

## **Series Sermon on the Mount**

### **Scripture Matthew 7: 21-27**

The Sermon on the Mount has been called a manifesto for the Christian counter-culture (*by John Stott*). Scripture states that the followers of Jesus are to live such good lives among the many cultures of the world that the members of those cultures will see the good deeds of believers and glorify God. That is how the kingdom of God will be advanced on earth. That will bring about God's will on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus wanted His listeners to understand that they could please God only by being counter-cultural people. In order for them to be kingdom people, they would have to live on earth according to the standards of heaven. This would make them unique people, radically different than even their religious leaders, the Pharisees and teachers of the law.

In the same way, Jesus wants all of His followers to follow the ways of the kingdom. He wants those of us who are modern day followers to be like salt in a tasteless world and like light in areas of spiritual darkness. He wants us to fulfill the purposes of God as revealed in the Scriptures. Fortunately, we today have the power of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit to help us, which the Apostles did not have until after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that His listeners had to make a choice about the direction of their lives. Throughout His teaching, Jesus presented His listeners with options, and, having heard the options, His listeners were no longer ignorant of God's standards and they could no longer avoid making a decision. They could pursue either of two kinds of righteousness, that of the Jewish religious leaders or that of God; they could accumulate treasures for either heaven or earth; they could serve only one of two masters, either God or material possessions; they could enter one of two gates and journey through life on one of two roads, either the way to eternal life or the way to destruction; and they could produce one of two kinds of fruit, either good or bad.

In the verses we will think about today, Jesus delivered a warning and then made a final appeal. He said that the choices to be made by His listeners required more than intellectual assent. He said that token agreement with His words would not be enough to qualify them for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Then He urged His listeners to use wise judgment about how they chose to live out their days on earth.

Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus strongly emphasized the need for practical application of the truth of His words. He taught that the kind of righteousness which was required of kingdom people had to reach deep into their minds and hearts, and affect their attitudes and intentions, and not be limited to superficial external behavior. The warning is in our first reading.

### **Read Matthew 7:21-23**

The passage that we thought about last week, verses 15-20, described false prophets. The verses we just read describe false followers, or perhaps we can say, self-deluded followers.

There are many individuals who consider themselves to be Christians. About 70 per cent of the citizens of the United States claim to be Christians. Worldwide, about one-third of humanity claims to be Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox Christian. In other words, one in three people in the world, which works out to be about 2.3 billion people, acknowledge Jesus as the Savior of mankind, but this does not mean that every one of these professing Christians is a genuine believer. Remember what Jesus said: “Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (*Matthew 7:14*). Most of the professing Christians in the world are what we refer to as cultural Christians, not born-again believers.

The Sermon on the Mount provides us with a superb picture of the attitudes, character, behavior, and values of kingdom people. Mere profession of Jesus as the Savior of mankind is not, by itself, sufficient evidence that a person has become a genuine kingdom person. The critically important quality is explained in verse 21 — only the person who “does the will of the Father in heaven will enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Verse 21 highlights the distinction between “doing what God wants” and tacitly acknowledging that a man named Jesus was on earth for several years until He suffered an unfortunate death. In the Greek language, the phrase, “He who does the will of my Father,” indicates that the actions must be the on-going habit of the person. A person can “Do the will of the Father” only when he/she has a deep inward desire to please the Father and the willingness to obey the Father. It is obvious that the kingdom person holds to a much different understanding of the teachings of Jesus than the typical Christian.

So what have we learned about “the will of the Father” in this series of messages? Virtually every verse in the Sermon has information about the will of God. Much of the teaching was explicit: “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” “You have heard that it was said ... but I say to you ... .” “Do not be like the hypocrites.” “Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear.” “Ask and it will be given to you.” “Do to others what you would have them do to you.” And so on.

Some of the lessons were implied: “If the salt has lost its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?” “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.” “If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” “When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” “If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light.” “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” “Enter through the narrow gate.”

It seems to me that no one who listens carefully to the teachings of Jesus has an excuse for not understanding “the will of the Father.” And yet, verse 22 indicates that many professing Christians are in for a future surprise. Verse 22 indicates that there is a future day in which individuals will stand before Jesus and plead for mercy on the basis of their good works. And they will be shocked to learn that Jesus will not acknowledge them as His own, but will instead refer to them as “evildoers.”

Let me break the information in this verse down into separate parts. First of all, what is the future day when there will be this surprising confrontation? There are numerous references in Scripture to a future day of judgment. For example, near the end of the Bible, we read these words: "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. ... And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. ... And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. ... They were judged, each one according to his works" (*Revelation 20:11-13*).

The Apostle Paul motivated the believers in Corinth with these words: "We have as our ambition ... to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (*II Corinthians 5:7, 9-10*). Those are just two of the passages which describe that "day" of judgment.

Now I need to explain why so many individuals will not be accepted by Jesus. In order to do this I refer to another passage of Scripture. Jesus described the day of reckoning with these words: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right, but the goats on his left.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you invited me in; I needed clothes and you clothed me; I was sick and you looked after me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick, or in prison, and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

“Then he will say to those on the left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink; I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me; I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

“He will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (*Matthew 25:31-46*).

Both groups in this parable were surprised by the verdict of King Jesus. The sheep were surprised that they were invited into the kingdom on the basis of the work they did; the goats were shocked that they were not. Notice the questions asked by the members of the two groups. During their ministry efforts, the sheep people never saw the Lord, yet they served the needs of Jesus’ people. The goat people saw lots of needy people around them but they provided no help. However, they insisted, if they had seen Jesus, they would have provided help.

Let me go a little deeper into this explanation because it will help us to understand the warning back in the Sermon on the Mount. These two groups were judged on the basis of their inner attitudes, and their attitudes were revealed by their behaviors. The sheep people and the goat people did not know it during their lifetimes, but they were being tested and graded by Jesus on the basis of their behaviors. If it had been known that the test required a person to visit needy people in the hospitals or prisons, or give food to hungry people in order to get a good grade, then many of the goat people would have been glad to do these activities.

However, there would still be a problem. If the conditions for getting a good grade had been known ahead of time, then these goat people would be trying to pass the examination, not because they were concerned about needy, lonely, and hungry people, but in order to get a good grade. The goat people failed to gain entrance into heaven because they were not concerned about others, and therefore did not please the King.

On the other hand, there were the sheep people. They, like the members of the other group, were not aware that their behavior was being examined. Yet they visited in the hospitals and prisons, and gave away food. Why? Because they loved other people. The grades were unimportant. They did not do their good deeds to get high marks. That is why they were surprised at the inheritance given to them by the King.

I hope you understand, from this parable of the sheep and goats, how the attitude of a person towards others is the crucial requirement which determines where each person will spend eternity.

One more essential comment: it was not stated that the good works which were performed by the sheep people (and not performed by the goat people) were the *cause* of their destiny. Rather, their good works were the *evidence* of who they were in their inner beings. Their works were a product of their attitudes and inner motivations. They were being authentic kingdom people. They fulfilled the purposes God had for their lives. They did the will of the Father.

In Luke's account of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus asked a pertinent question of His listeners: "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (*Luke 6:46*). In the Gospel of John, Jesus plainly stated, "If you love me, you will keep My commandments" (*John 14:15*). A few verses later He said, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word ... He who does not love me does not keep my words" (*John 14:23-24*).

The evidence of membership in the kingdom of heaven is not loud profession, nor spectacular spiritual accomplishments, nor proclamations of great spiritual experience. Non-believers have been known to do all of these things. Judas Iscariot participated in miracles when Jesus sent the Apostles out on ministry assignments. The book of Acts mentions other individuals who performed miracles in Jesus' name. Jesus warned His followers about people who had such power. He said that "false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect" (*Matt 24:24*).

Many professing Christians have a very impressive spiritual vocabulary. They recite the creeds and sing hymns of faith. Many professing Christians are busily involved in good deeds and beneficial activities in church fellowships and in their communities. For many professing Christians, their good deeds have become a substitute for doing the will of the Father. The deluded professing Christian uses his/her work ministries as evidence of faith and assumes that such activities will guarantee a favorable standing on the future judgment day. Unfortunately, such activities can be outside the will of the Father. Good works, in and of themselves, are not evidence that a person knows Jesus. As a result, Jesus will tell many people, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers."

Jesus is not impressed by our pious and orthodox words. The evidence that the Father wants to see is our yieldedness and obedience to His will. The fruit that God looks for in our lives is a growing conformity to the standards of the kingdom: righteousness, holiness, humility, trust, prayerfulness, honesty, love, generosity. These are among the evidences of obedience.

The concluding illustration in the Sermon on the Mount is the parable of the wise and foolish builders. Notice how verse 24 is tightly connected to the previous verses we have been thinking about.

### **Read Matthew 7:24-27**

I don't need to comment on these verses. The point of the parable is clear. The key thought is in verse 24: Spiritually discerning people both hear the words of Jesus and put them into practice. We can assume that both builders heard the same words, but only one of them applied the teachings of Jesus to his life. The difference between the two builders was their obedience.

This, of course, is another way of stating the key thought of verse 21: The person who "will enter the kingdom of heaven" is the one "who does the will of the Father."

Another appropriate song from kindergarten days (hand motions are optional!):

The wise man built his house upon the rock;  
The wise man built his house upon the rock;  
The wise man built his house upon the rock;  
And the rains came tumbling down.

The rains came down and the floods came up;  
The rains came down and the floods came up;  
The rains came down and the floods came up;  
And the house on the rock stood firm.

The foolish man built his house upon the sand;  
The foolish man built his house upon the sand;  
The foolish man built his house upon the sand;  
And the rains came tumbling down.

The rains came down and the floods came up;  
The rains came down and the floods came up;  
The rains came down and the floods came up;  
And the house on the rock went splash.

So build your life on the Lord Jesus Christ;  
Build your life on the Lord Jesus Christ;  
Build your life on the Lord Jesus Christ;  
And the blessings will come down.

The blessings will come down as the prayers go up;  
The blessings will come down as the prayers go up;  
The blessings will come down as the prayers go up;  
So build your life on the Lord.

Two questions each of us should think about and answer:

1. What is the foundation (basic principles) on which I am building my life?
2. In what specific areas of my life do I find obedience difficult? [Pray about improvement]

All of us must do a better job of applying the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount to our lives by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit.