

“Matthew”

Fall Series 1

Lesson 9

“Matthew 7:1-29”

Objective: To understand the message that Matthew meant to convey to his audience and then to come to understand what that message means for us today as those living in the 21st century. We will seek to ascertain what this message means and to determine how we are intended to live our lives as those who are disciples of Christ in our modern context, in light of the message it contains. We will place special emphasis upon application.

Materials: I will begin by examining carefully the Greek text of Matthew, examine other early translations such as the Syriac Peshitta, various modern translations, and any other sources relevant to the historical setting of the first century Roman world that can help us to understand the original meaning. I will then examine early interpretations and understandings and examine commentaries and modern interpretations to enlighten our understanding, help us make application to our current situation.

Procedures

1. We will begin by examining the text from the Greek text.
2. We will examine the contextual setting and seek to understand as much as we possibly can about the historical, cultural, and social settings, in order to understand the message Matthew intended and that God still intends for us.
3. From here, we will seek to find out how to best apply the words of Matthew, for the early disciples, then to our modern contextual framework as disciples of Jesus.
4. We will seek to understand the attitudes that we are called to have as disciples and to reflect not only the actions that are the calling of a disciple, but also to learn how to form our attitudes and thoughts in order to reflect our calling as followers of Jesus Christ.


Lesson

In chapter 7, Jesus will turn to the matter of “judging” others. The word used here (*κρίνω - krino*) is used as a technical word in judicial settings of passing judgment, however it is also used in reference to being critical and drawing conclusions regarding other people. The verb does not necessarily have a negative connotation in itself, but the illustration that Jesus gives following it, here, indicates that it is used here for being critical of another person.¹ How often is it the case that you have seen the failings in others and perhaps even commented upon them to others? How easy it is to do that for others and yet to be totally blind to our own shortcomings and failings. Jesus here challenges those who would engage in such activity. He issues the warning that people must beware of such judgment and scrutiny, because as you judge others so to you will be judged. If you judge others in this way, that same standard of judgment will come back to haunt you and it will be applied to you. Jesus calls for them to seek a different path, a different way.

¹ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* series (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), p. 274.

At 7:3, Jesus gives an illustration of the problem in a dramatic and memorable way. Perhaps you have had a splinter or a speck in your eye and asked someone for assistance in removing it? However, have you ever seen someone with a log in their eye? How could they see at all? They would likely not be a person that you would turn to you to assist you in removing a speck from your own eye. We all know the type, the expert critic, perhaps it is the case that all of us play that part at one time or another. Such an attitude does not promote unity, it does not promote community, and it does not promote hopeful, and useful, change. Jesus uses the imagery of verses 3-6 to challenge His listeners to have a different approach, a different attitude. He challenges them, first of all, to judge themselves and then they can see more clearly how they may help others, with the full recognition that the problem of the other person is minor compared to our own faults. The attitude of such a person is changed the whole tenor of the interaction changes.

The focus changes to that of concern for helping the other person in a genuine way. Can you imagine trying to help someone remove a small speck from their eye while having a log blocking



your vision and getting in the way? Jesus imaginatively and profoundly communicates the need for self-examination, especially if we are to help others. Critiquing others is dangerous business, especially when we do it while we are still blinded by our own self-delusions. The scenario indicated by the parable is totally ridiculous: like other such parables that Jesus gives, such as the one about a camel going through the eye of a needle. The incongruity of the images, created by such parables, commands the hearer's attention and brings to the forefront the untenable position of the insincere critic.²


Verses 1-5, carry a clear and simple instruction for the followers of Jesus, and then out of the blue we have verse 6 that seems to be incongruent both, with what comes before, and with what follows. There is some confusion as to why this is the case, some say that an apparently independent verse just appears here. It stands out, and we have no context in order to help us discern its setting, or further elucidate its meaning. Traditionally, this verse has been interpreted as being concerned with the proclamation of the Gospel to, not just unworthy, but

² R.T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, p. 275.

unappreciative, recipients. There has been considerable debate as to whether it is meant to refer to Jews, or to Gentiles, and it certainly best to leave that question open as it most likely can refer equally to both. To call a Jewish person a swine was an extreme insult, but it was not exactly a compliment to a Gentile either. The ones who are referred to as swine appear to be those who are unreceptive and remain unreceptive to the Good News.³ Perhaps Jesus inserts it here to grab the attention of His audience. Whatever the case it works to help us further understand that we are to treat the Gospel as holy and sacred.

At 7:7-8, Jesus will focus on those who are in fact not only receptive to the Good News about God, but actually seek blessings and benefits from God. Though what Jesus says here does not follow on directly from what has been said in this very immediate context it is a theme that meshes well with what is said in chapter 6 about not worrying because God knows what His children in fact need. I have seen this scene, of Jesus standing at the door and knocking, in paintings, in murals, and on the outside of church

³ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Vol. 33A in the Word Biblical Commentary series (Dallas TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1993), p. 172. cf. Hebrews 10:29 **Think how much more severe a penalty will be deserved by anyone who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was consecrated, and insulted God's gracious Spirit!** REB.



buildings. Clearly the words of Jesus here have touched the imagination and brought hope and a sense of security to people down through the centuries. The implication is that the one that seeks help from God will not find a locked door. The door will be an open one that will allow not only access to what is inside, but it will allow the blessings from the other side of the door to flow into the life of the one knocking. Jesus' words touch our imagination and our soul, they reach deep inside of us to those places that can still recognize the words of their creator. They touch a part of us that often remains deeply buried and seldom is even acknowledged to exist.

Verses 9-11, continue the theme of receiving gifts from God. Through very practical and ordinary images Jesus teaches deep and tangible lessons about the nature of God. There is a warmth and a tenderness in the words of Jesus that draws the heart ever more toward God. These are words that give hope and provide light to depths of the soul. How incredible to see God in such a context? Once again, Jesus touches upon our insecurities, our moments of worry, and our deepest concerns. Verse 10 indicates that there is no danger in asking for things from God as He will

certainly not give dangerous, or harmful, gifts to those that make requests of Him. At verse 11, Jesus will contrast the nature of the hearts of men with the nature of the heart of God: One is good and focused on what is truly good and the other will focus upon evil; and despite this, even those who are evil still give good gifts to their children. How much greater expectation of good should people have of God than of those who are evil.


At 7:12, we have the introduction of what we have come to call the “Golden Rule.” In this one verse Jesus sums up the intent of the Law and the Prophets. The precepts of this verse are touched on in a negative fashion in Tobit 4:15 before the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry.⁴ “The common description of this saying as the “Golden Rule” is traditionally traced to the Roman Emperor Alexander Severus (A.D. 222-35), who, though not a Christian was reputedly so impressed by the comprehensiveness of this maxim of Jesus as a guide to good living that he had it inscribed in gold on the wall of his chamber.”⁵ Needless to say this maxim has had

⁴ **“What you yourself hate, do that to no one. Don’t get drunk with wine, and don’t let drunkards accompany you on your way.** CEB. There is also an instructive parallel in a summary of the Law by Rabbi Hillel, *Shabbat* 31A - “He came before Hillel: “Convert me.” He said to him, “*What is hateful to your fellow don’t do.*” That’s the entirety of the Torah, everything else is elaboration. So go study.” Jacob Neusner, ed. and trans., *The Babylonian Talmud*, Vol. 2, Tractate *Shabbat* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2005), p. 127.

⁵ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 284.

tremendous influence and has touched countless generations through the centuries. Jesus puts it here in the midst of this great sermon as a part of His initial teachings to those sat listening to Him. How different would our world be if more people did much more than simply pay lip-service to these words. These words challenge us to change the focus of our intentions and our heart. They promote relationship, and they challenge us to see the world in the way that God sees the world. If just these few and simple words could actually be put into practice the transformation of our world would be startling and dramatic: How I long for such a transformation.

At 7:13-14, we come to the teaching of Jesus regarding the difference between the road to life and the road to destruction, or ruin (*ἀπώλειαν - apoleian*). How prone are all of us human beings to follow the crowd, to follow along with the majority. We even prefer majority rule as our form of government. I hope and pray that people can have enough discernment in their souls to avoid the wide road, the broad gate; the way that leads to destruction. Jesus challenges His listeners to practice discernment and also to recognize that following the crowd, the majority, is the path to




ruin. How often have we all seen the effects that being in a crowd, being in a mob, has on people. The effect is not one that is positive. Here Jesus challenges people to consider carefully the path that they choose in life. The words of Jesus are not words to help us choose between more success and less success, they are words that challenge us to recognize that one path leads to hope and life, while the other path leads to despair and to destruction.⁶

Jesus makes it plain that the narrow gate is not only narrow, it is also hard. Life on the narrow road will be hard, fraught, and that way also includes danger and great difficulties. Comfort and strength should be gained by the one who recognizes that their life is hard because of the path they have chosen. How do you choose which direction you will go in your life? Do you choose the easy path, the well-travelled path, or do you choose to follow the path of Jesus that is dangerous, hard and lonely? The challenge is clear and Jesus warns of the destination that is at the end of the wide, the crowded, path. Life is at the end of the narrow path through the narrow gate, while ruin awaits at the end of the wide, the crowded path.

⁶ R.T. France, The Gospel of Matthew, p. 284.

At 7:15, Jesus switches to warning people regarding false prophets (*ψευδοπροφητῶν - pseudopropheton*). How do you recognize a false-prophet? Discerning the truth is one of the most challenging and important tasks set before the disciple of Jesus. Satan is a liar and will do anything, and everything, to deceive those that would follow the narrow path of Jesus. Jesus describes such people, the false-prophets as “ravenous wolves” (*λύκοι ἄρπαγες - lukoi harpages*). They seek to steal, to take, to rob. They seek to devour others for their own benefit. They are not what they appear to be. They are not interested in the well-being of others, they have a different agenda. They look to their own welfare, their own comfort, their own interests, their own nourishment. Jesus says in 7:16 that you will know them by their fruit. We all know how to identify good fruit. Any doubt, taste it and it will become obvious the difference between good fruit and bad fruit. With time, and with practice, we can, and we must, learn to discern the difference between the two types of fruit. In 7:17-20, Jesus continues to coach His listeners in their need to practice discernment. We need to be fruit-inspectors not those that simply listen to eloquent and pleasing words. Words



can deceive while actions are a much more sure barometer of the reality that exists in a person's heart.

At 7:19, Jesus once again issues a warning to those listening. They must not be those themselves that produce bad fruit. What can you do with a tree that produces bad fruit? You cut it down and use the wood for the fire. You stop the rot, destroy the bad tree in order that its badness does not spread. With regard to the kingdom of heaven there is no place for bad trees. That place, the place of bad trees, will pass away and no longer exist. Jesus challenges His listeners to know the good from the bad by their fruit. Each of us is to examine not just the words of others, but their own fruit. How do you know who you should listen to in this world? Where do you get advice for living your life? Who do you trust? Who should you trust? Trust those who bear the fruit that is kingdom fruit. Paul speaks of it like this: **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against things like this. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus**

have crucified self with its passions and its desires.⁷ Against such things as these there is no law.

At 7:21-23, Jesus will highlight entrance requirements for entering into the kingdom of Heaven. This is the first instance of the address “Lord” (*κύριε - kurie*) as reference to Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. This word is the common replacement for the term *YHWH* in the Old Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint.⁸ Matthew, unlike Luke does not use the term “Lord” (*κύριε - kurie*) as reference to Jesus in the way that Luke does.⁹ However, in this instance there are at least some scholars that believe that Matthew makes an exception here, at least in the sense of placing Jesus in the role of the ultimate judge, the one who will decide the eternal destiny of all human beings.¹⁰ How will He make those judgments? He will base them on what people do. Those who are characterized as “evil-doers,” as “lawbreakers”

⁷ Galatians 5:22-23. CEB.


⁸ When Jews read from the Hebrew, the Masoretic text they substitute the word LORD for the word *YHWH* in their reading of the text. In Hebrew they would say *Adonai*, rather than *YHWH*. In our Old Testament translations in English we see this indicated by the use of LORD all capital letters in our translations.

⁹ Luke often challenges His readers to see Jesus as *YHWH* when he uses the term LORD.

¹⁰ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 293.

(ἀνομίαν - *anomia*) will be told to get away from Him, they will face destruction and ruin.


It is not those that sound, and look, like Jesus' disciples that make the cut. It is not even those who perform miracles in His name that are marked as those who will enter the kingdom of heaven. It is those that do the will of His Father that will enter into the kingdom of heaven. What does it mean to do the will of the Father? What is the will of the Father? Jesus will not only proclaim the will of the Father with His words, with His miracles, with His healings, and with His driving out demons, but in powerful and revealing ways through His actions. The greatest of these actions will be displayed in the giving of His life, His time, His energy, and His attention, to the needs of others. In this Jesus reflects most clearly the nature of God and calls His disciples to do the same. It is not the great and amazing deeds that a person does that mark them as a disciple of Jesus, it is the everyday actions, the everyday compassion, the care, and the concern that is shown to others. When our heart is poured out in love for others, especially for the weak, for the vulnerable, for the helpless, then we most powerfully demonstrate in such instances demonstrate the fruit of



our heart, the core of our soul. It is in moments such as this that we most clearly reflect the image of our Father in heaven.


In 7:24-27, Jesus will reiterate His message about hearing and doing. Hearing is not enough, doing is required. It is important to hear, but it is crucial to then put into practice the words that are heard. Being a follower of Jesus requires far more than intellectual ascent. It requires more than knowing the truth in the head, it requires putting it into practice because that truth has so infiltrated the heart as to initiate a change, a transformation, of the inner being. Having the plans for the building are not sufficient; putting those plans into practice is required in order to fulfill the destiny to which Jesus calls His disciples. We are called to build upon bedrock, that which is sure, solid, and immovable.

A part of the reason for building on such a sure and solid foundation is because of the attacks that will come against those that seek this path. Floods and rain can have a devastating effect on structures. Jesus will use this imagery to convey the importance of focusing on the foundational teachings of God. The words of God are not just for consideration, for entertainment, nor



for debate, they are meant to generate action, to generate change, to initiate the building of the house that God calls to be built. The warnings are real, they are urgent, they are emergency instructions. They are not intended to be put off until we get around to them or when the time is right. There is an urgency to the words of Jesus. None of us is given the promise of a tomorrow or another moment. We are challenged by the words of Jesus to avoid destruction.

In 7:28-29 we are given the response of the crowd. The teaching of Jesus was different from what they had heard before from their teachers. They noticed the differences immediately. Jesus taught as someone with authority. For us, on this side of the cross, this is not a shock, not a surprise, but can you imagine hearing these words for the very first times that they had been heard, sitting by the Sea of Galilee? These words that would outlast the greatest empires of men, these words that would shatter families, these words that would lead people to live in ways that were considered foolish and unwise by the powerful and wise of this world. Matthew here gives us a foretaste of the more that is to come. Of course the words of Jesus have authority.



What else could they have. Jesus is after all the actual embodiment of the “word” of God. **John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. 2 The Word was with God in the beginning. 3 Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word nothing came into being. What came into being 4 through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people.**¹¹


Jesus was there at the beginning and knows first-hand the things that others can only cite as those that pass on from others. With Jesus the words are first-hand. The words of Jesus challenge His listeners to listen to the calling of their heart; a heart that knows that it is in the presence of the author of life, the sustainer of all things. How will we respond to Him today?

¹¹ CEB.

Synopsis

Jesus begins this section by challenging His listeners not to judge others so that they will not be judged. He then lays out a parable that challenges people to examine themselves with a view to being able to help others. He portrays our dilemma in terms of that which is ludicrous and startling. The focus is upon helping others. He ends this first section by warning them about casting that which is holy and sacred before those who will not have appreciation for it and will treat those things with contempt.

Next, Jesus will deliver an image that has inspired and given hope and comfort to countless generations of people. The image of standing at the door, challenges people to seek the things that they need from the ultimate source of all things, from the Father in heaven. Jesus indicates that there need be no fear in doing this and that they can be assured that God will only give to them that which is good. Jesus ends this section with what has come to be known as the Golden Rule, challenging people to treat others as they would be treated.



Jesus then admonishes His listeners to follow the path of the narrow gate and to not just follow the crowds. The path of the crowds, the wide path leads to destruction. Though it is wide and easy it is the wrong path. Next Jesus will warn His listeners of the dangers of false-prophets. They come dressed in a way that makes them look as if they are safe and docile, when in fact they are dangerous and vicious. He gives them instructions to help them identify those who are false. He tells them to examine their fruit.

Next Jesus will challenge His listeners to do more than just listen. He challenges them to put into action the words that they hear from Him and the words of God. Doing great things in the His name is no sure sign that a person is truly a follower of Jesus. A true follower actually does the things that Jesus does in the way that He does them. Jesus reiterates this point in the words that challenge people to carefully build upon the bedrock of His words and not upon the opinions of self, or of others.

Finally, we are given the reaction of the crowd to this great sermon. They are astounded and amazed by the authoritative way that Jesus teaches.

Main Points

- Jesus challenges people to avoid judging others in a way that they do not wish to be judged.
- Jesus challenges His listeners to examine themselves.
- Jesus challenges His listeners to seek God.
- Jesus challenges people to treat others the way they would wish to be treated.
- Jesus challenges His listeners to choose the narrow way rather than the path most well-travelled.
- Jesus warns people regarding false-prophets and tells them how to identify them.
- Jesus challenges His listeners to be doers of the word and not just hearers.

Questions

1. What are some ways that you have experienced the judgment of others regarding your life?
2. Why do you think we are so prone to critique others and less prone to examine our own motives and actions?
3. What are some ways that we can become better at self-examination?
4. What are some ways that being better at self-examination will help us to be better at helping others?
5. Why do you think Jesus mentions this topic?
6. What are some ways that you have experienced the casting of pearls before swine?
7. How do you identify swine?
8. How is identifying swine different from judging others?
9. What are some ways that we can insure that we do the one without doing the other?
10. When Jesus indicates that when we ask, seek, and knock, the door will be opened, what is He talking about?
11. Why do you think it is important that we make requests to God?
12. How important is it for us to hear the message of Jesus here regarding the goodness of the Father? Why?
13. When is a time in your life when you feel that you were treated in the way that the other person wanted to be treated?

14. How do the words of Jesus about how we should treat others change our perspective on life?
15. How do you see the warnings of Jesus regarding the narrow and the difficult road challenging your perspectives on life?
16. How do the words of Jesus regarding the difficulty of the way that leads to life challenge the way you make decisions in life?
17. What are some ways that you can identify a false-prophet?
18. How do you identify good fruit in the people you meet?
19. What are some ways that you seek to insure that you are actually “doing” what God says rather than just “hearing?”
20. What are some things that you consider to be foundational in your walk as a disciple of Jesus?
21. Why do you think the crowd was so amazed by what Jesus said?
22. What are some ways that you today discern who you should follow?

To Take Home

What is Important to know?

It is important to know that the words of Jesus bring to us the truth and wisdom of God. They are not like the words of other men, because He is not like other men. Jesus teaches deep and powerful truths in His words. His words are meant to be put into action not simply heard. What are some ways that people hear words but do not put them into practice?

Where is God in these words?

God is in these words challenging His children to live into the life that He has called them to live. People very often hear words and either fail to put them into action or misinterpret the words, applying them in ways that were not intended. God has continually sought to call His children home. We have continually been disobedient, deceived, and misdirected. What are some ways that the words of this chapter bring clarity to the direction that our life should take?

What does any of this mean for how I live my life?

The words of Jesus here challenge all who would hear them to reexamine the way they perceive their life to be lived. Jesus seeks to provide clarity where there had been confusion, simplicity where there had been complexity, and focus where there had been apathy, neglect, and indifference. Jesus seeks to help His listeners to understand their need for action and for self-examination. What are some ways that the words of Jesus, in this section, challenge you to have a different set of priorities in your life?

What is the word of God calling us to do?

The word of God is calling upon people to be doers of the word and not merely those that hear the words of God. Jesus makes it clear that the way of life is a hard and difficult path. He also indicates that few take that path. As you think about the path that most people take, what are some ways that you have seen people taking the easy path? Why do you think there is such a tendency for people to want to take the easy path rather than the difficult path?