

What ultimately matters is how you respond to Jesus



What matters in life – Sermon on the Mount - Session 9^{i 1}

CITY BIBLE FORUM

To explore how being a follower of Jesus is about trust (that his view on reality is right) and obedience (putting his words into practice) (from Matthew 7:13-29)

Matthew 7:13 - 29¹³ Go in through the narrow gate. The gate to destruction is wide, and the road that leads there is easy to follow. A lot of people go through that gate. ¹⁴ But the gate to life is very narrow. The road that leads there is so hard to follow that only a few people find it.

¹⁵ Watch out for false prophets! They dress up like sheep, but inside they are wolves who have come to attack you. ¹⁶ You can tell what they are by what they do. No one picks grapes or figs from thornbushes. ¹⁷ A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that produces bad fruit will be chopped down and burned. ²⁰ You can tell who the false prophets are by their deeds.

²¹ Not everyone who calls me their Lord will get into the kingdom of heaven. Only the ones who obey my Father in heaven will get in. ²² On the day of judgment many will call me their Lord. They will say, “We preached in your name, and in your name we forced out demons and worked many miracles.” ²³ But I will tell them, “I will have nothing to do with you! Get out of my sight, you evil people!”

²⁴ Anyone who hears and obeys these teachings of mine is like a wise person who built a house on solid rock. ²⁵ Rain poured down, rivers flooded, and winds beat against that house. But it did not fall, because it was built on solid rock.

²⁶ Anyone who hears my teachings and doesn't obey them is like a foolish person who built a house on sand. ²⁷ The rain poured down, the rivers flooded, and the winds blew and beat against that house. Finally, it fell with a crash.

²⁸ When Jesus finished speaking, the crowds were surprised at his teaching. ²⁹ He taught them like someone with authority, and not like their teachers of the Law of Moses.

Jesus is just about to finish his sermon on the mountainside. The sermon has been all about what life in the kingdom of heaven – that is, in God's kingdom, is like. However, before we discuss Jesus' conclusion, we need to consider the gist of his argument so far.

Previous weeks

“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven”. (Matthew 5:20)

¹ Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, NIV, Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society.

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them to do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets”. (Matthew 7:12)

These are 2 of the hardest verses in Jesus’ teaching, but they also summarise the key ideas.

Q1. From these 2 verses, and in your own words, what do you think are the 2 most important ideas when we are talking about life in God’s kingdom?

1. Life in God’s kingdom means.....

Having a heart that is right with God (from Matthew 5:20)

2. Life in God’s kingdom means.....

Treating others as you would like to be treated (from Matthew 7:12)

This week

Jesus concludes his sermon by presenting his audience with a number of choices.

Choose your gate

Matthew 7:13 - 14¹³ Go in through the narrow gate. The gate to destruction is wide, and the road that leads there is easy to follow. A lot of people go through that gate. ¹⁴ But the gate to life is very narrow. The road that leads there is so hard to follow that only a few people find it.

Q2. Assuming Jesus isn’t talking about physical gates, what do you think he is talking about?

The choice between eternal life or destruction.

Q3. Do you think Jesus is being manipulative, talking about “destruction”?

Not if it’s really something that is worth avoiding – in that case, Jesus is being gracious in warning us of it.

Q4. How do you work out which road you’re on?

From how popular it is, and how easy it is to follow.

Choose your prophets

Prophet: a person who speaks for God or a deity, or by divine inspiration [dictionary.com]

Matthew 7:15-20 ¹⁵ Watch out for false prophets! They dress up like sheep, but inside they are wolves who have come to attack you. ¹⁶ You can tell what they are by what they do. No one picks grapes or figs from thornbushes. ¹⁷ A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that produces bad fruit will be chopped down and burned. ²⁰ You can tell who the false prophets are by their deeds.

Q5. Why are false prophets difficult to spot?

Because they look genuine.

Q6. So how do you identify a false prophet?

In what they do, they show what they are really like.

Q7. How do you know Jesus isn't a false prophet?

It's worth judging him by his actions. Did he act according to what he taught?

Choose your actions

Matthew 7:21-23 ²¹ Not everyone who calls me their Lord will get into the kingdom of heaven. Only the ones who obey my Father in heaven will get in. ²² On the day of judgment many will call me their Lord. They will say, "We preached in your name, and in your name we forced out demons and worked many miracles." ²³ But I will tell them, "I will have nothing to do with you! Get out of my sight, you evil people!"

Q8. How do you feel, reading this?

It's unsettling – and it should be! Jesus is saying it's possible to be deluded.

Q9. To get in to heaven, you need to "obey [Jesus'] Father". What "obedience" counts with God? (think about what we've learnt from Jesus' sermon so far).

Having a righteousness of the heart – having a heart that is right with God. Treating others as you would like to be treated.

Q10. If that's God's criterion where does that leave you?

It leaves us in a quandary. How do we know our hearts are right with God? What about those times when we haven't treated others like we want to be treated?

Words about Jesus

Romans 3:21-24 ²¹“But now a righteousness from God...has been made known, to which the Law and Prophets testify. ²²This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus”.

Q11. How does this help?

Having a heart that is right with God is something that God initiates. He initiates it by sending Jesus to redeem us – and if we trust in his death for us, then we are justified (declared right) before God. Accepting the rescue is part of our obedience. And it is the crucial part in terms of getting into heaven.

Choose your foundations

Matthew 7:24-27 ²⁴ Anyone who hears and obeys these teachings of mine is like a wise person who built a house on solid rock. ²⁵ Rain poured down, rivers flooded, and winds beat against that house. But it did not fall, because it was built on solid rock.

²⁶ Anyone who hears my teachings and doesn't obey them is like a foolish person who built a house on sand. ²⁷ The rain poured down, the rivers flooded, and the winds blew and beat against that house. Finally, it fell with a crash.

Q12. If Jesus isn't just talking about good building practice, what is he talking about?

How you respond to Jesus' teaching.

Q13. When do the foundations of a building become obvious?

When there's a weather disaster.

Q14. What disaster could Jesus really be referring to, do you think?

When God judges our life – the way we have lived will show whether Jesus' teaching was foundational or not.

To conclude

Jesus is pushing people to make a choice: to hear what he has to say, and respond in trust and obedience.

Q15. If someone trusts Jesus, what does this mean?

It means to trust that Jesus' view on reality is right. That having a heart that is right with God is what matters. (And from the Romans passage, that it is Jesus' death on our behalf that provides that righteousness).

Q16. If someone obeys Jesus, what does this mean?

It means they put what he says into practice.

ⁱ COPYRIGHT City Bible Forum (www.citybibleforum.org) a ministry of Evangelising Commerce Inc (NSW), 2013. This material may be reproduced free-of-charge for non-profit use only as long as this copyright notice appears, and the study is not modified in any way. For any other use, or to modify the material, please contact us to arrange copyright permission, which may involve a small fee to help finance the production of such resources by the staff of City Bible Forum. Contact info@citybibleforum.org or tel: (02) 9251 1166 or GPO Box 3266, Sydney NSW 2001.