

## RESULTS AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This study has surveyed the terrain of the temple mount of the Sermon textually, historically, linguistically, analytically, comparatively, religiously, and ritually. In my mind, the quest has borne good fruit. If the Sermon at the Temple is to be known by its fruits, the simple fact that it lends itself rewardingly to such scrutiny should be a strong clue that much more remains to be said and thought about the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon at the Temple.

Much more also lies ahead in thinking about the implications of this study on other areas of research. The Sermon on the Mount is a key scriptural text. How a person understands the Sermon on the Mount—when it was written, why it was given, and what it means—has a deep impact on how one interprets the entire ministry of Jesus, numerous texts of the New Testament, and many of the experiences of early Christianity. How one views the Sermon has equally far-reaching consequences for approaching the Book of Mormon—how it was translated, what it contains,

and why it is important. Sooner or later, all roads in the gospel lead past this scriptural Mount.

Thus, my interpretation will surely not be the last word on the Sermon on the Mount or its ramifications. This interpretation is likely to evoke all kinds of responses—some positive and some negative. It would be a first were that not the case: Few interpretations of the Sermon have ever met with anything close to universal acceptance. I will be the first to acknowledge that important questions and historical uncertainties remain. However, in discussing this text, which for centuries has defied consensus in analysis and summation, I hope to have shown that there is room for a Latter-day Saint interpretation that places a premium on the background and contextualizing information about the Sermon provided by the Book of Mormon.

That information leads me to the conclusion that the Sermon at the Temple is a powerful and meaningful scripture. To a greater extent than has been suspected before, it contains the fulness of the gospel, both as an epitome of Jesus' teachings and as an implementation of his commandments by way of sacred temple covenant, for many elements of the new covenant Jesus brought to the temple at Bountiful are fundamentally comparable to the temple ceremony familiar to Latter-day Saints. All portions of the text—some more obviously than others—can be understood ritually. The Sermon on the Mount is a natural script for an initiation text, which means that it (like many of the parables of Jesus) may have had esoteric significance, as well as public levels of meaning, to early Christians. To see the Sermon on the Mount simply as commandments, or as ethical teachings, or as making extraordinary apocalyptic demands, or as eschatology, is to see only parts of the whole. Through symbolic representation and covenantal

ritual, however, one can journey conceptually and spiritually through the sum of its truths, from one's present condition on into the blessings of eternity.

In the end, my interpretation has not yet really answered the ultimate question, "What is the meaning of the Sermon on the Mount?" That remains for the reader to discover. What I have tried to supply is a map, a few tools, and the ability to recognize some major landmarks along the way. After all is said and done, as Harvey McArthur has written, "When the reader lifts his eyes from the details and ponders the over-all meaning of what he has read, he is still confronted by [the] basic questions"—what does Jesus mean, and how should I live?<sup>1</sup> For a Latter-day Saint, I suggest, the answer to these questions is to be found in the same way as is the answer to a similar question, "What is the meaning of the temple?" The answer to that central Latter-day Saint concern is sought through such things as repeatedly experiencing the temple, meditation, contemplation, faith, repentance, obedience to sacred covenants, Christ-centered living, the integration of truth into the gospel and atonement of Jesus Christ, and a steadfast walk on an undeviating path toward the day of judgment and exaltation. The meaning of the Sermon will be found in similar ways.

In the course of this study, I have also explained why, in my opinion, the superficial label of plagiarism does not fit the Sermon at the Temple. I consider this an interesting secondary concern of this study. The Nephite text differs for sound reasons from the Sermon on the Mount. These differences are significant and often subtle and, along with many other factors, show that the Sermon on the Mount was not crudely spliced into the text of 3 Nephi. There is much more in the Sermon at the Temple than the theory of

plagiarism can account for. Nor is the Sermon at the Temple compromised by its similarity to the King James English or by critical studies of the New Testament. Instead, there are historical and philological reasons for believing that the Sermon at the Temple bears the hallmarks of an accurate and inspired translation of a contemporaneous record of the words that Jesus spoke in A.D. 34 at the temple in Bountiful. It is hard to imagine a more suitable text that he could have used on that occasion.

My main purpose in writing and sharing this study has been to enhance the respect and appreciation of Latter-day Saints for the Sermon at the Temple and, at the same time, to improve our understanding of the Sermon on the Mount. I realize that I have broken new ground, to say nothing of breaking stride with the preponderance of New Testament scholarly opinion by taking seriously the idea that Jesus was the author of the Sermon. I am also aware that not all the points I have advanced are equally persuasive or fully developed. I hope, however, that this uphill climb has been intelligently and engagingly conducted. After the trek, it seems clear enough to me that one should not dismiss this Mount on the basis of a few partial geological reports from the bottom. Hopefully, it will give all who make the ascent a clearer view from the top.

### **Note**

1. Harvey K. McArthur, *Understanding the Sermon on the Mount* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1978), 15.