

## **Is Good Enough Good Enough? Matthew 7:12-27**

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was a call to a new way of life for the people who were listening to him on that day. But they weren't the kind of people you'd think were in need of a new way of life. They were already religious; they had the holy Scriptures, the Temple, the worship, the sacrifices. They were surrounded by all kinds of religious experts and thought they were on the right track. But Jesus showed them they had been led astray and were not living according to the will of God. They needed to go a different direction. So throughout the sermon we've seen him giving them a new calling and purpose, a new understanding of righteousness, new motivations, new aim for their lives, new lifestyle, new way of relating to people and to God. Things would have to be different for those who chose to follow him.

And that's what the Sermon on the Mount is saying to many Christians today – Jesus is calling many of us to a new way of life. Even if we've been part of Christianity for a long time; part of the church, believing in Jesus and doing what we think we're supposed to do. If the things Jesus has been teaching throughout this sermon don't match up with the Christian life you know and practice, it's a strong indication that you aren't on the right track and need to change direction. That can be really hard for modern Christians to accept because we assume that as long as we're Christians, we're going the right direction. Whatever we're doing must be good enough. But if what we're doing and how we're living doesn't match up with what Jesus is teaching, then is it really good enough? Or is it just empty religion – like the people Jesus was originally speaking to?

As we reach the end of this series and consider all that we've heard Jesus say about: being salt and light in the world, and being transformed in every area of our lives, and being motivated by the joy of the glory of God, and making it our primary goal to lay up treasures in heaven, and making it our highest priority to seek first his kingdom and righteousness, and showing compassion and mercy to all people, and engaging in a personal relationship with our heavenly Father – as we consider all these things, we need to ask ourselves if we're on the right track. And if we're not, we need to ask ourselves if we're willing to

change and walk in submission and obedience to our Lord and Savior, or just keep going the way we're going.

As Jesus concludes this sermon, he's going to make some remarks that will challenge us. Are we going to listen to him and follow his ways, even if that means a different kind of life than we've learned to live? Or are we going to keep going down the path we're on, believing the soothing voices that tell us our way is good enough, trusting that everything will be just fine in the end if we do? May the Holy Spirit give us ears to hear what Jesus says today, and hearts that are open and ready to obey.

I want to look at Jesus' concluding remarks in 3 sections. The first includes a summary of his teachings and a call to follow him.

Read Matthew 7:12-14.

<sup>12</sup> *"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

<sup>13</sup> *"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. <sup>14</sup> For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*

Jesus has said a lot of things up to this point and given a lot of instructions about how to treat other people, but if he were to boil it down to a simple principle for us to live by, it would be: *"Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."* We call this the "Golden Rule."

As you look back over his sermon, his instructions for how God wants us to treat people are primarily back in chapter 5. And when you look at what he says there, you see that all his instructions follow this Golden Rule:

- If God convicts you of harboring anger and unforgiveness toward someone, you need to go to them and seek reconciliation.
- If you are tempted by lust or want to divorce your spouse, you need to flee from temptation and be faithful to your spouse and to your marriage.
- Rather than making flippant promises that you may or may not keep, you need to be a person of your word.

- Rather than paying back evil for evil, you need to show kindness to difficult people. Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors.

Whatever you wish others would do to you, do also to them. Jesus makes a similar statement in Matthew 22:37-40: *“And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”<sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment.<sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.<sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”*

So he’s giving them a general rule to live by when it comes to other people. If in doubt, simply come back to this guiding rule: Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them. Love your neighbor as yourself. If you do that, you capture the heart of how God wants you to live. And if your beliefs lead you in a different direction, and you don’t consider or care about other people, but put yourself first, you need to recognize that you’re off base and need to change.

The other statement he makes in the verses we read is a summary of the kind of life he’s been calling them to live. He uses the idea of a gate and a path. His way of life is through a narrow gate and along a difficult path. It’s narrow because not many would find or choose it. And it’s difficult because for most it would mean persecution, rejection, relocation, and all the struggles that go with it. Jesus realized that for those who chose to follow him, it would be difficult in this life, and he wanted them to know that. But he also wanted them to know that following him would be worth it because it’s the only way of life that actually leads to life. He is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one would come to the Father except through him.

The path they were currently on was a different one. It had a wide gate because most people would take it. It would be easy because it fit in with their culture and government and religious leaders. They wouldn’t face persecution, rejection, or relocation. Those who stayed on it would have an easier, more comfortable life. But in the end it would lead to destruction because it rejected Jesus and who he was and therefor didn’t lead to the Father. Despite being religious, it left people in their sin and under condemnation.

So Jesus is calling people to follow him and walk in his way. The way they were on wasn't going to be good enough. And that's the same for us today if our version of the Christian life is different than the way our Savior is actually leading. We need to follow Jesus because there are other forms of Christianity that don't really follow him and they lead to destruction, not life. Enter the narrow gate and find life.

As Jesus continues his concluding remarks, the next section contains warnings of the opposition they would face.

Matthew 7:15-20

*<sup>15</sup> "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. <sup>16</sup> You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.*

So there would be imposters – false prophets – people who would look good and sound good on the outside and try to lead people away from Jesus and walking in his ways. The first ones would be the scribes and Pharisees who would try to convince people that Jesus was a fraud. Then there would be others who were deeply influenced by the scribes and Pharisees but also acknowledged Christ as the risen Savior and they would try to convince people to follow a mix of legalistic Judaism along with faith in Christ.

Since then, there have been countless others who teach a form of Christianity but it's polluted with other teachings that pull people away from Christ and the true gospel. And that's what we have to watch out for today. That's why the Sermon on the Mount is so valuable to us because it brings us back directly to Jesus' teachings and shows us that if we're believing and living in a way that's contrary or different than what he says, we've gotten off track and begun to follow some kind of false prophet or false teaching.

How do you know they're false? Well besides teaching things contrary to what Jesus says (which can be hard to see because false prophets are master manipulators and very convincing), Jesus says you will know them by their fruit. In other words, don't just listen to what they say, pay attention to how they live their lives and the kind of character they have. Even if what they say sounds good, if what you see in their life does not emulate the kind of Christian maturity you see in the Bible, that is a clear warning sign. People aren't going to be perfect, but there needs to be good fruit. And when you see bad fruit it's a strong indication that you're looking at a bad tree.

Jesus continues his warning...

Matthew 7:21-23

*<sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' <sup>23</sup> And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'*

Now a lot of people get really worried about these verses and even some devoted Christians become afraid that they're going to be in for a terrible shock on the day of judgment, but you have to look at what Jesus says in its context. Jesus is warning the people about false prophets and that's who he's talking about here. This is a description of what they're like and of what's going to happen to them.

There will be Christian leaders who say that Jesus is Lord and who appear to do all kinds of signs and wonders in the name of Jesus, but who are completely false. They are operating in the flesh and fooling people or with the assistance of demonic power and performing counterfeit signs to lead people astray. There are some really obvious examples right now in our world today and all kinds of people have been duped into their deception. In most cases I think the false prophets have also been duped by their own deception and believe they're in the right, which is why Jesus says what he says in these verses. These false prophets are workers of lawlessness and are in for a rude awakening on the day of judgment when their wickedness is exposed and they

are rejected by Christ. So Jesus warns his listeners to not be duped by them. You will recognize them by their fruit. And in most cases it becomes pretty obvious over time.

And now, we come to the last section of concluding remarks and the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Here Jesus gives a final charge to listen to his words and obey.

Read Matthew 7:24-27.

<sup>24</sup> “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. <sup>26</sup> And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. <sup>27</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

These words are very clear and don't need an explanation, but they do need serious consideration. Don't let your familiarity with these verses cause you to miss the gravity of what Jesus is saying. As I've said many times already, Jesus is calling his listeners to a new way of life, and not only does that include the Jewish people in Jesus' day, it also includes many Christians today.

Have you listened to what Jesus has spoken in this Sermon on the Mount? Is it in line with what you believe and how you are living your life? If so, you have built your house on the rock and your life and future is secure. No matter what kind of storms you face, your foundation will not give way. Your walls will not fall. And you will make it through. Continue to follow Christ and you will receive your reward!

But if what you believe and how you are living your life does not line up with what Jesus has spoken, and you have been following another way of Christianity and hope that it's good enough, the image of a house completely collapsing is Jesus' merciful plea to warn you that it's not, and it's time to make a change. It's time to follow him.

That change requires faith and repentance. Each of us must believe what Jesus says, turn away from whatever has been contrary to it, and seek to live in obedience to him. It's a narrow gate and a hard road but it's the very road that leads to life. And if you walk it, you will be walking with Jesus. He will be completely yours. All that he's done for you and all that he has for you will be completely yours. He will never fail you. He will give you everything you need for the journey and one day, when you reach the end of the road in this life, he will welcome you into his everlasting kingdom where you will find a greater joy than you could ever imagine.