# The Sermon on the Mount
# Part 2

**A section from Cosimo Rosselli (1439-1507), *The Sermon on the Mount and Healing of the Leper* (1481-1482). Fresco (about 12'x18'!), Sistine Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican State**
**Courtesy Mary and David**

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**Fra Angelico, *The Sermon on the Mount***

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# What we learned last time

- **The Beatitudes**
  - **Not entrance requirements; not just a list of bad things to be reversed when Jesus returns; rather, a description of the ideal for Jesus' followers**
  - **"blessed are"—joyous, fulfilled, rewarded, content (our synonyms)**
  - **"meek"—gentle, forbearing**
  - **"poor in spirit"—those needy who wait upon the Lord, drawing on the "righteous poor" referred to in the OT**
- **History**
  - **For the first millennium the Sermon was read at face value**
  - **Aquinas and the medieval scholastics proposed the monastics pursue perfection while the rest of us live by a less taxing ethic**
  - **Anabaptists, Waldensians, Quakers and Mennonites take the ethical requirements at face value as forbidding oaths, violence, etc.**
  - **Luther sees it as pointing toward grace; he also applies Sermon to the church sphere, but not to public life**
  - **Calvin refutes both the literal reading and the two-level ethic**

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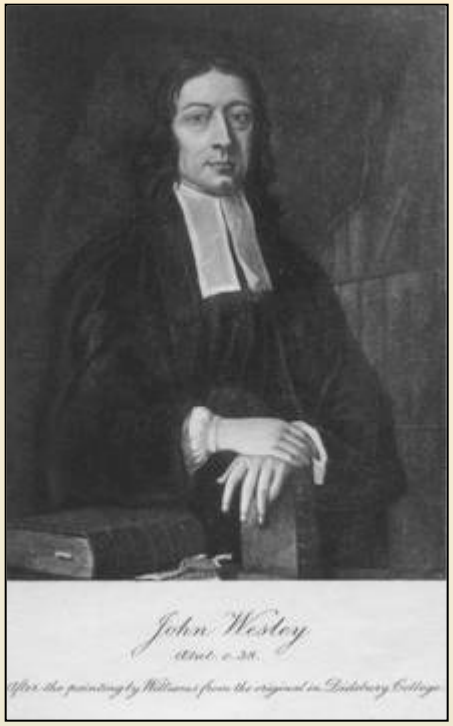
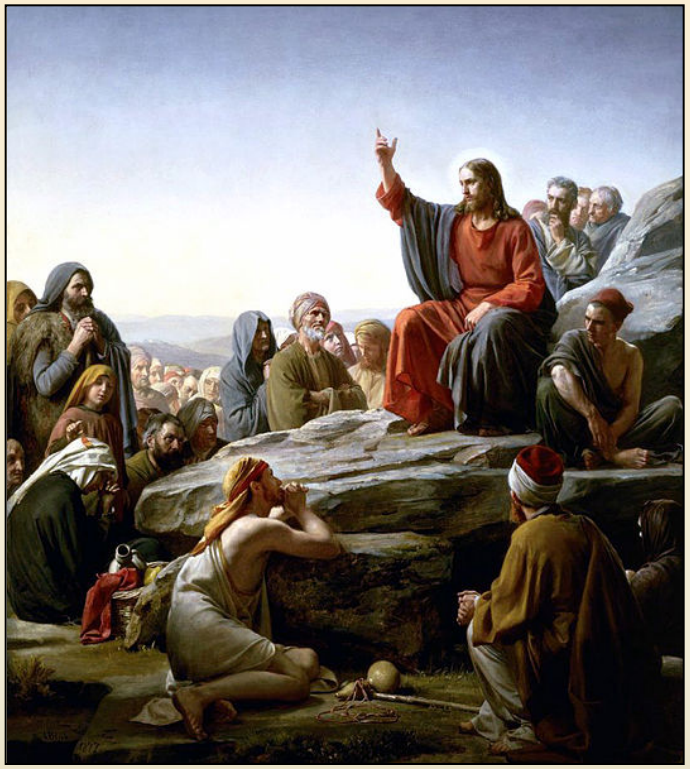
# John Wesley adopted a characteristically pietistic interpretation of the Sermon

- Wesley (18th cent.) followed the Reformers in justification by grace alone, but "perhaps the most distinctive characteristic mark of Methodism was its insistence that the Christian grows in grace and increasingly manifests the perfect qualities of Christ" [Kissinger, 38]
- Wesley saw the Sermon as a carefully crafted discourse
  - E.g. the Beatitudes may give guidance to all people but they are further important for the believer, as they describe the *progression* toward perfection
- The Sermon is for Wesley applicable to all parts of life
  - E.g. "do not store up for yourself treasures on earth" (Mt 6:19): "In our business we are to attempt to succeed only to the extent that we are enables to meet our financial obligations, to provide adequately for ourselves and our family…"



# John Wesley *really liked* the Sermon on the Mount

**"What beauty appears in the whole! How just a symmetry! What exact proportion in every part! How desirable is the happiness here described! How venerable, how lovely the holiness! This is the spirit of religion; the quintessence of it… Let us watch, and pray, and believe, and love, and 'strive for the mastery,' till every part of it shall appear in our own soul, graven there by the finger of God; till we are 'holy as He which hath called us in holy, perfect as our Father which are in heaven is perfect!'" [Kissinger, 39]**

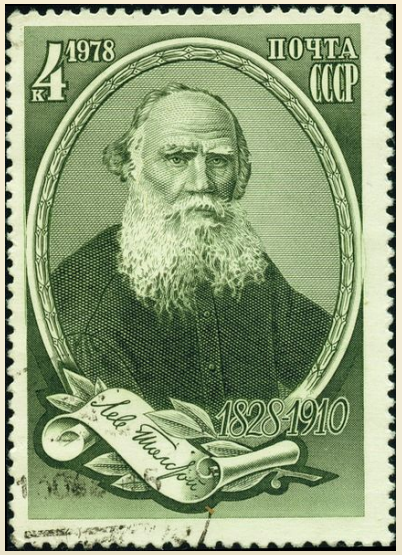


**Carl Heinrich Bloch (1834–1890), *The Sermon On the Mount*, oil on canvas**

# Leo Tolstoy saw devotion to the Sermon and to the Church as mutually exclusive

- For Tolstoy (19th cent.) the center of gravity of the Sermon lay in Matt 5:38-39—"Do not resist an evil person"
- Tolstoy found in the Orthodox Church a preoccupation with creeds, sacraments, theologies, the worship of persons and images—but neglecting good works [Kissinger 54]

"The churches are confronted with a dilemma—the Sermon on the Mount, or the Nicene Creed—one excludes the other: if a man sincerely believes in the Sermon on the Mount, the Nicene Creed and with in the church and its representatives inevitably lose all meaning and significance to him… And so the churches cannot help but use every possible effort to obscure the meaning of the Sermon on the Mount to attract people to itself" [Tolstoy quoted in K. 55]

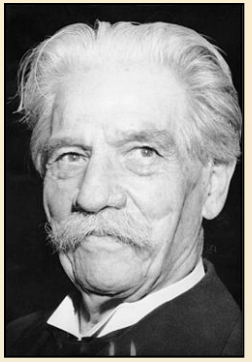


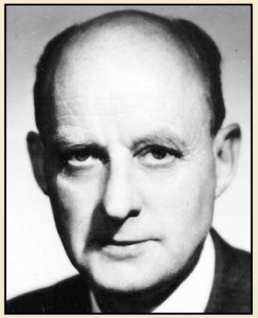

- Like the Anabaptists, Tolstoy saw the Sermon as preventing a role in government or military service
- Against the charge of naivety he replied that even "the so-called criminals and robbers… love good and hate evil as I do", and would be swayed by a Christ-like example. (Compare this to Calvin's view of human nature!)
- Gandhi was deeply influenced by the Sermon, and Tolstoy's treatment of it

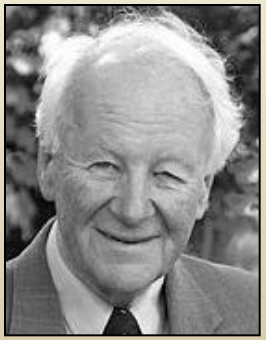
# The 20th century saw a range of interpretations

- "**Protestant liberals** have seen the sermon as a paradigm for the social gospel and a call to the church to usher in the kingdom of God on earth (a view also adopted in the secular form by **Karl Marx**)" [Blomberg]
- **Albert Schweitzer** (1901) asserts that in the Sermon Jesus was giving preparation for the short period before the kingdom was ushered in via a divine cataclysmic intervention—an "*interim ethic*"
  - The sayings of Jesus were not intended to be used by later generations, as most readers through the ages have assumed
- **Reinhold Niebuhr:** A sharp distinction has to be drawn between the ethics of power for individuals and for social groups:
  - The ideals which might work for individuals fail to deal with the realities of inter-group dynamics; the former strives for selflessness, the latter for justice
  - Anabaptist pacifism might be okay, but those who advocate renunciation of force between nations are just unrealistic
  - Niebuhr's view is very Lutheran but is also echoed by Stott:

"…if my house is burgled one night and I catch the thief, it may well be my duty to sit him down and give him something to eat and drink, while at the same time telephoning the police" [Stott, 112]







# The Sermon was the kernel of Bonhoeffer's call to radical obedience

- **Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote to a compromised church, calling it to the highest ideals:**

> **"The restoration of the Church must surely depend on a new kind of monasticism, having nothing in common with the old but a life of uncompromising adherence to the Sermon on the Mount in imitation of Christ. I believe the time has come to rally men together for this" [Kissinger, 84; quote from a letter to his brother Karl]**

- **Obedience and belief go hand-in-hand, so discipleship requires a straightforward reading of the Sermon**
- **With the cross of Christ, the Sermon is *not* an impossible ideal:**

> **"…The only proper response to this word which Jesus brings with him from eternity is simply to do it. Jesus has spoken. His is the word, ours the obedience. Only in the doing of it does the word of Jesus retain its honor, might and power among us. Now the storm can age over the house, but it cannot shatter that union with him, which his word has created" [*Cost*, 168]**

# … and more 20th century interpretations

- **Dispensationalism has classically limited the sermon's ethic to the future millennial kingdom which Jesus offered to the Jews but which they rejected so that it was postponed until after his second coming**
- **Subsequent 20th century scholarship has largely focused on how Matthew shaped the traditions he inherited ("redaction criticism")**
- **Inaugurated eschatology recognizes the 'already/not yet' tension in which the sermon's ethic remains the ideal or goal for all Christians in every age but which will never be fully realized until the consummation of the kingdom at Christ's return (Blomberg, Carson, Stott, et al.)**
- **After 2,000 years, no consensus exists**
- **Many voices have spoken with clarity and passion, informing our reading of the text**


**Detail of stained glass window created by Louis Comfort Tiffany in Arlington Street Church (Boston) depicting the Sermon on the Mount**

# The Sermon on the Mount
# Part 2

- **Recap**
- **Historical overview, cont.**
- **The *lost document* behind the Sermon**
- **The curious relationship between *James* and the Sermon**

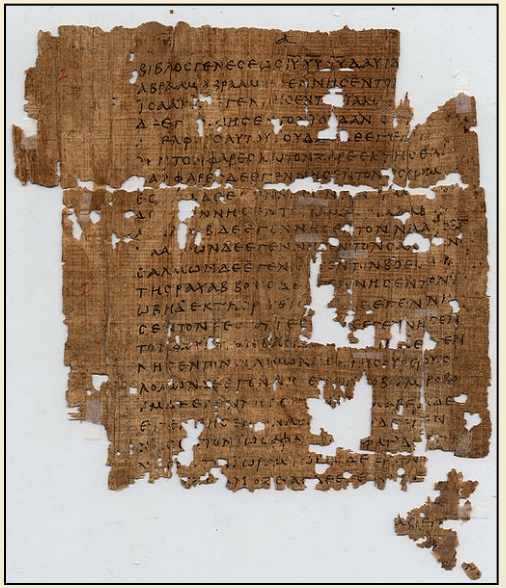
**Fra Angelico, *The Sermon on the Mount***

# Luke's *Sermon on the Plain* bears is similar to Matthew's *Sermon on the Mount*

- **The Sermons are a case study for the "Synoptic Problem": What the similarities between the synoptics tell us about their origins**

| John | Synoptics |
|---|---|
| • Few parables<br>• Many discourses of Jesus about himself<br>• Simple but elegant Greek<br>• Only mentions "kingdom of God" once | • Lots of parables<br>• Primarily concerned with Jesus' Galilean ministry<br>• Focus on the kingdom of God (or "heaven") |

- **The only incident prior to the passion (betrayal, arrest, trial, crucifixion, resurrection) recorded by all four gospel accounts is the feeding of the 5000**



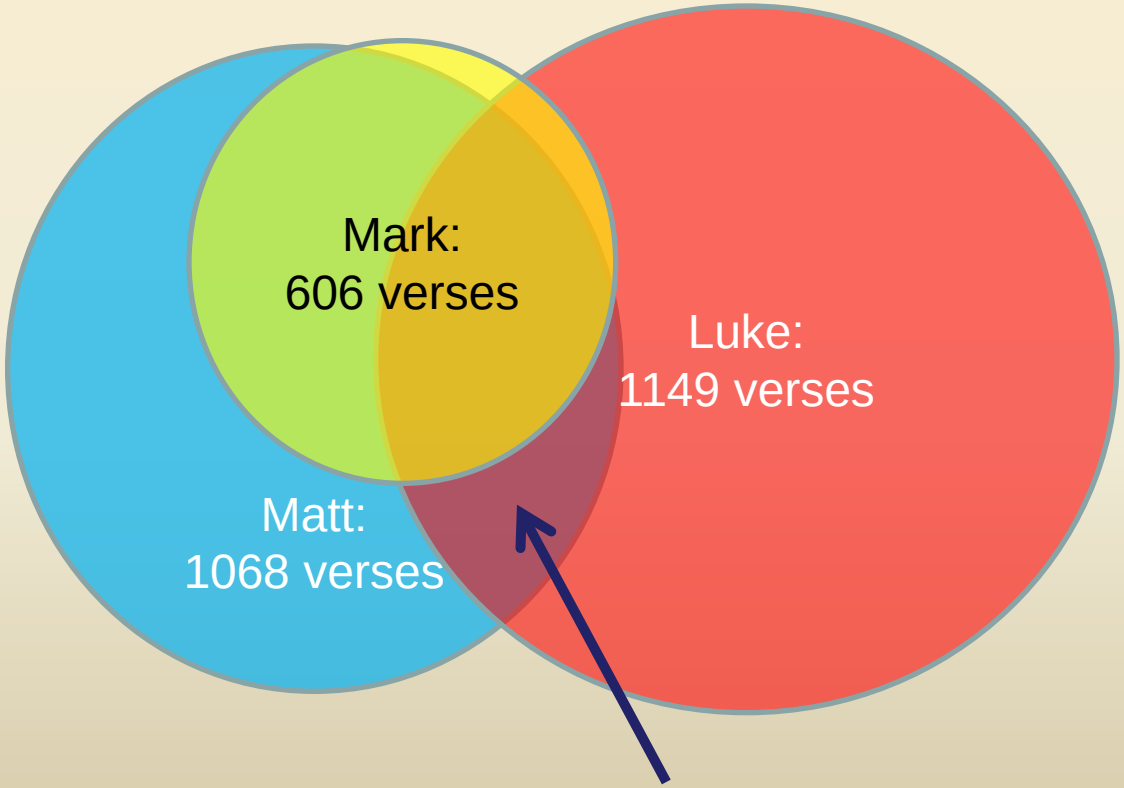
**The front side of the Papyrus 1, showing part of Matt 1**

**(part of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri, P. oxy. 2).**

**Date: c. 250**

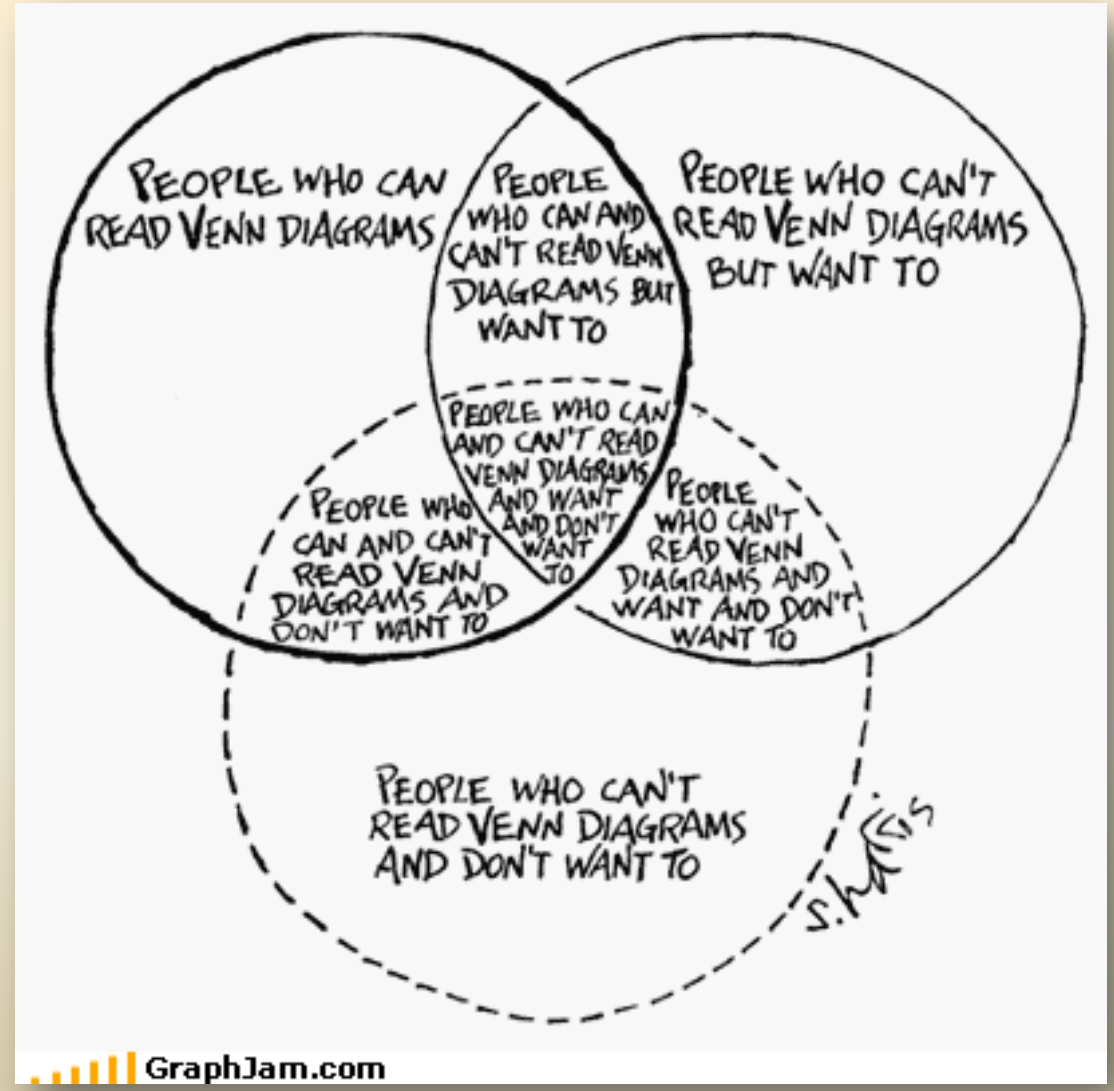
# The synoptics share material asymmetrically

- **606 of Mark's 661 vv appear in some form in Matt (making about half of Matt's 1068)**
- **350 of Mark's 661 vv appear in Luke (which has 1149)**
- **Matt & Luke have 235 vv in common which don't appear in Mark**




**235 verses are shared by Matt & Luke and are not in Mark**

# Sidney Harris provides a helpful refresher on Venn diagrams



# There's good evidence Mark was written first

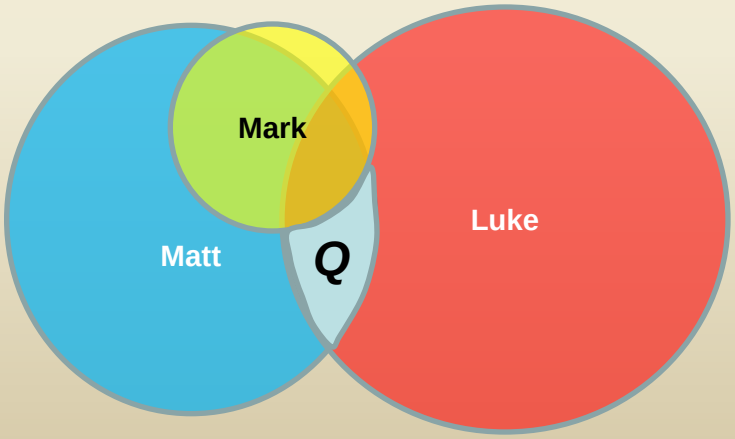
- ***Mark is shorter*: it seems less likely that Mark would remove Matt's material than Matt would add to Mark's**
- ***Mark's writing is less polished* than Matt's or Luke's**
- ***Mark preserves more Aramaic sayings* than Matt or Luke**
- ***Verbal agreements*: There are many parallel verses in the synoptics; Matt and Mark frequently agree in wording, as do Mark and Luke, but less so Matt and Luke**
- ***Order or events*: They all tend to agree about order, but Matt and Luke do not tend to agree against Mark**
- **Mark's more "primitive" theology: Mark is more prone to theologically challenging statements than Matt or Luke**
  - **Ex: Mk 6:5 where Mark claims that because of the unbelief of the people in Nazareth, Jesus "could not do any miracles there"**
  - **In the parallel verse, Matt 13:58 says that Jesus "did not do many miracles there"**

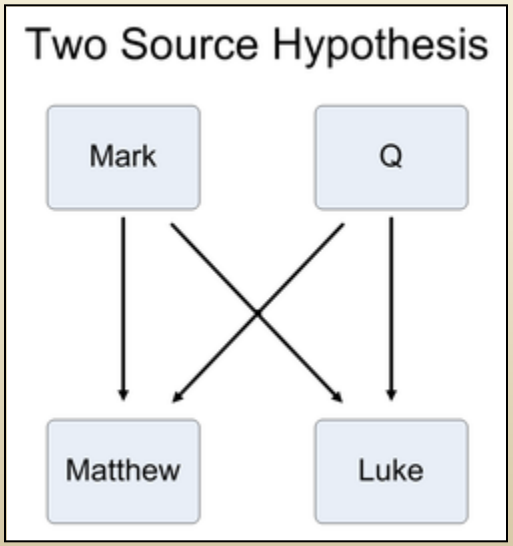
# Mark appears to represent an earlier theology

- ***Matt and Luke take the edge off*** **Mark's sometimes blunt or uncomplimentary statements about the apostles**
- ***Only once does Mark use "the Lord"*** **to refer to Jesus; Matt and Luke use it 19 and 16 times**
- **Matt and Luke suppress or weaken reference in Mark to such *human emotions* in Jesus as grief and anger and amazement**
- **Matt and Luke heighten anything which shows *Jesus' majesty***
- **These are thought to represent different emphases appropriate to the writers' audiences and their needs**

# The material shared by Matt and Luke but not found in Mark is believed to come from an early source, “Q”

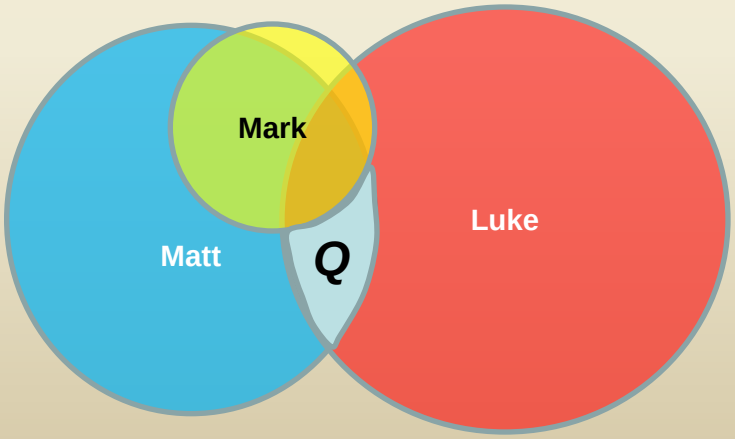
- These 235 verses are primarily sayings of Jesus
- Scholars debate whether these were circulated or oral or written form, but most think that they represent a single source of material
- Matt and Luke both drew on Mark and Q, adding their own material
- We don’t think Matt drew on Luke or vice-versa because of the lack of agreement in ordering between the two (and other reasons)

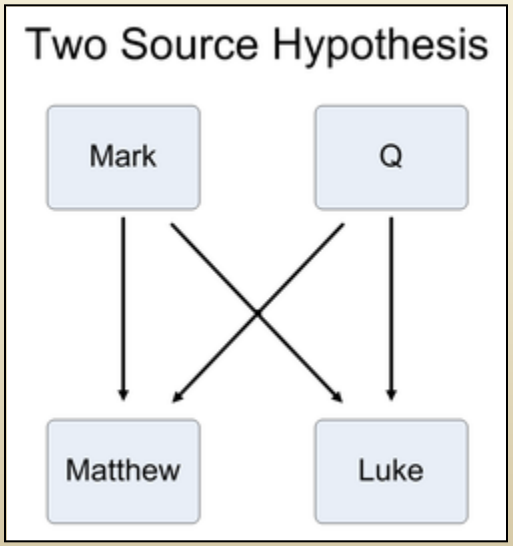


# The material shared by Matt and Luke but not found in Mark is believed to come from an early source, “Q”

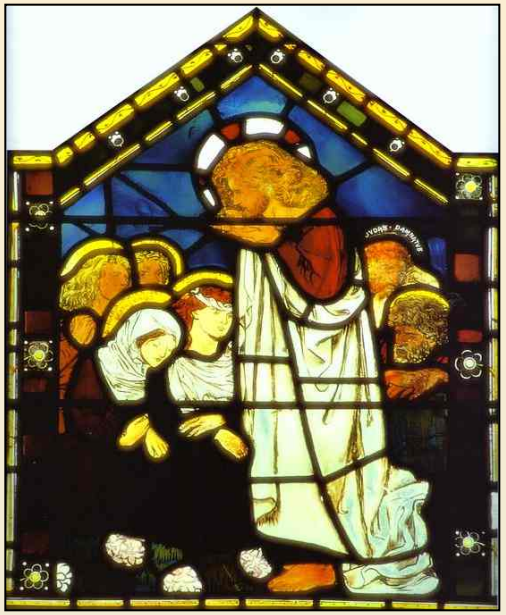
- Q explains doublets in Matt and Luke
  - Ex.: In Lk 8:17 and 12:2 Jesus says, “there is nothing hidden [concealed] that will not be disclosed, and [or] nothing concealed [hidden] that will not be known”
  - The first verse parallels Mk 4:22, and second Matt 10:26
- The Q material is put in different contexts in Matt and Luke: Matt puts it in his five discourses, while Luke strews it about. If Luke were using Matt it’s unlikely he’d strew like this



# Q can begin to tell us about Matthew's and Luke's views

- **Matt's Sermon on the Mount and Luke's Sermon on the Plain are taken from the overlap material, Q**
- ***Caveat*: It's possible that the SOTM and the SOTP are truly from different sources and even represent separate events; after all, itinerant preachers reused their material as they traveled**
- **The SOTM and SOTP have close agreement in ordering and content (though the SOTM is longer)**
- **"Although Luke has modified some Q traditions, and has perhaps omitted a few verses from Q and added a few others which were not part of Q, his version of the Sermon is usually considered to be very close to the original version in Q" [DJG]**
- **If Matt and Luke use a single source for their Sermons we can begin to infer how they modified Q**
  - **For example, in the beatitudes Luke contrasts the poor with the rich; Matthew's text blesses the poor *in spirit***
  - **If Luke's is closer to Q, Matt's "in spirit" is his way of explaining this beatitude for his readers**



**Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 1862, Stained glass. South nave window, All Saints church, Selsley, Gloucestershire, UK**

## “In spite of their great disparity in size, the versions of the Sermon in Luke and Matt agree strikingly in their order”

| | Luke 6 | Matthew 5-7 |
|---|---|---|
| Introduction | 20a | 5:1-2 |
| Beatitudes | 20b-23 | 5:3-12 |
| Woes | 24-26 | |
| Love of Enemy | 27-36 | 5:37-38 |
| Golden Rule | 31 | 7:12 |
| Judge not | 37-38 | 7:1-2 |
| The blind guide | 29 | |
| Teacher and disciple | 40 | |
| Speck and log | 41-42 | 7:3-5 |
| The tree and its fruit | 43-45 | 7:16-20 |
| Lord, Lord | 46 | 7:21 |
| House on the rock | 47-49 | 7:24-27 |

[DJG]

# The Sermon on the Mount
# Part 2


**Fra Angelico, *The Sermon on the Mount***

# The Epistle of James has been called a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount

- **"The closeness in content between James and sections of Matt that present Jesus' teaching is remarkable, as may be seen from the list of the parallels to Matt's Sermon on the Mount" [Raymond Brown 734]**

- **Topics shared between the SOTM and James include:**
  - **Trials (Jas 1:2; Mt 5:11-12)**
  - **Perfection (Jas 1:4; Mt 5:48)**
  - **"Ask and it will be given" (Jas 1:5; Mt 7:7)**
  - **"Be slow to anger" (Jas1:19-20; Mt 5:22)**
  - **"Be doers of the word and not only hearers" (Jas 1:22; Mt 7:24)**
  - **The poor of this world (Jas 2:5; Mt 5:3)**
  - **Keeping the whole law (Jas 2:10; Mt 5:19)**
  - **Mercy (Jas 2:13; Mt 5:7)**
  - **Fruit reflects character (Jas 3:12; Mt 7:16)**
  - **Peacemakers (Jas3:18; Mt 5:9)**
  - **God & mammon (Jas 4:4; Mt 6:24)**
  - **The meek/humble (Jas 4:10; Mt 5:5)**
  - **Storing up treasures (Jas 5:2-3; Mt 6:19-20)**
  - **Not judging others (Jas 5:9; Mt 7:1)**
  - **Persecution of the prophets (Jas 5:10; Mt 5:12)**
  - **Swearing oaths (Jas 5:12; Mt 5:34-37)**

- **"…despite the closeness of theme, neither the wording of the parallels nor the order in which they appear is the same" [Brown 735]**
- **It's probable James knew Q or something similar**
- **It's telling that James has been contrasted with Romans and the Gospel of grace. How we harmonize Paul and James may inform our understanding of Paul & the SOTM**

# Summary

- **Recent interpretations seek to retain the strength of the Sermon while avoiding the absolutism of the Anabaptism reading**
- **The unavoidable tension: to what degree are we to strive to be like God—and how do we go about it?**
- **The Sermon is part of the "Q" material, widely believed to be a collection of Jesus' teachings used by Matthew and Luke in composing their gospel accounts**
- **In James we appear to have the oldest extant commentary on the Sermon on the Mount (next oldest—*the Didache*)**
- ***Next time*: We follow Jesus to the very *antitheses*!**

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