

6. Walking Out True Faith in God

The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 7:1-29

When Jesus spoke to the crowd on the hillside, these Beatitudes, or "beautiful attitudes" as we are calling them, the people were so hungry for the message that Jesus was bringing to them. He taught as no one had ever spoken before. He showed them clearly the ways of the kingdom and gave an open invitation for them to experience it. We may look back at that time when His disciples walked with Him and say, "It would have been so wonderful to have been there and heard Jesus speak firsthand and see Him perform miracles. It would have been so wonderful to be able to look upon His face!" If you have ever had thoughts like this, I would encourage you to take and apply these beautiful words and lay them up like treasures in your heart. God has a feast for us in His words. He wants us to behold Him through His words and fellowship with Him in worship and prayer.

The Christian pastor and author A.W. Tozer once said, "We can have as much of God as we want." That may sound too good to be true, but upon careful consideration, I do believe it is true. Why? Because God does not withhold anything good from us, and the most precious thing that we could ask for would be more of His character, His presence in our lives. What stops us from knowing the presence of God in our lives? Unforgiveness, bitterness, and anger with our fellow man. These are some of the things that Jesus has already addressed as He gets to the heart of the matter, that is to say, our hearts. In this study, Jesus continues to address our heart issues with the goal of bringing us closer to Himself.

One of the most damaging things to a person's self-esteem is criticism. Have you ever been on the end of harsh judgementalism? Criticism can crush a person's spirit. I remember starting as a young person in my early twenties, just learning to preach and teach the Word of God. I had an influential person in my life who, after he had heard me preach a couple of times, told me that I should give up trying to preach because I was no good at it. Those words crushed me at the time! A person who experiences that kind of judgment can do one of two things. Either he can completely abandon any thoughts of carrying on in ministry, or he can respond by getting better at whatever God is calling him to do. I said to myself, if I am not good at communicating the Word of God, I am going to work hard at it so that I have something interesting and upbuilding to say. Now and again, those words come back to me, encouraging me not to rest on the things I have learned and the wisdom I have accumulated but to fulfill God's call to do everything I can to go into the world and preach the Gospel. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had words to say about being careful in our judging of others:

Judging Others

⁷ "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ²For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. ³"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. ⁶"Do

not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces (Matthew 7:1-6).

What are some of the thoughts about judgment that you can take from this text?

The word *judge* (v.7) is from the Greek word, *krino*, from which we get the word *critic*. The root meaning of this word is to separate, but it can also mean to judge in a courtroom or to discern truth from error. Discerning truth from falsehood is something that we are meant to do and is essential to our discipleship. So, Jesus is not saying that we are never to make any judgments, as He goes on to say in verse 6, “Do not give dogs what is sacred.” We are not expected to turn a blind eye to error.

Paul the apostle taught his protégé, Timothy, not to lay hands on someone quickly (1 Timothy 5:22). In other words, not to give leadership authority too soon to up-and-coming leaders, but to try their character. All this requires leaders to make judgment calls about people. So what is Jesus getting at when He tells us not to judge? The fruiting on a branch goes through various stages before it should be plucked and eaten. Being a disciple of Christ means that we are to judge our brothers and sisters with a large heaping of grace rather than critique them at every stage of their growth. Give them room to grow in grace, reminding ourselves that the Master will judge us with the measure we have used in our lifetime.

You cannot go very far as a disciple if you cannot judge where people are coming from, but in your judgment, be careful not to judge according to what you see on the outside. Some of God's most outstanding leaders have grown up under terrible circumstances and have had little of this world's provisions or encouragement. In your growth as a disciple of the Lord Jesus, let your judgment be towards yourself first. Take the beam out of your own eye so that you can take the speck out of the eye of another. Be careful to listen to the correction of the Holy Spirit as He encourages changes in your thoughts and actions. New believers should take care to work on their own character before they can expect to speak into the lives of others or be leaders in God's church. I still shudder to think where I would be today if I had listened to that influential person who advised me to give up teaching God's Word.

Ask, Seek, Knock

⁷“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹“Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! ¹²So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 7:7-12).

The Lord now turns His attention to giving input and encouragement to prevailing prayer. The verbs He uses are in ascending degrees, going from asking the Father to going a step further by adding action to our asking, seeking out the answer to our asking. Too many people passively wait for the answer to come in the mail, and God sometimes answers that way, but we should seek

opportunities for God to answer our prayers. Sometimes, it means seeking a better job or starting a business. Difficulties can be God's opportunity to teach us new things. The third level of intensity is to accompany our seeking by knocking. The thought is one of pounding on the door, adding passion to our prayers. In the original Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, asking, seeking, and knocking are all in the present imperative, which means that we are to keep on asking, seeking, and knocking. Jesus presumes that those who are seeking Him on the hillsides that day are good fathers. He appeals to their desire to give good things to their children, saying that it is foolishness to think that the Heavenly Father would do less. He says, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those of His own that love Him?

The Gospel writer, Luke, goes further in his account of Jesus' teaching here. He adds a mini parable to give us an example of what the Lord is talking about:

The Parable of the Friend at Midnight

Passion, desire, and persistence for whatever you are asking will obtain results in prayer. This whole idea of faithful persistence is so important to the Lord that He gave us a parable, hoping to encourage us to pray through any apparent obstacles. What happens when there seems to be no answer and it appears as though your prayers of faith are being ignored?

Let's read the Parable of the Friend at Midnight:

⁵Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, ⁶because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' ⁷"Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' ⁸I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs (Luke 11:5-8, Emphasis added).

In the passage of Scripture above, we have the story of a traveler who arrived at his friend's house in the middle of the night, and during the summer months in the Middle East, travelers often journeyed late to avoid the heat of the day. The traveler was on a journey and decided to stay the rest of the night with a friend as he passed through a particular town. Having no email or phone in those days, his friend was not expecting him and had no bread to feed him. It was a sacred obligation to give hospitality by providing the traveler with food and a place to sleep. What should the house owner do? No bread to put before his friend was a considerable embarrassment to him. He did have a friend that he thought might get up and give him some bread, so off he went to wake up his friend and get some bread. It was common in the Middle East at that time for whole families to sleep together in the same room. Even today, in some countries in Asia, this is not uncommon.

In 1976, I traveled with a friend across Europe and through the Middle East into Asia. In one town we passed through, there were no regular hotels that we could find, and upon inquiry, we were invited to stay where many other Asian people were staying the night. It was already 10:00 P.M., and we were exhausted from our travels on a rickety bus over mountain ranges. It seemed pretty cheap until we were shown the room in which we were to stay. It was a large room with about twenty other people sleeping on the floor on a very thick piled carpet or a sleeping mat. Naturally,

we were shocked to find that we were sleeping in the same room with many others already asleep on the floor. It was a communal sleeping room. There was no furniture in the room, just a wood-fired stove in the middle to keep people warm. It was quite an experience to sleep with about twenty other people in the same room!

To Westerners, it seems odd that many people would sleep in the same room, but for people in the Middle East and Asia, it was not abnormal. Jesus describes a man who awakened after midnight and had a similar situation where his family all slept together. This situation would mean he has to get up and be very careful not to step on his kids in the dark, find the lamp and try to light it, and then go and find the bread, which would probably wake up the whole household. We can imagine him speaking in hushed tones down to his friend, perhaps through a window, hoping that his friend would understand why he could not get up and give him the bread he needed. His response to his friend was, “My children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything” (Luke 11:7). That sounds like a final answer. However, that was not the end of the story.

William Barclay, in his commentary, writes:

In the East, no one would knock on a shut door unless the need was imperative. In the morning, the door was opened and remained open all day, for there was little privacy, but if the door was shut, that was a definite sign that the friend did not wish to be disturbed. But the seeking house owner was not deterred. Instead, he kept knocking.¹

In telling this parable, why do you think Jesus chose to include a man who was reluctant to get up and help his friend? What do you think Jesus was trying to illustrate by this character's actions and the way he responded to his friend?

Andrew Murray, the writer of the book *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, makes an excellent observation regarding this passage:

What a deep heavenly mystery persevering prayer is! The God who has promised and who longs to give the blessing holds it back. It is a matter of such deep importance to Him that His friends on earth should know and fully trust their rich Friend in heaven! Because of this, He trains them in the school of delayed answers to find out how their perseverance really does prevail. They can wield mighty power in heaven if they simply set themselves to it!²

The emphasis is on the word *boldness* in Luke 18:8 in the New International Version (NIV) or *impunity* in the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. The Greek word *Anaideia* is translated into our English word "boldness" in the NIV. This Greek word literally means to be without shame. The Key Word Study Bible says it means: “Shamelessness, unabashedness, audacity. The word describes the brazen persistence displayed in the pursuit of something, an insistence characterized by rudeness and a lack of compunction.”³

¹ William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, Gospel of Luke*, Saint Andrew Press Publishers, Page 145.

² Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, Whitaker House Publishers, 1981, Page 64.

³ Key Word Study Bible, AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, TN 37422. Page 1585.

The King James Version translates *Anaideia* using the English word “importunate.” Webster’s New World dictionary says that the word importunate means: “urgent or persistent in asking or demanding; refusing to be denied; annoyingly urgent or persistent, troublesome.”

Why would Jesus use this word? What does He want us to understand about prayer by approaching God with shamelessness or audacity?

There is a faith and persistence that will not let go of God until one gets what they need. This describes a faith that pleases God. Indeed, the point of the parable is that the man went from asking to seeking and, in his urgent need, went knocking on the door and would not let his friend fall back asleep until he gave him the bread he needed. What Jesus is saying in this passage is that if a grouchy friend can be persuaded to get up and give his friend some bread due to some shameless, brazen persistence, **how much more** will God, who longs to feed and clothe His people when they ask Him? This story has been given to us to encourage us to prevail in prayer and not give up. If importunity and shameless audacity can be used to bring one’s needs before a man who was angry at being inconvenienced, how much more will God do for us? God is infinitely kind, willing, and ready to do good to us. Our Father is not angry at our importunity but longs that we learn how to overcome by persisting in prayer.

Jesus carries on from talking about persistence and faith in prayer by talking about the golden rule that should govern the behavior of every believer: “**So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets**” (Matthew 7:12). This kind of teaching had never been heard before that day on the hillside. This saying of Jesus has been called “The capstone of the whole discourse,” being a new way of looking at life entirely. Before this time, the saying was always in the negative. The great Jewish Rabbi, Hillel (110 BCE-10 CE), said, “What is hateful to yourself, do to no other; that is the whole Law, and the rest is commentary.” There is the Golden Rule in its negative form,⁴ But Jesus is teaching a whole new slant on the behavior of the believer in Christ. Before the Sermon on the Mount, the prevailing teaching was not to do things to others that we wouldn’t want them to do to us, but Jesus put it in a positive form: “Do to others what you would have them do to you.” A man, by doing nothing, could believe he was pleasing God, but Jesus is saying for us to take steps of action to do things that will change society by positive action.

The Narrow and Wide Gates

¹³“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it (Matthew 7:13-14).

People make decisions about life throughout their day, but deciding to live by pandering to our flesh, our sinful nature, and by doing what seems right for our own desires is seen by Jesus as a broad gate and a road that many walk along. Instead, the Lord would have us take the difficult road, the road that leads to life and eternity. Jesus gives us a picture of a man entering through an easy-to-find large gate into a major city and walking along a broad, wide main avenue. The broad

⁴ William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, The Gospel of Matthew*, Saint Andrew Press Publishers, Page 273.

road is so wide that it will accommodate any ideas about who you are and where you are going. You can carry anything on your shoulders, and you won't even have to unburden yourself of your baggage to get in through the gate. That way takes no effort on your part, and no change of heart is required, for all are accepted. Unfortunately, it is the way to destruction, and many are walking on that main avenue. Many of us reflect on times in our lives when we have gone through a gate that led to giving in to our passions and sinful actions and attitudes that we now regret and have taken a toll on our character.

Jesus also talked about a narrow gate, a way not easy to find and takes effort and the casting off of lethargy and a passive spirit to seek out the way with our whole heart. There are only a few who find and walk the narrow road. The author Alexander Maclaren likened the first two Beatitudes to the side posts of the narrow gate or door. One side post denotes the need for an awareness of one's spiritual bankruptcy, while the other side speaks of the demand for sorrow over sin. When one enters through the narrow gate, the road to eternal life remains narrow and difficult and requires us to die daily to selfishness, but it is the way the Holy Spirit transforms us. We'll only see the fruit of the Spirit's work in us on that last day when we will stand before the Lord of Glory, for we "graduate" into eternity with the inner character that God has shaped us into.

True and False Prophets

¹⁵“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them (Matthew 7:15-20).

Many do not see how false prophets are speaking their messages every day. We are all aware of those who spend five minutes teaching and 20 minutes on how we should give our finances to them. The false prophet looks the part on the outside but talks little, if any, about repentance and faith in Christ. This world’s false prophets in our time come to us more through lies and deception through the media. With the repeal of the Smith Mundt Act in 2013, propaganda is now lawful to be propagated to the American public. The false prophets come at us on the news programs of today, presenting a false reality and putting down anything to do with God’s kingdom. The news programs are all owned at the board level by spiritual Babylon and advance false narratives, seeking to promote a world system controlled by evil spirits acting through people from behind the scenes. The believer in Christ is to be discerning about what the main TV news channels and entertainment channels are advocating. May God give us discernment to see the fruit of laws and things that are being supported. We need the Holy Spirit to open our eyes: “**To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn**” (Isaiah 8:20). With so much deception going on in this world, more than ever, we should be those who search out the Scriptures daily.

True and False Disciples

²¹“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ (Matthew 7:21-23).

There will always be those around us who behave Christianly but do not have the life of God and His Spirit operative in their lives. They are wolves in sheep’s clothing. They look like genuine believers and even seem to be walking in power and authority but lack the fruit of the Spirit. They will say the right things, although when you ask them certain things about the Christian faith, they will avoid plain statements of where they stand on certain sins of the flesh. Some are deceived into thinking they are going to heaven because of their deeds, but Christ is the Door of the Sheepfold, and He knows if we genuinely believe and trust in Him. One of the most horrifying things that can ever happen to a person is to think they will go to heaven when they die only to hear the Master say, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (v. 23). One can look the part, say the right things, but never come into a right relationship with the King of Heaven.

The Wise and Foolish Builders

²⁴“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” ²⁸When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law (Matthew 7:24-29).

The Lord culminates this awesome sermon on how a true believer lives their life by warning them and us about the foundation of one’s faith. Is the way you live your life based on the firm foundation of the outflow of the life of Christ living in you, or is your life lived out on the shifting sands of your thoughts about how you live your life? The key is to put into practice what you hear from the Sermon on the Mount. These words of Jesus are real treasures that will take you to an eternity with Him in His Kingdom. They are not to be taken lightly but written on the table of your heart, the area within us that makes up the decision center of your being. My prayer is that each of us hearing these words will not let them slip from our minds but let them bring change to our values and practices in life.

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