship on the similarities and what it means for biblical interpretation, it is important to clarify two points. First, verbal inspiration as it is referred to in this paper is to be understood in the strictest sense of the term, i.e. actual men in history were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write down the Scriptures. The *sedes doctinae* for this doctrine is 2 Timothy 3:16. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (ESV). Another supporting passage for this doctrine is 2 Peter 1:21. “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (ESV).

Second, the implications of subscribing to this doctrine include rejecting the existence of a “Q” document, a “Jesus tradition,” or a “synoptic tradition.” This is to avoid giving any

¹⁰ Cf. Warren S. Kissinger, *The Sermon on the Mount: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1975).

¹¹ Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1-11:1* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 229-230.

conjecture that the New Testament documents are the result of tradition that was honed over the first and second centuries CE. Although the scholars cited may not share the same view of the origins of Scripture as this paper presents,¹² their insights regarding the particular issue at hand are useful for any student of biblical scholarship. It is not the goal of this paper to argue a broad range of views. Rather, it is to employ scholarship, wherever possible, to identify, analyze, and interpret the similarities which are under examination. For this reason, I have included quotations from the whole spectrum of biblical scholarship ranging from “liberal” to “conservative.”

THE CRITERIA FOR A “PARALLEL”

Most of the scholarship which will be cited in this paper is relatively recent. However, it should be noted that the authors of these sources do make extensive use of the expansive history of interpretation which date back to the beginning of the New Testament Era. A brief overview of this more recent scholarship in regards to the parallels between the Sermon and James will now be given.

In the scholarship which will be surveyed below, two broad and basic types of parallels or similarities seem to emerge. The first is the literary/textual type of parallel. This type is present when actual Greek vocables, cognates, and synonyms emerge in both texts. The second type of similarity is thematic/conceptual, or topical. This is present when two separate texts address the same subject matter. Of course, these two types of parallels will intersect in any analysis of differing sections of Scripture. Nevertheless, because of the subjective nature of discerning what constitutes a parallel, these two basic types of parallels will help explain why scholars seem to differ on the sum total of similarities in two texts.

An example of parallel sections

An examination of the parallel between James 5:12 and Matthew 5:34-37 will serve as an example to demonstrate the nature of the differing types of parallels. In fact, this is the most explicit parallel between the Sermon and the Epistle. Matthew and James do not use the exact

¹² Cf. Dan G. McCartney’s “Four Views of Author and Date” in *James* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 14-20. In this section, McCartney mentions all commentators on James listed in the Bibliography along with their various views.

same wording. However, they use vocables and cognates in different forms to express the same idea.¹³ James 5:12 is as follows: μη ὀμνύετε μήτε τὸν οὐρανὸν μήτε τὴν γῆν μήτε ἄλλον τινὰ ὄρκον· ἦτω δὲ ὑμῶν τὸ Ναὶ ναὶ καὶ τὸ Οὐ οὐ, ἵνα μὴ ὑπὸ κρίσιν πέσητε: “Do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your ‘yes’ be yes and your ‘no’ be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation” (ESV). Matthew 5:34-37 is as follows: ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν μὴ ὀμόσαι ὅλως· μήτε ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, ὅτι θρόνος ἐστὶν τοῦ θεοῦ, μήτε ἐν τῇ γῇ, ὅτι ὑποπόδιόν ἐστὶν τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ, μήτε εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα, ὅτι πόλις ἐστὶν τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως, μήτε ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ σου ὀμόσης, ὅτι οὐ δύνασαι μίαν τρίχα λευκὴν ποιῆσαι ἢ μέλαιναν. ἔστω δὲ ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν ναὶ ναί, οὐ οὐ· τὸ δὲ περισσὸν τούτων ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἐστὶν. “Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply ‘yes’ or ‘no’; anything more than this comes from evil” (ESV).

As is evident from reading these sections, one can easily conclude that they are similar, albeit the Matthew passage is more expansive. However, it will serve well to present in exactly what manners they are parallel in order to help understand the subjective nature of determining what constitutes a parallel.

The above example of parallel passages of Scripture includes both the literary/textual and conceptual/thematic types of parallels. This paper will split the textual/literary type of parallel into two sub-categories. The first sub-category is verbatim, in which the two sections under examination match in a word for word comparison. The second sub-category of the textual/literary type uses the same verb root or noun but appears in differing forms. (A variation of this type is when two parallel passages both use a cognate form. The example above does not include this category of parallel). Starting from the most textually explicit, then moving to the more subjective, the two differing types and two sub-categories of the textual/literary type will now be shown from James 5:12 and Matthew 5:34-37 using three demonstrations: the verbatim sub-category of the literary/textual type, the identical verb root or noun sub-category of the literary/textual type, and the conceptual/thematic type.

¹³ Davids, 121.

The first demonstration will be the verbatim sub-category of the literary/textual type. In the above parallel passages, (with the exception of common prepositions, particles, and adverbs), there are two examples of exact word for word similarities. The first example is in the word for “yes,” ναι. The second example is in the word for “no,” οὐ. Of course, both of these words are very popular in the New Testament. Yet, in this particular situation, it is clear that these words become a parallel given the order in which they appear and the way in which they are repeated.

Here, James and Jesus are communicating the exact same words. However, the exact particulars of the sentences in which these verbatim words occur are clearly different from each other in the manner in which they appear. This is when it becomes necessary to apply the second sub-category of the literary/textual type of parallel: the same verb root or noun appearing in differing forms.

The second demonstration of types of parallels will show this sub-category (identical verb roots or nouns appearing in different forms) of the literary/textual type of parallel. James 5:12 and Matthew 5:34-37 provide four examples:

The first example is from the verb root ὀμνύω, “to swear.” Both James and Matthew make use of this verb root, yet use it in different forms. James uses it in the second person plural imperative form ὀμνύετε with the negative adverb μὴ. Matthew uses it in the present aorist infinitive form ὀμῶσαι as an objective infinitive to the verb λέγω. In Matthew, this infinitive is also used with the negative adverb μὴ.

Although they are different in form, the phrases in which the verb ὀμνύω is used communicate the same thing: “Don’t swear/take an oath!” Both are forms of a negative prohibition or command. Both emphasize the importance of not swearing. This is evident by this negative adverb μὴ in position before both forms of the verb given in the two different sections under examination. Not only because these words are of the same root, but also because they have the exact same meaning within their contexts, they are regarded as a sub-category of the literary/textual type of similarity.

The second and third examples of the verbal root or noun sub-category of textual/literary similarities are in the varying forms of the nouns οὐρανός “heaven” and γῆ “earth.” James uses them in the accusative form τὸν οὐρανὸν and τὴν γῆν. Matthew uses them as datives τῷ οὐρανῷ and τῇ γῇ with the pronoun ἐν.

These are considered parallels not only because they are from the same base noun, but also because they communicate the exact same meaning. Because of Semitic influence, James uses the accusative to indicate the entity being sworn by.¹⁴ Matthew uses the more common pronoun ἐν with the dative to indicate the entity being sworn by. In both renderings of an oath formula, the result is the same as either form of syntax is acceptable.

The fourth example of literary/textual parallel in James 5:12 and Matthew 5:34-37 is in the two different verb forms of the verb root εἰμί. Both James and Matthew use the third person present imperative form. However, James uses the colloquial ἦτω,¹⁵ whereas Matthew uses the regular/formal ἔστω. Again, there is virtually no difference in meaning and both forms are from the same verb root. Thus, this similarity is the literary/textual type of parallel.

The third demonstration will show the conceptual/thematic type. This type of parallel is more subjective than the other kind because it is harder to determine with certainty exactly what the criteria are for this type of parallel. Because this type is subjective, the following parallel will be given only for the sake of argument to demonstrate the manner in which determining such a parallel is subjective.

The thematic/conceptual parallel in James 5:12 and Matthew 5:34-37 is found in the final phrases of both sections of Scripture. In James, the phrase is ἵνα μὴ ὑπὸ κρίσιν πέσητε, “so that you may not fall under condemnation” (ESV). In Matthew, the phrase is τὸ δὲ περισσὸν τούτων ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἐστίν, “anything more than this comes from evil” (ESV).

Although both phrases use completely different vocabulary, they can be regarded as a similarity. In James, the phrase is a ἵνα clause of purpose/result. In the Sermon on the Mount, the phrase is a simple clause with ἐστίν as the main verb. Of course, these phrases have a different purpose for being included in their own sections. Yet, they are regarded as a similarity because they both demonstrate the spiritual danger of taking oaths by frivolous entities. To some, this

¹⁴ Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), comment, “In addition to the accusative, the NT also employs ἀπὸ with the genitive with verbs of ‘fearing, fleeing, avoiding,’ etc., which was in part possible already in classical, but was encouraged by Semitic influence... Only in James 5:12 does ὁμνύω still take the accusative of that by which one swears, while it elsewhere takes ἐν” (83).

¹⁵ Cf. Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W.). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature 3rd ed.*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 282.

similarity might be regarded as a stretch. To others, it might be regarded as obvious given the whole context of each phrase. Again, this is because of the subjective nature of determining the criteria of what constitutes a parallel.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP ON THE PARALLELS

Now the criteria that constitute a parallel have been established. The next step is to overview the previous scholarship on the similarities between James and the sayings of Jesus, with a special emphasis on the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 in particular. Again, it will be noted that the following scholars seem to have differing criteria in what constitutes a parallel. This notion will account for the fact that there are varying sum totals for the exact number of parallels between the Sermon on the Mount and the Epistle.

James and the Synoptics

The scope of this paper is dedicated to the similarities between James and Matthew 5-7. However, it is important to recognize that there is a significant amount of similarities between the Epistle and all three Synoptics.

Kittel listed some 26 correspondences between the text of the Epistle of James and the sayings of Jesus, none of which, taken singly, would provide substance for a convincing argument in favour of seeing an influential contact between the Epistle of James and these sayings traditions, but, when taken as a whole, these resonances are too frequent, and too consistent, to be satisfactorily explained in any other matter.¹⁶

In addition, Peter H. Davids indicates 35 allusions to the sayings of Jesus in all three Synoptics throughout the Epistle of James.¹⁷

It seems that the similarities can be attributed to more than just coincidence. Edgar shares this view:

The number of possible points of contact between a text of only 108 verses like the Epistle of James, and the synoptic Jesus traditions, is very striking... Other commentators attach more significance to these connections which range from close verbal correspondence (Jas. 5.12 and Mt. 5.34-37), to the similar use of certain words and

¹⁶ David Hutchinson Edgar, *Has God Not Chosen the Poor?: The Social Setting of the Epistle of James* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 27.

¹⁷ Peter H. Davids, *James* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 22.

phrases (Jas. 1.5 and Mt. 7.7//Lk. 11.9; Jas. 5.9 and Mk. 13.29; Jas. 2.5 and Mt. 5.3//Lk. 6.20), to broad thematic similarities (Jas. 2.1-13 and Mk. 10.17-20//Mt. 19.16-22//Lk. 18.18-23). None of them is exactly identical with the wording of the gospel traditions, and, taken singly, many, perhaps even most, can plausibly be explained as simply sharing a common ethos. Taken as a whole, however, the resonances are too frequent and consistent to be explained satisfactorily as accidents of a common general outlook.¹⁸

Of course, the early writers of the New Testament shared a common ethos brought about by adhering to the same religion. When a group of individuals share an ethos, it is inevitable that their writings will intersect when addressing certain themes and subject matter.

However, the similarities between the Synoptics and the Epistle of James are so frequent that one cannot ignore them in interpretation. “In view of the striking number of parallels which have been adduced between the Epistle of James and the synoptic gospels, it is clear that this relationship must be taken seriously in any evaluation of the epistle.”¹⁹

In fact, the similarities between James and Jesus aren't just prominent, but overwhelming. James B. Adamson expounds on JB Mayor:

J.B. Mayor, at the other end of the scale, asserted that the Epistle of James preserved within its short compass of only 108 verses more sayings of Jesus (57 parallels with Matthew, 11 with Luke, and three with Mark) than are contained in all the NT Epistles put together—an assertion that, if correct, would be sufficient to invest this NT writing with unique value. J.B. Mayor and other commentators have given impressive lists of echoes (*Anklänge*) of such parallel passages. If we are now inclined to be more skeptical, finding many of them accidental, far-fetched, or fanciful and others explicable by the postulation of a common Jewish (especially Wisdom) source, enough evidence remains to show an undoubted and striking similarity.²⁰

Especially striking is the speculation that James in only 108 verses has more teaching of Jesus weaved into his epistle than the rest of the New Testament epistles combined.

¹⁸ Edgar, 63.

¹⁹ Edgar, 27.

²⁰ James B. Adamson, *James: The Man and His Message* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1989), 170-171.

James and the Sermon on the Mount

Now that a brief overview on James and the Synoptics as a whole has been given, attention will be turned now to the epistle's similarities with the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 in particular.

Although James is similar to all of the Synoptics, the highest concentration of these similarities is found specifically in the Sermon on the Mount. It should be noted that in Edgar's appendix, he attributes more similarities to Matthew 5-7 than to any other section of the synoptic gospels.²¹ Dan G. McCartney counts twenty-one parallels.²²

In addition, Ingeborg Mongstad-Kvammen states:

The second theological tradition in the Epistle of James is the teaching of Jesus. Although there are no direct quotations from Jesus, the Epistle shows a striking closeness to the Jesus tradition that is not found elsewhere in the New Testament. In all parts of the Epistle there are correspondences to the synoptic tradition and very often to the Sermon on the Mount/Plain (Matthew 5-7 and Luke 6:20-49).²³

Mongstad-Kvammen's quotation not only confirms the sheer amount of similarities between the Epistle and the Sermon, but also puts an emphasis on the Sermon on the Mount in particular.

Peter H. Davids also puts emphasis on the similarities between the epistle and the Sermon:

It is clear to any casual reader of James that his writing is very close to the teaching of Jesus. In particular James is very close to the teaching of Jesus recorded in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) or the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6). This fact is underlined in that in all late Jewish and Christian literature, with one exception (1 Enoch), only James and Jesus pronounce woes on the rich.²⁴

Another scholar who puts a special emphasis on the Sermon on the Mount and James is Homer A. Kent: "A number of teachings in James are similar to Christ's, especially to the

²¹ Cf. Edgar's appendix 75-94.

²² Dan G. McCartney, *James* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 50.

²³ Ingeborg Mongstad-Kvammen, *Toward a Postcolonial Reading of the Epistle of James: James 2:1-13 in Its Roman Imperial Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 41.

²⁴ Davids, 21.

Sermon on the Mount, even though James does not state them exactly like Matthew's record in chapters 5 to 7."²⁵

Now, the actual numerical sums of similarities in the Epistle and Sermon according to different scholars will be given, both in regards to what is considered a literary parallel, and what is considered a parallel of subject matter. Again, it will be noted that the subjective nature of what constitutes a parallel accounts for the various sum totals of the exact number of parallels between James and the Sermon on the Mount.

Doctor Virgil V. Porter Jr. of Central Baptist College points out that there are 49 literary parallels within the texts of the Sermon and the Epistle.²⁶ He also points out that there are 11 parallel subjects which both the Sermon and the Epistle address.²⁷

Kent confirms that these similarities resonate throughout the whole epistle. "Many references to Christ's teaching are found [in the Epistle of James], some clear examples are the mentions of oath-taking (5:12, cf. Matt. 5:34-37), peacemakers (3:18, cf. Matt. 5:9), and judging (4:11-12, cf. Matt. 7:1-5)."²⁸ In his commentary, Kent doesn't directly address the similarities between the Sermon and the Epistle in the sense that he doesn't organize a particular chapter of his writing to comment on the issue. Nevertheless, the above quotation, (found in the chapter of his book titled *Date of the Epistle*), still demonstrates scholarly recognition of the similarities between James and Matthew 5-7.

This concludes the brief overview of previous scholarship on the topic of this paper. Although there is a paucity of scholarly work directly purposed to examining James and the Sermon on the Mount specifically, there is much to be said about the implications of these similarities in biblical interpretation. First, they cannot be overlooked. Second, they are most concentrated in the Sermon on the Mount. Third, as will be demonstrated later, they give insight into presenting the Law to those who believe.

²⁵ Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Faith That Works: Studies in the Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986),

²⁶Virgil V Porter Jr., "The Sermon on the Mount in the book of James part 1." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162, no. 647 (July 2005): 347-352.

²⁷ Porter, 352-360.

²⁸ Kent, 27.

HISTORICAL SETTING

For the purposes of this paper, there will be some value in sifting through the scholarship concerning historical setting of both sections of Scripture under examination. It will also help in establishing possible reasons why the two writings share a significant amount of similarities. The first step in accomplishing these tasks is to compare and contrast the writing styles, purposes, scope, and genres of both the Gospel of Matthew and the Epistle of James. Inevitably, such scholarship and speculation will overlap in any side-by-side examination of James and the Sermon. No matter what, proper hermeneutics must remain intact so as not to detract from the original purpose of each separate work in the Gospel of Matthew and the Epistle of James.

The role of historical setting in examining the parallels

In biblical analysis, often the real life spiritual meaning for the reader of Scripture is lost when too much focus is put on anything but the text itself. This trend has happened often in recent centuries in textual, literary, and historical criticism:

Over the course of the post-Reformational controversies, the Bible showed itself to be a contested legacy for Western Christians, ultimately devolving into a multiplicity of bibles with distinct canons, separate ecclesial contexts, and prolific theological superstructures... As a text, an object of critical analysis, the Bible came into clearer focus; however, as Scripture, the Bible became increasingly opaque... They [critical scholars] used historical research to write the Bible's death certificate while opening, simultaneously, a new avenue for recovering the biblical writings as ancient cultural products capable of reinforcing the values and aims of a new sociopolitical order. The Bible, once decomposed, could be used to fertilize modern culture.²⁹

Such critical methods serve only to reduce Scripture to a product of circumstances. On the contrary, Scripture is beautiful divine truth laid out for posterity, written by real people influenced and motivated by God himself in verbal inspiration. The Bible as we know it today is in fact the actual words of God as he inspired men to write them down.

Of course, if done correctly, there is value in analyzing the socio-historical, socio-linguistic, and cultural setting of a biblical text:

To ignore the historical setting of the words of Scripture is to ignore the background into which God chose to place the writing of his Word. To study the historical setting and

²⁹ Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4-5

understand the words of Scripture in the light of this background is basic for the proper understanding of many biblical passages. This is merely an application to Scripture of a principle that applies to the interpretation of any literature.³⁰

Historical setting can even add to the depth of real life meaning and implications for the reader of Scripture. The Epistle of James and the Sermon on the Mount are no exception to this principle.

When it comes to examining the circumstances surrounding a particular section of Scripture, there is really only one “legitimate” way of accomplishing this.

The Bible interpreter does not study the historical setting in order to alter or change what Scripture says. Rather, he studies it only that he might understand both fully and rightly what the inspired author has written. Since the latter is the only legitimate use of the historical setting, the only literary criticism to be done is the external kind.³¹

In fact, the similarities themselves give testament to the historical settings of these two passages of God’s Word. It is the purpose of this paper not to lose the meaning behind the historical settings of James and the Sermon on the Mount, but to enhance them as it analyzes two separate sections of Scripture side by side. In applying this principle, one must avoid making too much of the parallels between the Epistle and the Sermon; yet, at the same time, one must properly apply the historical setting to their interpretations. “To appreciate what James wants to communicate to the church of our day, we need to understand these circumstances as best we can.”³²

The parallels as evidence for dating or authorship

Attempts have been made at using the parallels between the Epistle of James and the Sermon on the Mount as evidence for dating both the Gospel of Matthew and James and for pinning down their respective authorships.³³ Of course, the arguments of dating and authorship can become quite complicated and nuanced, specifically in regards to whether James the brother of Jesus (James the Just) is the author of the epistle, another man by the name of James, James

³⁰ David P. Kuske, *Biblical Interpretation: The Only Right Way* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 1995), 67.

³¹ Kuske, 67.

³² Moo, 2.

³³ Cf. P. J. Hartin, *James and the Q Sayings of Jesus* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

the brother of John, or a second century editor superscripting a pseudonym. (Because of verbal inspiration, the last view listed becomes impossible). Of course, it is not the main purpose of this paper to speculate dating and authorship. However, it is important to understand the impact the similarities could have on the argument. Therefore, a few quotations will suffice in surveying the various views on the matter.

First, David H. Edgar states:

While the relationship between the Epistle of James and the synoptic gospels clearly must be taken seriously, a number of problems with the perspectives outlined above remain. The relationship between the epistle and the gospel traditions does not necessarily imply an early date for the epistle.³⁴

In its context, the above quotation is addressing P. J. Hartin's work on James and the "Q" sayings of Scripture along with multiple other theories on the dating and authorship of James in regards to the similarities to the Synoptics. Edgar's point is that such theories and perspectives on dating and authorship will never stand undisputed. However, both Edgar and Hartin downplay the doctrine of verbal inspiration.

In addition, Edgar attests that it is a vain endeavor to pin down with certainty the exact identification of the author of the book of James: "It is impossible to establish whether or not the epistle originated from James, the brother of the Lord. In this case, it is preferable simply to leave the question open, rather than run the risk of allowing excessive interpretative influence to such a tendentious consideration as authorship is in relation to the Epistle of James."³⁵

It is important to note that scholarly attempts at dating are not "shots in the dark." Rather, leaving the question open safeguards against the danger of interpreting the text from outside itself. For example, once one identifies James the brother of Jesus as the author with absolute certainty, the focus on the parallels becomes one of advancing an argument of authorship, instead of interpreting the text itself within a unified Scripture.

For this reason, I prefer Kurt A. Richardson's view on authorship because he comes to a conclusion on the matter of authorship without using the parallels as evidence. In fact, from his

³⁴ David Hutchinson Edgar, *Has God Not Chosen the Poor?: The Social Setting of the Epistle of James* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 27-28.

³⁵ Edgar, 22.

quotation, it would seem that there are plenty of other factors to consider on the matter of authorship:

If the epistle's author is James the Lord's brother, then it was written before AD 62, perhaps in the previous decade. James is the only likely candidate for authorship, as, indeed, Christian tradition has affirmed... The problem with proposing another James to have written the letter is finding a more likely candidate. James the son of Zebedee (Matt 10:2) was killed by Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:2) and does not figure significantly in the New Testament. Neither does James the son of Alphaeus (Matt 10:3), nor James "the Less," a son of Mary and brother of Joses (Matt 27:56), nor James the father of Judas, although there is some lack of clarity in the New Testament on this unknown figure... The simple identification "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1) seems to signify a leader who was so well known within the first generation church that no further designation was required. The linkage with Jude's Epistle reveals the same dynamic, "Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James" (1:1; cf. Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3).³⁶

However, just like the other theories on dating and authorship, this too will not stand undisputed.

Finally, because of a paucity of evidence, the dating and authorship of the Epistle of James are hard to determine with absolute certainty, especially in regards to the parallels between James and the Sermon. Thus, any attempt to do so will distract from the scope of this paper. Instead, these parallels will be allowed to stand side by side as examples for preaching the Law to Christians in a unified Scripture. The similarities between the characteristics of the authors and audiences of Matthew and the Epistle of James will now be examined.

Matthew and James as Jewish-Christian writings

It is clear from historical evidence and evidence from within the texts themselves that both James and Matthew are examples of early Jewish-Christian writing. Evidence for this claim will be given below. This section will examine each writing separately, starting with James, then examining Matthew as a whole, followed by an examination of the Sermon on the Mount within the whole book of Matthew.

³⁶ Richardson, 39-40.

As stated above, it is impossible to declare with any absolute certainty the exact identification of the author of the Epistle of James;³⁷ yet, his writing style gives several notable glimpses into the kind of author that he was.

First, James was well versed in Jewish culture and Old Testament Scripture.

It [James] is the most Jewish book in the New Testament. Except for a very few references (primarily 1:1, 2:1), the Epistle would fit easily into the Old Testament literature. This is not to suggest that it is not thoroughly Christian but rather that it meshes easily with the concepts and activity with which godly Jews lived.³⁸

Moo also states, “A feature of James that would immediately impress the ancient reader is the degree to which James borrows from traditional teaching... The letter also betrays a striking number of similarities to the words and emphases of a certain segment of Hellenistic Judaism.”³⁹

Second, the Greek is of high quality⁴⁰ and alludes to other well-known Jewish writings of the time.

The Greek of the letter is idiomatic and even contains some literary flourishes (e.g., an incomplete hexameter in 1:17). The author frequently alludes to Jewish writings typical of the Hellenistic diaspora (Sirach, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, Philo)... We must not exaggerate the quality of James’s Greek. While more polished and closer to the “higer *koine*” than most NT Greek, the Greek of James is far from literary Greek. Absent are the elaborate sentences found, for instance, in Hebrews.⁴¹

Thus, it is not far-fetched that a Jewish-Christian man would have written in such intelligible Greek. “There is the fact that even with the good Greek there are a number of awkward phrases that show a Semitic thought pattern.”⁴²

Third, James uses metaphors and illustrations to portray beautiful spiritual truths.

James’s lavish use of metaphors and illustrations makes his teaching easy to understand and to remember. The billowing sea, the withered flower, the image of a face in a mirror, the bit in the horse’s mouth, the rudder of the ship, the destructive forest fire, the pure

³⁷ Although it serves well to analyze the authorship of James, doing so exceeds the scope of this paper.

³⁸ Kent, 28-29.

³⁹ Moo, 7.

⁴⁰ Kent, 29.

⁴¹ Moo, 14.

⁴² Davids, 7.

spring of water, the arrogant businessman, the corroded metal, and moth-eaten clothes—all are images of virtually universal appeal.⁴³

Thus concludes a brief overview of the characteristics of writing style of James. Now, the author of the Gospel of Matthew will be briefly overviewed, emphasizing its nature as an early Jewish-Christian writing.

It should be noted that this overview of the author of Matthew as an early Jewish-Christian evangelist should be read with the following three presumptions. First, Matthew was written by the apostle. Second, the historical author wrote under the influence of the doctrine of verbal inspiration.⁴⁴ Third, his Gospel is the inerrant Word of God.

The traditional view of Matthew is that it was written to appeal to early Jewish-Christians. This paper will affirm that view. Johannes Ylvisaker states:

For whom and with what aim has, therefore, Matthew written his Gospel? To this questions the church fathers have given the unanimous testimony, in the first place, that it was written for the Christians among the Jews. The character of the Gospel bears ample evidence of this fact. More than any other Gospel, it points to the writings of the Old Testament. It presupposes an acquaintance with Jewish customs of the day, the geography or topography of the country, etc. The conflict with the Pharisees and scribes is placed in bold relief, more so than in the other Gospels. And this leads naturally to a consideration of the special purpose of this Gospel.⁴⁵

Also Arthur W. Pink states:

The *position* which Matthew's Gospel occupies in the Sacred Canon indicates its character and scope. Standing immediately after the Old Testament and at the beginning of the New, it is therefore the connecting link between them. Hence it is *transitional*, and also more Jewish than any other book in the New Testament. Matthew reveals God appealing to and dealing with His Old Testament people.⁴⁶

The setting in which the Gospel of Matthew was authored was one that assumed knowledge of the Old Testament. Thus, it was directed toward early Jewish-Christian recipients. "In addition, Matthew's intention to extend the story of God's dealings with Israel through a narrative that

⁴³ Moo, 2.

⁴⁴ Cf. "Excursus: Verbal Inspiration and Works Cited"

⁴⁵ Johannes Ylvisaker, *The Gospels: A Synoptic Presentation of the Text in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, with Explanatory Notes* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1932), 12.

⁴⁶ Arthur Walkington Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1982), 9.

possesses an authority equal to that of the OT invites the conclusion that he intended his Gospel to be read, along with the OT, at the worshiping assembly.”⁴⁷

This concludes the short section on the Gospel of Matthew and the Epistle of James as Jewish-Christian writings. The main insight to be drawn from this conclusion is as follows. The fact that Matthew and James are Jewish-Christian in scope can in part account for the similarities between the Sermon and the Epistle. Yet, this argument is only part of a larger picture. It will be noted that the genres of the Sermon and the Epistle are very different in nature, and that the purposes of the writers were very different in nature. More on this point will be discussed below under the heading “James and the Sermon as Independent Works.”

The conclusions thus far are as follows: It has been demonstrated that Matthew and James share a striking amount of similarities both in literary/textual parallels and in thematic/conceptual parallels. These parallels are unjustified evidence in presenting an argument for authorship or dating. (Doing so would tempt the interpreter to make false conclusions outside of the texts themselves). In addition, the writing styles of the Gospel of Matthew and of James are similar only in the fact that they are both Jewish-Christian literature. Thus, it would seem at first glance that no argument has been advanced. However, these notions have been eliminated as the prime cause of the parallels between the Sermon and the Epistle. Once these have been eliminated, the next step is to examine both sections of Scripture as literarily independent works. In doing so, we become one step closer to presenting these works as a result of verbal inspiration within a unified Scripture.

JAMES AND THE SERMON AS INDEPENDENT WORKS

This paper will argue that James and Matthew were written separately from one another. First, this point will be argued on the basis of the differing genres of the Sermon and the Epistle. Second, this paper will give a proposed explanation for the preponderance of the similarities that the Sermon and the Epistle share.

It will be noted that because both Matthew and James are verbally inspired, they will inevitably overlap with each other in the sense that all Scripture is Christo-centric. Ultimately,

⁴⁷ Gibbs, 6.

both Matthew and James are Christian works. Because they are both Christian writings, they will both weave the teaching of Jesus into the message they are communicating to Christians at large.

Genres of the Epistle and the Sermon

Of course, both Matthew and James share a common ethos and religion. Yet the genres of both books of Scripture are very different in nature. At risk of stating the obvious, James is an epistolary letter, whereas Matthew is a form of historical narrative. Yet, for the purposes of this paper, it will serve well to analyze the genres of each book at a deeper level. The genre of James will be examined first using previous scholarship on the issue. An analysis of the Sermon on the Mount will follow.

The broadest classification of the genre of the book of James is of course the fact that it is an epistle, a letter written to a group of early Christians in a narrow or broad setting. Yet, “The letter is a very broad literary category in the ancient world, encompassing everything from brief notes of information and request to long argumentative discourses. Identifying James as a letter, therefore, is both obvious and not very helpful...”⁴⁸

However, the letter of James is quite different from the other epistles in three main aspects. First, it has an abundance of imperatives. In the 108 verses of the epistle, there are fifty-four imperatives. Second, as stated above, it has more allusions to the teaching of Jesus than the rest of the epistles combined.⁴⁹ Third, there is no explicit reference to the doctrine of justification by faith. Fourth, it is not written or titled to a specific group of people or entity. Rather, it is more general, addressed to the “diaspora.”

Moo also gives some significant characteristics of this epistle in particular as contrasted against other New Testament epistles:

...A closer examination of the nature of this particular letter takes us a bit further. Absent from James are the customary greetings, references to fellow workers, and travel plans that mark many ancient and NT (especially Pauline) letters. Also missing are the references to specific people, places, or situations in the body of the letter. Where James

⁴⁸ Moo, 6.

⁴⁹ Cf. the Adamson quotation on pgs. 8-9 above.

does refer to a situation, he casts it in a vague, even hypothetical maner (e.g., 2:2-3, 15-17; 4:13-17).⁵⁰

In addition to the fact that James is an epistle, other suggestions have been made at a more specific subgenre:

Most critics (there are some notable exceptions)⁵¹ suggest that the work is loose in structure and has no unity or methodical train of thought, but is rather a “handful of pearls,”⁵² a diffuse and disconnected anthology of loosely connected preexisting sayings,⁵³ Wisdom logia,⁵⁴ Islamic *ahadith*,⁵⁵ or even independent sources,⁵⁶ flyleaves of prophetic addresses,⁵⁷ an “ethical scrapbook,”⁵⁸ or a literary mosaic of a somewhat artificial character, having definite resemblances to the Wisdom books, diatribe, and especially paraenesis.⁵⁹

To simplify the varying suggestions, I will start with the broadest classification and then move to the narrower. The most popular three of these suggested genres are as follows. First, James is a form of paraenesis, or “an address or communication strongly urging someone to do something.”⁶⁰ Second, it is a subgenre of paraenesis in the form of “Wisdom Literature.” Third, James was originally meant as a homily. Evidence from previous scholarship of these three suggestions will be given below. In addition, it will be noted that all three of these genres can overlap with one another.

Because of the preponderance of imperatives within the epistle of James, it is clear that it is a form of paraenesis in the broadest sense of the term. James is overall exhortatory in nature. The whole content of his letter is urging the “diaspora” to act according to God’s will. Moo

50 Moo, 6.

51 For references see Dibelius, p. 6, n. 22; worthy of mention are Cladder, Motyer, Johnson, Parry, Francis, Forbes, Davids, and others.

52 E. J. Goodspeed, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (1975), p. 284. For an excellent summary of various opinions, see D.E. Hiebert, “The Unifying Theme of the Epistle of James,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135 (1978): 221ff.

53 C. Von Weizsacker, *The Apostolic Age of the Christian Church*, II (ET 1895), 27ff.

54 T. Y. Mullins, “Jewish Wisdom Literature in the New Testament,” *JBL* 68 (1949): 338.

55 E.F.F. Bishop, *The Apostles of Palestine* (1958), p. 178.

56 Oesterley, pp. 466f. See also Ropes, p. 228, on the belief that Jas. 3:2-12 is based on a written tract.

57 J.E. Symes, “The Epistle of James,” *The Interpreter* 9.4 (1913): 406-13.

58 A.M. Hunter, *Introducing the New Testament* (1946), p. 96.

59 Adamson, 88-89.

60 Oxford Dictionary, paraenesis, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/paraenesis>.

analyzes Dibelius: “The ancient genre of *paraenesis*, according to Dibelius, was characterized by four factors that make it a perfect fit for James: (1) a focus on exhortation; (2) a general rather than specific situation; (3) the use of traditional material; and (4) loose organization.”⁶¹

It will be clear that in classifying the letter as “paraenesis,” this paper does not confirm the speculation that James is simply a smattering of “paraenetic components.”⁶² Again, this paper assumes James as an independent work and authorship that takes scriptural truths and applies them to a very specific situation. Of course, verbal inspiration as defined above was the driving force behind James’s work.

The second genre is classifying James as “Wisdom literature.” Moo affirms this view of classification. “In our discussion of the genre of James, we noted that James has often been classified as a wisdom document. This classification is based more on the letter’s proverbial style and general moral tone than on actual references to the concept of ‘wisdom.’”⁶³

The third genre is that of a sermon or homily. Davids subscribes to this view:

It is clearly oral discourse, like the Greek diatribe, the synagogue homily, or a sermon. There are a number of connected discourses (2:1-13; 2:14-26; 3:1-12; etc.) plus a scattering of shorter sayings (e.g., 3:18; 4:17). Since these are usually on ethics, they are sometimes termed paraenesis, or ethical instruction.⁶⁴

Finally, no matter what the speculation on what type or genre of literature James is, it is clear that it is very different from the book of Matthew, whose main genre is “historical narrative,” as will be addressed next. There is no scholarship that puts James in the same literary realm as the book of Matthew. It is safe to assume that the scholarly consensus is that James is not a form of historical narrative. Thus, the argument that James and Matthew are literarily independent of each other is advanced.

Contrary to the Epistle, the book of Matthew as a whole is written in a narrative style. That point is clear. However, its original purpose is harder to pin down with certainty. Gibbs

⁶¹ Moo, 8.

⁶² Cf. Moo, “Dibelius modernizes this basic view in his form-critical approach, treating James as a collection of loosely strung-together paraenetic components” (43).

⁶³ Moo, 33.

⁶⁴ Davids, 7.

gives various suggestions on the intentions and purposes of Matthew.⁶⁵ It is not the purpose of this paper to examine each suggestion and intention in depth. Yet, it will serve well to point out three things about the Sermon on the Mount in particular within the book of Matthew as a whole. The following three points will demonstrate the fact that when interpreting the Sermon on the Mount, it serves well to understand that it should receive a different treatment than James when it comes hermeneutical application. In short, because James and Matthew are independent works, they have their own purposes. As will be demonstrated later, these purposes will affect the way in which the similarities are interpreted; namely, that they are applying Law themes to different situations.

First, the Sermon on the Mount expounds the teachings of Jesus to fulfill a purpose within the larger narrative of the book of Matthew. Gibbs affirms this point:

Many scholars, the present author included, think that the teaching we know as “the Sermon on the Mount” (Mt 5:3-7:27) was likely collected and arranged by Matthew himself, as he gathered authentic teachings of the Lord Christ. The differences among the Synoptics invite us to appreciate the ways that each author has structured his material so as to offer a historically accurate portrait of the Son of God that is completely faithful to the actual events and that is reliable in every way for faith and life.⁶⁶

It should be noted that one must take great care in declaring that the Sermon on the Mount was “collected, arranged, and gathered by Matthew.” Although this may be true, it should be noted that this paper presumes that the Sermon on the Mount was an actual historical event in which Jesus truly preached those sayings to some “disciples” who “came to him” after he went up on a literal mountain somewhere from “beyond the Jordan.” It was this actual event in time which Matthew records as he “arranged” the real teachings of the historical person of Jesus.

Second, in interpreting the Sermon on the Mount, it is important to keep its contents within the narrative of the whole of the Gospel of Matthew “We honor the evangelist’s intention when we read his narrative for its own sake, and with the desire to observe its special arrangement and emphases as the Gospel progresses from genealogy to Great Commission.”⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Cf. Gibbs, “Introduction to Matthew,” (1-67).

⁶⁶ Gibbs, 31.

⁶⁷ Gibbs, 30.

Third, interpreting the Sermon on the Mount within the greater narrative of Matthew as a whole assists in understanding a particular section, while at the same time preventing biblical misapplication of Matthew's original intention:

Positively, two advantages come to mind. In the first place, narrative criticism emphasizes the need to read the Gospel widely, that is, to know the narrative's entire "flow" so as to be able to understand more accurately how any particular pericope fits into the Gospel's overall point of view and theology. When this wide-ranging reading occurs, perceived difficulties may disappear... A second advantage is that reading narratively is a safeguard against interpreting smaller units in a way that violates their context and so abuses their intended meaning. One does not, of course, need to be a narrative critic to want to avoid the dangers of reading passages out of context.⁶⁸

Finally, it becomes clear that when it comes to specific purpose, James and the Sermon on the Mount are more different than they are similar. James is a general exhortatory epistle, whereas the Sermon on the Mount is a real historical event purposefully placed within a larger narrative. In keeping with the scope of this paper, I will allow James and the Sermon to stand as independent works from one another, independent works that both demonstrate the different ways the truths of Scripture can be communicated to believers, especially in the preaching of the Law to Christians.

Also, because the two works under examination are completely different genres of Scripture, the assertion will be made that they are independent of one another. Adamson states, "While much of the Epistle coincides, both verbally and conceptually, with the interests of the Gospel of Matthew on the one hand and Luke on the other, it is obviously independent of either, containing material similar in vocabulary, style, and thought to one of the special Synoptic sources."⁶⁹

Finally, to conclude this section, it will be stated that the Sermon on the Mount is to be interpreted as an exposition to real people within a narrative. Also, the Epistle of James is to be interpreted as an epistolary exhortation to early Jewish-Christians living somewhere in the Roman Empire.

⁶⁸ Gibbs, 35-36.

⁶⁹ Adamson, 193.

A proposed explanation for the parallels

It has been established that James and Matthew were written as independent works. It has also been established that the similarities between James and the sayings of Jesus are too frequent to be ignored, especially in regards to the Sermon on the Mount. Thus, it will serve well to examine the cause of these similarities. In doing so, this section examine various views on the ways in which the sayings of Jesus were circulated in the 1st century AD. Next, it will consult Scripture on the matter. Finally, it will examine the implications of the conclusions drawn both from the various views and Scripture.

In addition, three presumptions must be made in the reading of this section. First, all Scripture is Christo-centric. Second, James and Matthew both share a common Jewish-Christian ethos. Thus, in the broadest sense of parallelism, it is obvious that both sections of Scripture will share certain themes and ideologies. Third, this writer rejects the existence of the proposed “Q” document and its implications for redacted versions of the Synoptic Gospels.

The first view under examination is that of James P. Adamson:

These similarities and differences are both extremely significant and hardly accidental. . .yet these parallels, even with their differences, are most impressive especially when taken cumulatively. It can hardly be doubted that while Matthew and James employ their material in different ways for different purposes, the two show no literary interdependence but appear to be tapping—each in his own way—a primitive precanonical Gospel source.⁷⁰

The above quotation is of value in that it affirms the literary independence of both James and Matthew. However, it explains the similarities in a fashion that is unnecessary. It is impossible to affirm the existence of a precanonical Gospel source. This is where the doctrine of verbal inspiration comes in to play. When one subscribes to the doctrine of verbal inspiration, the need to find such a document becomes unnecessary.

Another intriguing concept is in regards to James’s usage of νόμος especially in 1:25: “the law of liberty” or “the perfect law that gives freedom.” Davids states:

This “doer” [in regards to the “one who is blessed in what he does” in James 1:25] studies the **perfect law that gives freedom**. By this James means not the Stoic rule of reason or the Jewish law, but the Jewish scriptures as interpreted and completed by the teaching of Jesus. In other words, **the perfect law** is the teaching of traditions from Jesus

⁷⁰ Adamson, 189.

such as those embodied in the Sermon on the Mount (e.g.; Matt. 5:17). Paul and James both agree that the teaching of Jesus is binding on the Christian and that no other way marks out the path of blessing and salvation.⁷¹

Adamson also states:

Nowhere else does the Epistle show a closer affinity with the Synoptic record than on the subject of the law, which James twice paradoxically calls “the law of liberty.” Originating probably in the Jewish-Christian diaspora, the phrase is clearly messianic and probably refers “chiefly to those collections of Christ’s sayings, such as the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7) and the Discourse on the Plain (Lk. 6:20ff), which were regarded as the rule of life.”⁷²... The Epistle presents the idealization of Jewish Christian motive and life.⁷³

In short, these quotations speculate that the “perfect law that gives freedom” is a reference to some sort of circulated form of Jesus’ sayings. Certainly, these assertions in part solve the issue of why James and the Sermon on the Mount are similar. However, they cannot be concluded with certainty and are merely the product of conjecture. Although thought-provoking, the assertions of Davids and Adamson conclude too much with a paucity of evidence. Again, their assertions may be true, but they overstep the bounds of proper interpretation because of an unjustified inference and speculation.

Indeed, because of James’s Christian identity, he inevitably views the “law” as something that was completed in full by Christ. This paper will take the stance that the “law of liberty” is a loose reference to Christ, but not necessarily a reference to an early written document which was a compilation of Jesus’ sayings, nor a reference to the Sermon on the Mount in particular. Moo affirms this less contentious stance:

The flow of thought in these verses appears to demand a broader reference. The “law of v. 25 must be substantially equivalent to the “word” of vv. 22-23. Yet that “word” must also be closely related to, if not identical to, the “word of truth” through which these points suggest that James’s “law” does not refer to the law of Moses as such, but to the law of Moses as interpreted and supplemented by Christ. Perhaps, then, the addition of the word “perfect” connotes the law in its eschatological, “perfected” form, while the qualification “that gives freedom” refers to the new covenant promise of the law written

⁷¹ Davids, 42.

⁷² H. H. Esser, “Law” (*nomos*), *NIDNTT*, II, 449.

⁷³ Adamson, 188.

on the heart, accompanied by a work of the Spirit enabling obedience to that law for the first time.⁷⁴

The focus must remain on what is known. It can be known that James was making references to the teaching of Christ, albeit not explicit references. Clearly, no matter the identity of the author, James was well-versed in the sayings of Jesus. No matter the source, “He [James] carefully chose a number of these sayings, and wove them into the fabric of his Epistle.”⁷⁵ Whether he was mentally aware of them from a personal acquaintance with Jesus, or from a correspondence with other early Jewish-Christians, or both, can only be concluded with murky speculation. It safe to assume that James weaved the teaching of Jesus into his epistle with intention.⁷⁶ However, it serves to no avail to make conclusions on the exact source from which James drew those sayings.

Also, because James’ audience was clearly Christian, it is safe to assume they knew the teachings of Jesus in some form. This can be demonstrated merely by reading the text of the letter of James. In a sense, this text presupposes an audience who would have been familiar with the Jewish-Christian view of religion. “Knowing that they [the sayings of Jesus] would have special meaning for is readers, he [James] used them to reinforce his teaching on certain topics such as the value of trial, the need of wisdom, the generosity of God, the royal law of love, hearing and doing, faith and works, the Parousia and the end time.”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Moo, 94.

⁷⁵ Adamson, 193.

⁷⁶ Cf. Edgar, “Even if written traditions of the sayings of Jesus had been compiled by the time of the composition of the epistle, either in the form of our gospels, or of earlier, pre-gospel collections, it was not until well into the second century that such works began to be explicitly cited as Scripture. Thus, if the epistle was written before a definitive Greek version of such traditions had been recognized, obviously the author could not quote from it. It is impossible to tell if he does in fact quote from such sayings of Jesus as he was acquainted with, but which differ from those in the gospels. This is certainly a possibility in relation to 5.12, and it has been suggested that other verses of the epistle may preserve otherwise unrecorded logia of Jesus...Accordingly, the *Didache* would seem to bear witness, on the one hand, to the practice of unattributed reference to the sayings of Jesus, by writers who were obviously thoroughly familiar with the traditions of Jesus’ words, and on the other hand, to the possibility of the circulation of such traditions in forms which were not identical to those preserved in the gospels. Thus, it would seem to verify the legitimate possibility of the use by the author of the epistle of traditional sayings of Jesus, which were recognized as authoritative, but which had not yet achieved a static form” (64-65).

⁷⁷ Adamson, 193.

It is a less contentious endeavor to examine the source from which Matthew compiled his Sermon on the Mount. First, since Matthew was an apostle, he had direct communication with Jesus Christ himself. Second, Matthew was present for the actual historical event of the giving of the Sermon on the Mount.

It is clear that Matthew compiled real sayings of Jesus into the Sermon on the Mount. In understanding this point, it is important to note that the Sermon on the Mount was a real historical event. Gibbs states, “Many scholars, the present author included, think that the teaching we know as ‘the Sermon on the Mount’ (Mt 5:3-7:27) was likely a collected and arranged by Matthew himself, as he gathered the authentic teachings of the Lord Christ.”⁷⁸

Yet, it should be noted that Matthew the Evangelist was inspired to do so by the Holy Spirit. Gibbs attests to this view: “I show my convictions that St. Matthew the evangelist possessed, as gifts from the Spirit, both the knowledge to preserve and the skill to arrange genuine teaching of the Lord, Jesus of Nazareth, into a coherent and powerful whole.”⁷⁹ Although Gibbs uses the words “gifts from the Spirit,” he is still referring to verbal inspiration. This is clear in the context from which the quotation was taken.

Of course, verbal inspiration will suffice for an explanation to as why James and the Sermon on the Mount are so similar. However, it will serve well to explore biblical mention of the way Christianity was before the New Testament was written down. Scripture doesn’t say much on this matter, but there are two passages which lead one to conclude that the truths of Jesus’ life had circulated in some way before the New Testament Scriptures had been written down. The first is Luke 1:1-4.

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught (ESV).

Clearly, the compilation of “a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us” has been lost to antiquity. Nevertheless, Christians don’t need this record because the Gospels and

⁷⁸ Gibbs, 31.

⁷⁹ Gibbs, 231.

the New Testament has been preserved in the form known today. However, it is clear that some sort of “tradition” existed before the canonical books were written down. Arthur A. Just explains:

The evangelist is a recipient of a tradition that was handed down by those who were from the beginning eyewitnesses and became ministers of the Word. Luke is dependent on the witness of those who have seen and heard Jesus and have delivered a tradition to him.⁸⁰

It is important to note that this “tradition” does not refer to a smattering of primitive works which later developed into the Gospels by redactors. Rather, the point is to acknowledge the existence of some sort of Christian “tradition” which existed before the Gospel of Luke was written.

Therefore, it is also possible this existed before James was written down.

The next passage of Scripture that seems to imply some known form of Jesus’ sayings that pre-dates the canon is Acts 20:35. “In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (ESV). This saying of Jesus does not appear in this exact form in the canonical Gospels.⁸¹ However, it would seem that Paul incorporates it into his discourse to the Ephesians to an audience that may have been aware of such a saying.

What is the interpreter to make of these sayings? First, it is impossible to speculate with any certainty what form or to what extent people knew these sayings. Second, the very fact that God inspired certain men to record a more reliable documents gives testament to the fact that these early forms were incomplete.

In conclusion of this section, it is clear that both the Sermon on the Mount and the Epistle of James use the truths of the teaching of Jesus to convey spiritual truth. This conclusion must be arrived at in regards to verbal inspiration. In Matthew, (at risk of stating the obvious), the sayings are explicit in the sense that Matthew directly attributes the sayings in the Sermon on the Mount to the historical person of Jesus. (Also, the Sermon on the Mount was a real historical event that took place in the way Matthew recorded it). In James, the references to the sayings of Christ are implicit in the sense that he does not directly attribute them to the person of Jesus. However, the truths of Christianity are present throughout his epistle. This conclusion is also to be arrived on the basis of verbal inspiration.

⁸⁰ Arthur A. Just, *Luke 1:1-9:50* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publ. House, 2007), 38.

⁸¹ Frederick F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 395.

It should be asserted with caution that both Matthew and James had some sort of written collection of Jesus sayings, (if asserted at all). Rather, it is clear that both weave the sayings of Jesus into their respective works with purpose. Of course, Matthew would have known this knowledge from firsthand experience. James, on the other hand, could have known these sayings from firsthand experience, depending on the exact identity of the author. If James was in fact the brother of the Lord, this speculation becomes solidified. If the author of James was of a different identity, it is still clear that he was well aware of the sayings of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount included, regardless of whether the Gospel of Matthew had yet achieved a written status or not. Again, this is to be concluded from the doctrine of verbal inspiration.

SAME THEMES, DIFFERENT USES

It has been demonstrated that although the Sermon on the Mount and James are literarily independent works, they do in fact share similar themes. The cause of these themes has been explored and can be explained by the fact that both James and Matthew were well-versed in the sayings of Jesus. Also, they were divinely inspired to pen their respective works. Yet, the question still remains, what is an interpreter to do with these similarities? It has been demonstrated that it is unjustified to use them in dating or authorship theories on Matthew or the Epistle of James. So, where does that leave the interpreter? In the end, both the Sermon on the Mount and the Epistle are beautiful expositions of the Law. Both weave together similar themes into Law presentation. James primarily uses these themes or sayings of Jesus to prod the conscience. Thus, his main use of the Law is primarily that of Mirror, secondarily as Curb. Matthew uses the sayings of Jesus to encourage believers. Thus, his main use of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount is as Guide. These two concepts will be examined below.

It is important to note that the Holy Spirit may use the Law in a certain capacity which is unintended by the preacher. A preacher may intend First Use of the Law, but depending on the conscience of the individual hearer, it may be received as the Third Use of the Law, and vice-versa. This is because, finally, the Law is the one revealed will of God. The only difference in is contingent on whether the hearer has been brought to faith beforehand or not. The Formula of Concord attests to this:

However, in order to avoid all misunderstanding as much as possible and to teach and maintain the real difference between the works of the law and the works of the Spirit, it

must be diligently noted that, when we speak of good works that are in accord with the law of God (for otherwise they are not good works), the word “law” has one single meaning, namely, the unchanging will of God, according to which humans are to conduct themselves in this life. The distinction between these two kinds of works is due to the difference between two different kinds of people who make an effort to keep this law and will of God. For as long as human beings are not reborn but do act according to the law and do perform its work because they are commanded, either out of fear of punishment or desire for reward, they are still under the law.⁸²

Finally, these distinctions between the uses of the Law are only used to clarify the teachings of Scripture. They were not put into usage until the sixteenth century. Matthew and James clearly do not speak in these terms, nor do they suppose them. However, after further examination of the Sermon on the Mount and the Epistle of James, it becomes clear that their writings accomplish these uses, even though they were not aware of this terminology.

James as Law as Mirror

Because James is very narrow in the overall scope of his letter, (although he does address many topics), this is the first step in realizing that his main purpose in expositing Law is to show people their sin; namely the Second Use of the Law. It has been established that James in his writing presupposes that his audience had knowledge of the teachings of Christianity. This accounts for the fact that his message is very narrow:

To be sure, James says little about many basic Christian doctrines. The person and work of Christ, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the theological significance of the church, the fulfillment of the OT in Christ—none is mentioned in James. But this kind of argument from silence (as we have noted elsewhere in this Introduction) does not carry much weight. James, like all the other letters of the NT, is occasional, written in a specific situation and addressing specific problems.⁸³

Thus, his purpose in writing was narrow in scope.

After realizing that James was narrow in scope, the next step is to affirm that the goal of this narrow scope is to rebuke the early Christians; namely to exposit the Law as Mirror to expose their shortcomings. Moo attests to this view:

Failure to mention even some basic Christian doctrines is therefore not only not surprising but expected—and paralleled by other NT letters. James, we have suggested, is

⁸² Kolb and Wengert, 589.

⁸³ Moo, 27.

writing to rebuke and exhort former parishioners about certain specific problems in their Christian practice. He knows that they are acquainted with the basic doctrines of the church and does not need to go over them again.⁸⁴

Also Edgar:

Although the author [James] presupposes that the addressees should recognise [*sic*] the authority of his standpoint, it is also apparent that they are persistently reproached for their failure (in the author's view, at any rate) to actualize wholly the implications of this world-view as a way of life. There is a gap between the author's expectations and the addressees' performance of these demands, which the author sees as indicative of wavering, unwholeness and deficient commitment to God.⁸⁵

James saw a problem. Sin was getting hold of the "diaspora." Thus, it was his divine purpose to write them a letter to expose this sin. Of course, the end goal of rebuke is to get the heart ready to receive forgiveness.

Of course, making the generalization that James is primarily an exposition of the Second Use of the Law will meet its exceptions. For example, not every imperative in the epistle is a rebuke. Some are exhortatory. With correct explanation, these could be taken as Third Use of the Law. For example (and this is not exhaustive), 1:2-5 "2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach" (ESV). It would be hard to find someone who wouldn't view these verses as encouraging. Although James doesn't explicitly state the manner in which Christians become "perfect and complete," it is safe to assume that the presupposed knowledge of his audience would know that it is only through God that this is accomplished. Another example of a passage that could be understood as Gospel encouragement is 1:12 "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him" (ESV). Again, it would be difficult to argue this passage as presenting the Law as mirror.

⁸⁴ Moo, 27.

⁸⁵ Edgar, 218.

Despite the exceptions, it is important to note that the general mood of the epistle of James is one of rebuke. Of course, not every single verse will carry this sentiment, especially verses given at the beginning of the letter still in the “greeting” section of the Epistle. The “body” of the Epistle will carry the sentiment of rebuke more than any other section.

In summary of this section, two concepts will be emphasized. First, it will be noted that the audience meant to receive this letter was already Christian, as the above quotations attest. Yet, even Christians still need to hear rebuke, as the Old Adam never goes away in this lifetime. James preached the Law to Christians for the purpose of Spirit-wrought contrition, that his audience could realize the spiritual dangers of what they were doing, namely, failing to put the teachings of the Lord Jesus (which they were fully aware of) into practice. Second, James weaves the very words of Jesus into his rebukes. Thus, he applied them in a situation in which people needed to hear these sayings re-purposed for the sake of rebuke.

Sermon as Law as Guide

Like James, the audience of the Sermon on the Mount were also believers. This fact is integral in forming the argument of this paper: that Matthew and James both preach the Law, using the sayings of Jesus, to people who are already believers. The audience of the Sermon on the mount were believers in two respects:

First, the actual audience that heard Jesus preach the Sermon were believers. This inference is taken from the text of Matthew itself: “Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him” Matthew 5:1 (ESV). It is clear that his “disciples” were already believers. Werner H. Franzmann affirms:

The sermon is not one in which Jesus calls men to repentance and faith. Rather, it is spoken to those who have already become his own, to believers. To state otherwise is to ignore what is obvious from the sermon itself. In 5:1 it is expressly stated: “His *disciples* came to him, and he began to preach to them.” Observe, too, that the Beatitudes could have been addressed only to people who were already believers.⁸⁶

Thus, the Sermon on the Mount was a preaching of the Law to Christians.

⁸⁶ Werner Herman Franzmann, *Bible History Commentary: New Testament*(Milwaukee: WELS Board for Parish Education, 1989), 232.

It will be noted however, that there may be exceptions to this statement. For example, it is possible that not everybody who heard the Sermon were already believers.

As is clear in these verses and throughout the Gospel, the “crowds” never attain to the status of those who believe in Jesus, even if imperfectly. Although 7:28-29 will declare that in some sense Jesus also teaches the Sermon to the crowds, the specific comment in 5:1-2 that “*his disciples*” approached him, and he opened his mouth and began to teach *them* and say...” distinguishes Jesus’ “disciples” from the “crowds.” These crowds hear Jesus’ words. Moreover, they understand his claim to authority and are astonished by it, though they do not show that they accept his claim.⁸⁷

Also Franzmann offers a slightly different view:

It is most likely that at least some of the crowds, that is, non-disciples, who followed Jesus heard his discourse on the mount as well. (Matthew 4:25; 5:1; Luke 6:17, 20) But the presence of these listeners was only incidental. It was their privilege to hear what blessings had already come into the lives of Jesus’ believing followers and what the happy lot would be of all who should hear and keep Jesus’ words or sayings in the true faith.⁸⁸

Second, the Gospel of Matthew was written for believers in the sense that they were in need of some sort of record of the words and works of Jesus.

To be sure, one should not dismiss the possibility that the Gospels could and do function as evangelistic tools. However, the Gospels in general, and Matthew in particular, do not read like documents that are trying to *persuade* the readers/hearers for the first time that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. What is explicit in the Lukan prologue is implicit in Matthew’s narrative as well, namely, that the readers/hearers envisioned by the evangelist have already received instruction regarding “the things that have been accomplished among us.”⁸⁹

For the purposes of this paper, the Sermon on the Mount as an exposition of the Law as Guide must be interpreted within its narrative. On account of this, the focus on the preaching of the Law to Christians will be more on the audience of the actual sermon within its context of the whole book of Matthew, namely, “the disciples” who heard him preach. Yet, an awareness of the larger audience of the book of Matthew as a whole cannot be overlooked in the sense that the recording of this Evangel was mainly for those who already believed. Of course, this observation could be made for any book of the New Testament. However, it is included here to further

⁸⁷ Gibbs, 228.

⁸⁸ Franzmann, 232.

⁸⁹ Gibbs, 6.

advance the argument that the Sermon on the Mount would serve as Law as Guide for the original audiences who heard it; first for the audience that was present at the actual historical event of the Sermon; second for the larger audience of the book of Matthew as a whole.

The Sermon is an exposition of the Law as Guide in the sense that one must believe the teaching behind it, namely the Gospel Motivation that the text of the Sermon itself offers. “Unless the hearer/reader receives for himself the Lord’s teaching *through* the blessings of 5:3-12, the rest of the Sermon’s teaching will not be accessible...For those whom faith and understanding begin to be granted, however, the blessing and calling of Jesus become their own; Jesus speaks to ‘you.’”⁹⁰

Rev. F.W. Wenzel affirms the view that the Sermon on the Mount is primarily Third Use of the Law:

Another understanding of this sermon is that it contains the true conception of the Law with some exercises of godliness and warnings against hindrances to salvation. If rightly understood, we may accept this conception of the sermon. The Law has a three-fold use, as curb, mirror, and rule. Inasmuch as Jesus here is speaking to disciples, we would take it that the third use of the Law, as a rule of life, is meant. Jesus wishes to show His Christians what good works really are... The Gospel which in the first place has made him a Christian or a disciple of Christ, now also urges him to conform to what Jesus is here asking of him in this sermon. It is not a law-giver speaking here, but Jesus the Savior of mankind, who wants his disciples to prove their faith, their discipleship in their daily life. ---It has always proved somewhat difficult for those who regarded this sermon as an exposition of the Law to bring the beatitudes under this head, but viewing it rather as an exhortation for sanctification as following upon, and preceding from faith, this difficulty has disappeared.⁹¹

Franzmann also states:

Yes, Jesus does expound the moral law here at some length in this sermon, but he does not here use the law as a mirror to show men their damnableness under sin. Rather, he employs the law as a rule by which the believers’ lives are to be governed as they strive to please him who made them the children and the wards (6:32) of the Father in heaven and who has assured them of being accepted at the Last Judgment.⁹²

⁹⁰ Gibbs, 232-33.

⁹¹ F. W. Wenzel and Martin H. Wenzel, *The Wenzel Commentary: An Exegetical Study, Based on a Harmony of the Gospels* (Hines, MN: M.H. Wenzel, 1986), 171-72.

⁹² Franzmann, 232.

In conclusion of the section, “Same themes, different uses,” points will be reiterated. First, both James and the Sermon on the Mount are directed towards those who already believe and have knowledge of Jesus’ teaching. Second, James is primarily an exposition of the Second Use of the Law. Third, the Sermon is mainly an exposition of the Third Use of the Law.

TWO EXAMPLES FROM THE TEXTS OF DIFFERING USES OF THE LAW

So far, this paper has expounded on previous scholarship on the issue of the parallels between the Sermon on the Mount and James. It has argued that the Sermon and the Epistle are independent literary works which both draw from the teachings of Jesus. Also, these teachings are presented for different purposes; namely, that the Sermon is an exposition of the Third Use of the Law, whereas James primary focus is on the Second Use of the Law.

Now, these principles will be applied to two actual examples of parallels from the texts of the two sections of Scripture under examination. Three presumptions will shape the final section of this paper. First, this list is in no way exhaustive of all the literary parallels that previous scholarship has observed. Second, the main purpose of this list is to give examples of application of the main argument of this paper (although it will also be informational in the sense that it demonstrates some of these similarities). Third, observation of these parallels are taken from Virgil J. Porter’s *The Sermon on the Mount in the Book of James, Part 1*. Fourth, it will be restated that the purpose of analyzing these parallels is not to establish theories of dating or authorship. Rather, it is to demonstrate the ways in which different authors of Scripture present the Law to believers. Fifth, the order of the similarities will be given thematically, not employing the order in which they appear in either text. Now, several parallels will be given as examples of preaching the Law to Christians.

The Poor⁹³

The first example is a literary parallel from James 2:5 and Matthew 5:3. These passages share two vocabularic similarities (with the exception of common particles, adverbs, pronouns,

⁹³ For a more expansive list on this parallel, see also Porter’s *The Sermon on the Mount in the Book of James, Part 1*, “James mentioned the ‘high position’ of the poor (James 1:9), who are ‘heirs of the kingdom’ (2:5), and Jesus too extolled the ‘poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (Matt. 5:3). James’s reference to a righteous person

and linking verbs). These similarities will be bolded in the Greek. James 2:5 is as follows: Ἀκούσατε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί· οὐχ ὁ θεὸς ἐξελέξατο **τοὺς πτωχοὺς** τῷ κόσμῳ πλουσίους ἐν πίστει καὶ κληρονόμους **τῆς βασιλείας** ἧς ἐπηγγείλατο τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν; “Listen, my beloved brothers, has God not chosen the poor who are in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?” Matthew 5:3 is as follows: Μακάριοι **οἱ πτωχοὶ** τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν **ἡ βασιλεία** τῶν οὐρανῶν. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The two vocabularic similarities are in the adjective πτωχός “poor” and the noun βασιλεία “kingdom.”

In addition to the two vocabularic parallels, (which could be explained away by common usage in the New Testament) the whole of each verse is also conceptually parallel. The two authors just use different language to illustrate the same themes. James uses the aorist verb ἐξελέξατο “[God] has chosen” to portray the manner in which God has blessed the poor. Matthew uses the adjective Μακάριοι “blessed” to portray the same. James uses the noun κληρονόμους “heirs” to describe that the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor. Matthew uses the genitive of possession αὐτῶν “theirs.”

What, then, is the difference here? As stated above, it is in the usage of the concept of the poor being heirs of the kingdom of heaven. James is prodding the consciences of the early Jewish-Christians who were apparently neglecting the poor.⁹⁴ Jesus is comforting the poor with a statement of fact. Both explicate that the poor are blessed. Yet the differing authors put their own spin on it in the context of the section.

not resisting a rich person (James 5:6) recalls Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:39-41. The need and concern for clothing (James 2:15) correspond to the reference to clothing in Matthew 6:31. The need for ‘daily food’ (James 2:15) correlates with a petition in the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:11). The defrauded laborers (James 5:4) were day laborers who expected their wages at the end of the day. They were concerned about their ‘daily food’ (James 2:15) and their ‘daily bread’ (Matt. 6:11). Giving money, food, or clothing to the poor is reflected in the epistle’s words about providing clothing and food for a brother or sister (James 2:15-16) and the distress of orphans and widows (1:27). James’s challenge about authentic Christianity being measured by appropriate works and behavior (1:27; 2:1-7; 14-17) parallels Jesus’ challenge about the authenticity of a person’s faith (Matt. 7:21). Both the sermon and the epistle reminded the rich of potential losses and the temporary nature of wealth (Matt. 6:19-20; James 1:10-11; 5:1-3). Both refer to rusted treasures and moth-eaten garments (Matt. 6:19; James 5:2-3), and both caution against trusting in money (Matt. 6:21, 24; James 4:13-17)” (353-354).

⁹⁴ Cf. Moo, “James’s general point in this verse, then, is clear enough: God’s choice of poor people to inherit his kingdom is evidence of his regard for them and shows how wrong Christians are to discriminate against these very poor people” (106).

James' variation of the Golden Rule

The next example in which James and Jesus teach the same rule in different context, demonstrating different uses of the law, is in the variation of the golden rule. This parallel is purely conceptual. Thus, this paper will spare the Greek and quote only the English passages. The parallel is found in James 2:8 and Matthew 7:12. James is as follows: "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well" (ESV). The Sermon is as follows: "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." James is explicitly referencing Leviticus 19:20. Jesus is explicating the same concept, but using completely different words.

Again, the purpose of these commands is completely different in scope. In view of the general sense of James, this imperative is meant to prod the conscience, to accuse those who violate the Law given in Leviticus 19:20. Given the following verse, 2:9, this becomes apparent to the reader of Scripture. "But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors" (ESV). Moo attests to the purpose of James in accusing the sinner:

The return to the subject of favoritism in this verse shows that James has not left the topic that he introduced in v. 1. Implicit in the logic of James's argument is the assumption, perhaps drawn from Leviticus 19, that favoritism violates the demand of love for the neighbor. And so he can accuse those who show favoritism of committing sin and label them as "lawbreakers."⁹⁵

This assertion that James is accusing the recipients of his epistle is a textbook example of the Second Use of the Law.

Jesus' assertion, however, has a completely different meaning within its context. Gibbs attests to this point:

The Golden Rule can only be appropriated in the context in which it stands, namely, in the discourse offered to *Jesus' disciples* and in light of the Father's Gospel promises, which Jesus has articulated in the Beatitudes (5:3-12) and most recently in the invitation to believe the Father's willingness to give the good gifts that we request from him (7:1-11). For the Golden Rule is too hard, too heavy to approach in any other way.⁹⁶

In conclusion of this section, it will be noted again that these two examples serve as applications of the groundwork of this paper.

⁹⁵ Moo, 113.

⁹⁶ Gibbs, 382.

CONCLUSION

The preponderance of parallels between the Sermon on the Mount and the Epistle of James is not to be overlooked in any evaluation of either section of Scripture. Their existence is more than just mere coincidence. This is attributed to the fact that both James and Matthew used the sayings of Jesus to convey very different messages to differing audiences. They both wrote their works independently of one another for very specific purposes. The epistle of James is especially concise in its purpose. It is clear from his language that he is addressing a very specific problem within the “diaspora.” Thus, his language reflects that purpose. The Sermon on the Mount, on the other hand, is a beautiful exposition of the Law as Guide to believers who were being instructed on how to apply their faith to very real situations. Finally, the fact that both sections of Scripture, written independently of one another, employ similar themes to different situations gives testament not just to the doctrine of verbal inspiration, but also the unity of Scripture as a whole.

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