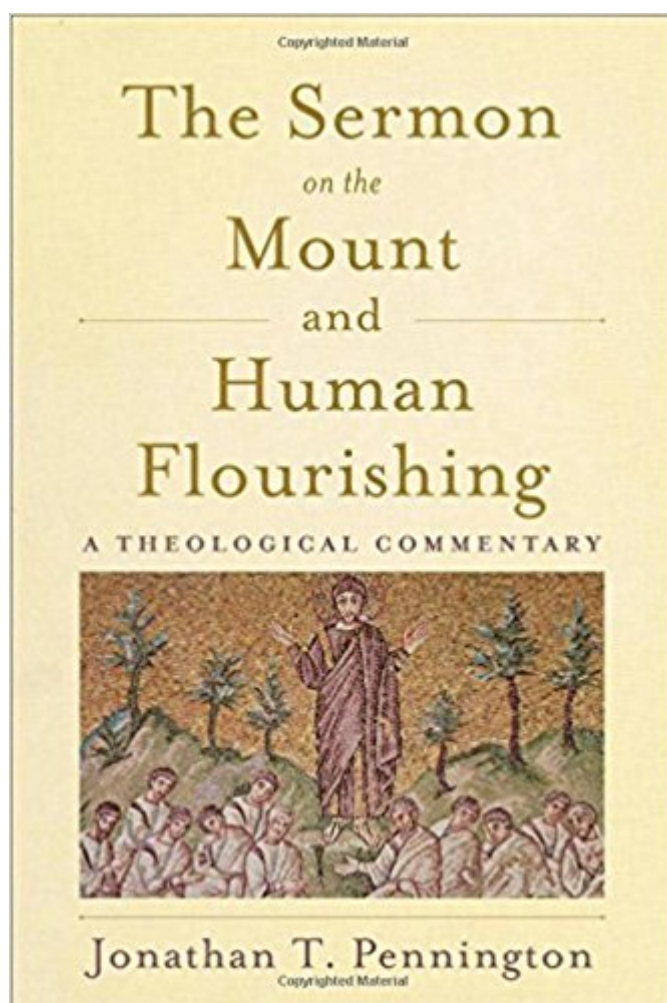


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The Sermon On The Mount And Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary



Synopsis

The Sermon on the Mount, one of the most influential portions of the Bible, is the most studied and commented upon portion of the Christian Scriptures. Every Christian generation turns to it for insight and guidance. In this volume, a recognized expert on the Gospels shows that the Sermon on the Mount offers a clear window into understanding God's work in Christ. Jonathan Pennington provides a historical, theological, and literary commentary on the Sermon and explains how this text offers insight into God's plan for human flourishing. As Pennington explores the literary dimensions and theological themes of this famous passage, he situates the Sermon in dialogue with the Jewish and Greek virtue traditions and the philosophical-theological question of human flourishing. He also relates the Sermon's theological themes to contemporary issues such as ethics, philosophy, and economics.

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Customer Reviews

"You have heard it said that the Sermon on the Mount is an impossible ideal, but Jonathan Pennington says to you that it brings blessing and virtue, wholeness and excellence through the wise words of King Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount has informed theological ethics and Christian discipleship for centuries, but often readers have not known quite what to do with these instructions. Pennington here offers a comparative and literary analysis that brilliantly plots the text's portrayal of the good life of the gospel against other portraits of the virtuous life in Jewish and Greco-Roman

literature of the day."--Michael Allen, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

Pennington has written an exegetically sane and readable commentary on the Sermon on the Mount that also provides a macroscopic reading strategy, focusing on how the Sermon envisions the realization of true human flourishing. Pennington argues what may be surprising to many today: human flourishing does not come by ignoring the law of God but by doing the will of God as whole persons. Pennington recognizes the need for balance between the unique work of Jesus in Matthew--who saves his people from their sins--and the necessity for his disciples to live in accord with the ethics of the kingdom. Pennington's exposition of Jesus's teaching has numerous implications for how we approach life today and deserves careful consideration. For anyone who has ever asked, what is the good life?, here is an answer that interacts robustly with the biblical text in its ancient context. This is a creative, substantive, and worthwhile contribution to the study of the Sermon on the Mount."--Brandon D. Crowe, Westminster Theological Seminary

Pennington offers a helpful prolegomenon to the study of the Sermon on the Mount. His fresh proposal of a new paradigm for interpreting the Sermon exhibits an awareness of the major trajectories in the history of interpretation and judiciously engages the most recent scholarly discussions. Not content with mere theory, Pennington applies his paradigm in a brief commentary on the Sermon. Along the way he offers many insights that will enrich one's study of Jesus's ethical teaching. This is essential reading for scholars interested in synoptic studies."--Charles Quarles, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

"Pennington's reading of the Sermon on the Mount is a remarkable piece of work: erudite, careful, balanced, and fresh. Grounded in meticulous historical exegesis but shaped by a distinctive sensitivity to theological hermeneutics, the book succeeds in proclaiming what is often undersold in our evangelicalism--the goodness of the good news by which we come to flourish."--Grant Macaskill, University of Aberdeen

When it comes to the Sermon on the Mount, many scholars find it difficult to comprehend the Sermon, let alone to make a contribution to the history of Christian thinking about it. Pennington has accomplished both, baptizing this great collection of Jesus's teachings into the wisdom tradition of human flourishing and virtue ethics. Even where I disagree with Pennington, I have learned from his logical and clear case for the Sermon as a summons to human flourishing. This book will prove to be an exceptional classroom tool as well as a preacher's steady resource."--Scot McKnight, Northern Seminary

Is there need for another book on the Sermon on the Mount? Yes, because few others combine the strengths, clarity, pathos, and insight of this one. It is rooted in wide reading across many centuries and traditions. It takes full measure of

the range of methods available to shed light on the passage. It is alert to personal transformation as a justified aim in reading. It is balanced, hermeneutically informed, and academically grounded without failing to be pastorally useful as well as theologically responsible. Readers of all stripes will benefit from interaction with Pennington's expositions and sometimes painfully honest wrestlings."--Robert W. Yarbrough, Covenant Theological Seminary

In this insightful volume, Pennington brings his expertise in the Gospels (and Matthew in particular) to bear on the theological masterpiece that is the Sermon on the Mount. Pennington finds in the Sermon an 'eschatological, Christ-centered, kingdom-oriented piece of wisdom literature,' whose unified theme is the goal of human flourishing. I found Pennington's careful exegesis and balanced conclusions thoroughly convincing."--Mark L. Strauss, Bethel Seminary San Diego

Pennington invites readers to consider anew the First Gospel's Sermon on the Mount. Situating the Sermon's message in the nexus of Second Temple Jewish wisdom and the Greco-Roman virtue traditions, Pennington unlocks the potential of the Sermon for the church in the twenty-first century. In his reading, the Sermon bids humans into a way-of-being-in-the-world that produces a foretaste in the present of the whole-person, full-human flourishing promised in the eschaton through the practice of Jesus's words."--Joel Willitts, North Park University

Incredible commentary and approach to the Sermon. Deeply scholarly, indeed technical at times, but the depth of meaning he gives through elucidating the context of the Sermon, both historical and literary, will forever change the way I read Jesus's most important discourse. The book is probably not for the average church member as he deals in the weeds of Greek and Hebrew texts and lexical issues. Those with some seminary education may be challenged but should still give it a read. Dr. Pennington is breaking evangelicals out of their old molds and presuppositions about the New Testament's many commands and imperatives for Jesus's disciples. The wise Way of Israel's Messiah-King and Rabbi-Teacher becomes central to the Gospels' gospel!

I am not an unbiased reviewer of Dr. Pennington's work. I was a reader of his manuscript, a student in several of his courses from '09-'12, I received a review copy of this book, and Jonathan is a close friend and mentor. But I don't think anyone truly needs an unbiased review of the SotM. Indeed, to know Jonathan's strength of character, his honest wrestling with not just theology but theology with flesh on (living theology), and his deep love for God, Holy Scripture, his humility underneath present and past colleagues, and his love for his students, family, and friends; all of these things demonstrate the Sermon applied, the Sermon lived, not in a theological ivory-tower, but in his home,

his classroom, and in his prayer closet. Jonathan is a gifted scholar and rhetorician, so when he writes about the temptation to live virtuously for the praise of others instead of his heavenly Father, his scholarship carries the weight that we so desperately need in our studies. The first section of this book is about our "orientation" to the SotM: theological, thematic, and historically-informed orientation, but also an orientation of humility below the text, rather than lording over the text as if we have it all figured out. These interrelated essays, while more academic in nature, are very accessible, and without them, approaching the section-by-section commentary on the Sermon in the second half of the book would be a far less fruitful exercise (for example, he frequently refers back to foundational interpretative arguments, themes, and ideas from the first part of the book). So, part one, orientation to the Sermon, part two, the commentary proper, and finally, a chapter of theological reflections upon completion of this major work (many doctoral dissertation ideas in this chapter). And don't forget the footnotes... there are many rich insights in small print; chase 'em. This is clearly not a formal review. I'm not that guy. You might find yourself disagreeing with his interpretation at many points precisely because he quotes from and summarizes the best arguments on the text, even (and especially) when they don't support his reading. Humble teachers are the ones from whom you want to learn. Follow Dr. Pennington as he follows after our humble Lord, and you might just reap flourishing.

Highly recommended. One of the best theological discussion of the Sermon on the Mount I have ever read. His discussion of the problems with the English translation of makarios as blessed is worth the price of the book alone.

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