

The Frick Collection: Detail Report



The Sermon on the Mount

Claude Lorrain (Claude Gellée) (French, 1604–1682)

Date ca. 1656

Medium Oil on canvas

Dimensions 67 1/2 × 102 1/4 in. (171.5 × 259.7 cm)

Credit Line Purchased by The Frick Collection, 1960

Accession Number 1960.1.162

Currently On View

First Floor, Room 13, West Gallery

Commentary Christ, surrounded by the Twelve Apostles, is shown preaching to the multitude from the wooded summit of Mount Tabor, as described in the Gospel of Matthew (5:1–2): “When he saw the crowds he went up the hill. There he took his seat, and when his disciples had gathered round him he began to address them.” It was in this discourse that Jesus set forth the principles of the Christian ethic through the Beatitudes and instituted the Lord’s Prayer. The crowds that Matthew described as “astounded at his teaching” are vividly depicted by Claude among the absorbed and gesticulating foreground figures, whose diminishing sizes enhance the dramatic spatial effects of the vast and airy landscape. The artist has compressed the geography of the Holy Land, placing on the right the distant Mount Lebanon and the Sea of Galilee — with the towns of Tiberias and Nazareth on its shore — and on the left the Dead Sea and the river Jordan. Executed for François Bosquet, Bishop of Montpellier, the painting later entered the collection of Alderman William Beckford at Fonthill House in Wiltshire, where it suffered minor damage in a fire that almost totally destroyed its companion picture, *Queen Esther Approaching the Palace of Ahasuerus*. The *Sermon on the Mount* was the product of preparatory drawings ranging from topographical layouts to compositional and figural studies, including one showing the central group of Christ and the Apostles in a configuration somewhat different from that of the painting (Teylers Museum, Haarlem). Upon completing the picture, the artist made a careful copy of it in the *Liber Veritatis* (British Museum), an album of drawings in which he recorded his paintings in chronological sequence; it was there that he noted when and for whom it had been executed. The *Sermon on the Mount* is unusual among Claude's landscapes both for its exceptional size and for its large central mass, but in its magical luminosity it is characteristic of his finest achievements. Source: *Art in The Frick Collection: Paintings, Sculpture, Decorative Arts*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.

Collection History Commissioned by François Bosquet. Jacques Meijers sale, September 9, 1722, Rotterdam, Lot 29. Alderman William Beckford, Fonthill, Wiltshire. Inherited by his son, William Beckford, in 1770. Henry Wellbore Agar-Ellis, Viscount Cliveden sale, May 2, 1806, London, Lot 51. Robert Grosvenor, Marquess of Westminster (1820). Duke of Westminster sale, June 24, 1959, Sotheby’s, Lot 8. Agnew, 1959. Heinemann, 1960. Frick, 1960. Source: *Paintings in The Frick Collection: French, Italian and Spanish. Volume II*. New York: The Frick Collection, 1968.