

# OpenTheo

## Judging, Seeking, and Building (Matthew 7)

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Jesus teaches his disciples concerning judgment, the Golden Rule, and warns them about hypocrisy and false teachers in the concluding part of the Sermon on the Mount.

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## Transcript

Welcome back to this, the eighth in my series on the Gospel of Matthew. Today we're looking at chapter seven of the Gospel, the final chapter of the Sermon on the Mount. It begins with some famous words, Judge not that you be not judged.

These have often been taken to exclude any right to make morally discriminating judgments concerning people's behavior. But when we look at it in context, I think it will be seen to have a more specific meaning than that. Jesus' teaching here is something that is found elsewhere in Scripture in various ways.

We can think even within the Sermon on the Mount, it's connected with things such as chapter six, verse 14 and 15. If you forgive others their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

And earlier on in chapter five, verse seven, blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy. Elsewhere in Scripture we have warnings against the sort of hypocritical judgments that are cast by people who do not keep the law, but yet judge others concerning the law. In Romans chapter two, verse one, a very famous case where this person has cast judgment concerning these people who have failed to obey the law.

And then he says, therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another, you condemn yourself because you, the judge, practice the very same things. As we look through the teaching of Jesus here, I think it will be seen that he's dealing with something a bit more specific.

We have references, for instance, in Deuteronomy chapter 19 to hostile judgments. It talks about the person who's seeking to judge someone in a hostile and false way. The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother.

So you shall purge the evil from your midst, and the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you. Your hand shall not pity, it shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. Now the principle there in the context of Deuteronomy is if someone is bringing hostile false witness against someone to the end that they receive a certain punishment, they should be subject to that same punishment themselves.

And Jesus' teaching here is following a similar line. If you play the part of the judge, you will be judged by the same measure that you judge others. If you are unforgiving towards others, you will not receive forgiveness yourself.

If you lack mercy towards others, you will not receive mercy yourself. If you are someone who performs the very things that you condemn in others, you have no excuse. So in all of these ways, Jesus' teaching is something that is found elsewhere in Scripture.

It's not exclusive to this part, but is drawing upon themes that we find in the Old Testament and then develop further within the New. It's not a matter of just making moral judgments, but something more specific than that. It's a playing the part of the judge.

You put yourself in the position of the judge. You're taking God's place. You're assuming his role and his authority.

And the danger is that in condemning others, you bring condemnation upon yourself. James talks about this in chapter 2. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy.

Mercy triumphs over judgment. So Jesus is particularly teaching about the sort of practice of those who assume the status of judge for themselves. Judge others without

mercy.

Condemn in others what they perform themselves. And pointing out that they will suffer the same sort of judgment that they place upon others. And we see this in a very practical way in the story of David when he's challenged by the prophet Nathan.

He's given the parable concerning the new lamb. He makes a judgment upon that case. And then he is told by Nathan, you are the man.

That you are the man who has done this thing that was presented to you in a parabolic form. You actually performed this evil deed. And you will suffer the judgment that you cast upon this hypothetical other character.

Judge not that you be not judged is also referring to a specific sort of judgment. It's referring particularly to the eschatological judgment. The judgment that awaits us in the future is a judgment to be performed by God himself.

And that judgment is one that none of us can take. We see this later on in Matthew where we're told about the distinction between the wheat and the tares and the importance of leaving things until their proper time. And when the time comes there will be a discrimination made.

But it will be God who makes that discrimination. Now this sort of judgment that's in view here is not judgment concerning any ethical situation. In some ways when God has cast judgment we do not have the right to assume judgment for ourselves.

And that isn't a great danger. We are supposed to live according to God's judgments. Now the danger is on the one hand taking the place of God to condemn others in order to raise ourselves up.

And this is something that we see as a common feature of human nature within ourselves. Primarily following this principle we should see that we are people who like to judge others as a means of setting ourselves off as better than them. And so that instinct of judgment is one that's deeply ingrained in us and Jesus challenges it.

And he challenges it by drawing attention first of all to the instinct that we have and the problem that we will face the same judgment that we meet out to others. The measure that we measure with others will be measured to us. So there's a problem.

There's a vicious cycle perhaps here. And Jesus presents an alternative. And the alternative is to start with yourself.

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye but do not notice the log that is in your own eye. Well how can you say to your brother let me take the speck out of your eye when there is the log in your own eye. You hypocrite.

First take the log out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's. Now this is an illustration that is quite hyperbolic but also taken from the context of the carpenter's workshop perhaps which if we think about it Jesus would have spent most of his childhood and early adulthood within that context working with his father. And now he applies that illustration quite forcefully to the situation of hypocrisy. Deal with your own issues first before you cast judgment upon others.

And then once you have dealt with your own issues you first of all you'll be less inclined to set yourself as a judge exalting your status over others and you'll be more inclined to take a helpful approach of trying to assist people with their issues in a non-condemnatory fashion in a way that's not designed to assume the part of the superior judge for yourself but someone who's trying to bring moral clarity to bear having achieved some clearer view yourself. As you've dealt with your own issues you can have a clearer view to help other people with theirs but sort out your own household first. These are principles that I think we see elsewhere in scripture and within cultural teaching more generally.

I think this is also something that captures a dynamic that we often see within society where people will point at other parties and insistently judge those other parties on the other side of the political aisle. Some parties within your family for instance that constantly cause you problems and constantly saying you you you or them them just blaming some other party out there rather than actually dealing with their own issues and those other parties become an alibi for our own issues and so as we point out all their problems we draw attention from our own issues and we don't have to deal with them. We pretend that they aren't there because the issues have been displaced onto these other parties.

We blame them for all the situations within the world, within our families, within our relational network, whatever it is. Jesus teaches to start with ourselves first. Deal with our own issues, our own problems, our own sins, our own failures, our own flaws and having done that we will be in a position to assist others.

Now note this isn't a position of standing in the position of the judge and judging and condemning others and raising ourselves up as superior once again. Rather it's a position of assistance. You're helping these people to remove something from their eye once you have removed something far greater from your own eye and that relative sense of the your own blind spots and those of others I think is also important here.

Now it's not maybe we shouldn't take the illustration too far but it is important to recognise this. Also judge not that you be not judged. It's a recognition of the primacy of God's judgment that God is the one who's in the position of a judge and we are not and so we must submit to God's judgment.

That takes a number of different element dimensions to it. First of all that we defer

judgment until the proper time on certain issues and on other issues we do not assume judgment for ourselves when God has already declared his judgments and so in the case of moral discriminations when God has declared the case we should not assume the right to judge for ourselves. We do not judge in those sorts of cases.

We do not assume the place of God so that we do not get judged ourselves. If we assume the place of God and declare that God's judgments are not just and if we assume the right to make our judgments then we're putting ourselves in the place of God which is a dangerous position to be in. So on the one hand this requires a certain understanding of God's standards and a recognition of his judgments that he's already given.

In other respects it requires deferring until the proper time to make certain judgments and all together it's a posture of submission to God and mercy towards other people, forgiveness towards other people that we're not judging them for their sins that they have done to us. We put that in the hands of God. Vengeance belongs to the Lord not to us and so in all these ways we submit to God's judgment and we recognize the limitations of our own judgment and also most particularly our limitations as a judge.

We are not in the position to judge concerning some of these cases. Now I think we see illustrations of that in certain instances in cases such as the stoning of the adulterous woman in John chapter 8. All these people coming to accuse and then told him who is without sin cast the first stone. What is the point of that? Is it that you must be morally, completely morally upright in order to cast the first stone? No that's not what Jesus is saying.

Jesus is pointing out the fact that if you have sin in this particular case, drawing his attention back to Deuteronomy chapter 19 and the principles there, if you do not have, if you have sin in this particular case, in this particular matter, if there's a case of entrapment or something like that or if you yourself are sinful in this particular area and you judge that other party, you're putting yourself in the position of the hostile false witness and that same judgment comes back upon you and so that warning of not judging is one that is about assuming the place of God, about hypocrisy and the way that we can judge others as a means of assuring our own status and also covering up our own sins. Jesus' challenge then is to deal with our own sins first, focus on our own sins and then we'll be in a position to cast right judgment or to judge according to what God has judged, to recognize the definitive and final character of his judgment, both the definitive judgments that he has cast already and then the final judgment that we await at the end of history which will bring to an end all of our judgments and sum them up and so one of the things that we must do is learn how to judge well by applying God's judgments first of all to ourselves and we're judging with God's judgments not with our own and one of the things that we learn in our regular worship of God, our regular confession of our sins and our regular hearing of God's word is we're learning his

judgments so that in the light of his judgments we'd better be able to know and discriminate between good and evil. The focus on the eye here is important as well, it's the prominent organ in the body in many respects, it's the first thing that you see of someone often, it's that aspect that really sums up the person, you look into someone's eyes and it's that which represents them, it's prominent within the body but it's also a means of perception and judgment, you judge with your eyes as you perceive things and cast judgment concerning them, you see that something's good or that something's out of order or that something seems to be amiss and with your eyes you cast judgment.

Now if you have a glaring sin within your life it is something that's like a beam in your eye, it's something that prevents you from seeing with clarity in a moral sense and so until you deal with that you will lack moral clarity in your judgments and you will not be able to assist others. Now your desire to assist others when you're not actually dealing with your own problems is a sign of hypocrisy itself, it's a sign that you take seriously, you don't really take these things seriously, all you take seriously is your desire to put your brother in an inferior position by pointing out his faults when you have not dealt with your own. Sort out your own problems first and then you'll be in a position to judge, that's Jesus' teaching, that then you'll be in the position to assist not to judge in a way that assumes status over them.

Now the next part of Jesus' teaching is perhaps one of the most peculiar and difficult parts of the Sermon on the Mount or the teaching of Matthew more generally. Do not give dogs what is holy and do not throw your pearls before pigs lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you. What is being referred to here? It is using imagery of two different types of animals, dogs and swine and we see those animals referred to later on in the Gospels and elsewhere where they're seen to be associated with Gentiles and with the Romans in particular, the swine associated with the Romans, dogs associated with Gentiles like the Canaanite woman elsewhere in the Gospel.

What might be going on here? What is Jesus teaching? I think if we connect it with what follows it makes a lot more sense. What Jesus is teaching is that you should not as Israel entrust your good things, the treasures that God has given to you, the temple, the covenant, the status that you have as his special people to the protection of Gentiles, that you should not look to them as your great protectors. Now there's a certain way in which the Gentile nations were under God's providence protective nations, those that assist or assisted Israel and protected them from predation from other forces and Israel existed in the midst of these empires in a way that enabled it to carry out its vocation.

Now we do see that in places like Daniel and elsewhere but there's something more going on here. It's looking to those parties for trust, putting your things in their keeping. So throwing your pearls before pigs and giving the dogs what is holy.

It's looking towards the Romans to protect your place and not looking towards God. And

what's the alternative? Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be open to you. Now the alternative is to look to God.

God is your great benefactor and patron. If you want to be secure as a people don't look to the Romans and the Gentiles. They will, if you defile your holy things by giving them to them, throwing them in front of them, defiling them by serving them by being subservient to the Romans rather than to God, if you defile your holy things by treating them as little things that you can pawn off to the Romans and the Gentiles for your own security, you will end up finding that they turn around and they trample you under their feet.

It's an image that is associated with occupation, occupying forces that trample opponents under their feet. Now the danger is if Israel despises the things or defiles the things that God has given to them by entrusting them to the Romans, they will end up just being destroyed by the Romans. The alternative is to trust in God, the good God and Father that called them out of Egypt and brought them to himself.

And if they trust in God, God will protect them. If they trust in him they will find that their requests are answered, their seeking is rewarded with finding and their knocking with opening. In all of these ways Israel is called to recognise who do they trust above all else, who do they depend upon, whom do they look to for security.

And the answer must be God alone. Now if they're looking to the Gentiles they'll fail and this is a warning to us too. So often we look for our security and our strength to politicians.

We will defile things that are holy just to curry favour with politicians and with people who have power within our society, the movers and shakers of our day. We'll do everything to appease them, to affirm them, to get them on our side and as a result we end up defiling the things of God. We do not bear a faithful witness because we're more concerned with carrying political and social favour than we are with obeying God.

And that warning is one that is connected with those who are seeking the favour of men rather than the favour of God. The same people who will want to go out into the streets and be recognised by men rather than going into the secret place so that they might perform their prayers faithfully before God alone, they're the same sort of people that will be looking to the Romans, to the political authorities, to the powers that be for their security rather than looking to God. And so the challenge then is to look to God alone.

In Luke's paralleled account in Luke chapter 11 he connects this request with the request for the Holy Spirit. Everyone who asks receives and the one who seeks finds and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you if his son asked for a fish will instead of a fish give him a serpent or if he asks for an egg will give him a scorpion? If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will

the heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? So it's the power to live out the way of the kingdom that God will give the Holy Spirit, he will give security and he will give the kingdom to those who ask him.

But if you put your trust in the Gentiles and the Romans and in these other pagan forces you'll find that you defile the things that God has given to you and you will be trodden underfoot by them. The conclusion of this whole central section of the sermon is found in chapter 7 verse 12. So whatever you wish that others would do to you do also to them for this is the law and the prophets.

The thinking about the structure we've had the introductory section with the beatitudes, we've had the statements concerning the fulfilling of the law of the prophets at the very beginning in chapter 5 verse 17 following and then you have the double triad and then the central triad concerning prayer and then this double triad again and now you have the return to that original point of fulfilling the law and the prophets. This is what has been called the golden rule and it is something that is found in many other sources. We can think about Tobit chapter 4 verse 15, what you hate do to no one.

It's from the third century before Christ. A generation before Jesus there's a story of a proselyte coming to Shammai and Hillel, the different schools of Pharisees and saying can you explain the entirety of the Torah while I'm standing on one leg? I think that's the story and Hillel or Shammai dismisses the questioner whereas Hillel says what is hateful to you do not do to your neighbor. Now all of this goes back to the book of Leviticus and chapter 19 where we find the original form perhaps of this statement at least in scripture in chapter 19 verse 18.

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people but you shall love your neighbor as yourself I am the Lord. To love your neighbor as yourself that's unpacked in do unto whatever you wish that others would do to you do also to them. This fulfills that second table of the law.

It draws back to Jesus' earlier statement concerning love your neighbor, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. The importance of loving your neighbor as yourself this is returned to here. It's that which fulfills the whole second table of the law.

Now that statement is also one that is found in other sources. We see it in Aristotle, in Confucius and Jesus and Leviticus are perhaps more distinctive in using positive forms. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Whatever you wish that others would do to you do also to them. This is not just a negative statement of what not to do to other people. The truth and authority of what Jesus is teaching here doesn't depend upon its novelty and this is something that's found elsewhere.



What Jesus is teaching here is novel in some senses in terms of his presentation of the inner structure, the deep structure of the law and the way all of these things are connected and fulfilled. But it doesn't depend upon being radically new. What the importance is I think is the manifestation of the wisdom of the law, the wisdom of Christ concerning the law and how this fulfills its connection with natural law.

What we see as we look through scripture is that scripture brings the law of God to bear upon the world. And so first of all you see this movement into reflection upon the law of God. Then you have the mind illuminated by the law of God going out into the world and recognising patterns, moral patterns and other things and speaking concerning those patterns in ways that other nations can recognise as congruent with these ways of speaking about reality are congruent with reality.

In fact they display something of the deep grain of the universe. Now natural law is something that enables us to recognise some of these patterns as we reflect upon practice, as we reflect upon the world and other people. There is a sort of feedback loop of practice and reflection and there's a practical knowledge that emerges from that and sometimes we can express this within aphorisms or other statements along those lines.

And wise people from different cultures have arrived at various formulations of wisdom and ethics and these have a great deal in common. C.S. Lewis talks about the Tao as one way of recognising these affinities between these different ways of looking at the world. And scripture presents us with many statements that have similarities with statements that we find in other cultures.

Whether we can see similarities with ancient Near Eastern cultures and their wisdom, with wisdom from Eastern cultures and from other cultures around the world. And part of what's being revealed through that is that scripture and reflection upon the law of God gives us insight into the very structure of moral reality. And there is a moral reality and a moral reality that is objective and has been recognised by other people in other cultures.

As they've had the same sort of deep reflection upon the world they've come to similar conclusions. There's a confirmatory force to this and also there's a witness to the authority and wisdom of the teaching of the scripture where it's able to look even deeper into reality to recognise things about reality that are perceptible within reality. These are not just commands coming from outside of the world and placed upon the world from outside.

These are things that are perceptible within the structure of reality itself and human experience. And when scripture brings them to light we see the wisdom of scripture that's talking about things that are really within the world. And that concordance between the wisdom that we find in scripture and natural law and natural reason I think is an important part of the testimony to the truth of scripture more generally.

Jesus concludes with three warnings. One is the narrow way, a warning about false prophets and building the solid ground. There's a choice between two ways.

This is something that we find in other books of the bible. You can think perhaps of the story of Proverbs where in chapter nine you have these two people appealing. You have Lady Wisdom and the Woman Folly and both of them presented in very similar situations presenting a very similar appeal to the same person, the simpleton who's going by.

And both of them presenting this appeal give an alternative between life and death and this same choice is one that faces the person who hears Jesus' words. So again it's a wisdom statement. You can see the same thing at the beginning of Psalm.

Psalm 1 begins with, blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly nor stand in the way nor sit in the seat of the scornful. And it goes on and talks about the Lord knows the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked will perish. Contrast between two ways and that contrast between two ways is found in a lot of wisdom literature and here it's found again.

It shouldn't necessarily be presumed that these are timeless statements. It's only going to be a minority that find their way into the kingdom. It's referring particularly to Jesus' own time.

I think there are more general truths here that people do. It's not an easy way to find. It's not an easy route.

The broad way is an easy route to take. It's one that is easy to find and it's comfortable whereas the narrow way is difficult and challenging. It calls for faith.

It calls for giving up of the sort of security that we usually assume for ourselves. The security of wealth. The security of political power and allegiances and Jesus as he shows these things aren't secure at all.

Thieves will break in and take those riches. Moth and rust will destroy your treasures and the Gentiles that you trust in will turn against you and destroy you. But these things seem so secure to us and so the challenge to give them up and to depend upon God alone to not be people who are driven by worry and concern of pride and all these other things.

That's a challenge. It requires taking a route that's challenging and difficult. It's the narrow way rather than the broad and that choice is between two gates and between two ways.

The difference between the gate and the way is not entirely clear. Perhaps it's one emphasizes the point of entry. One emphasizes the point of the manner of passage that you're moving from one place to another along a certain type of path.

The narrow gate might suggest that you have to divest yourself of many things. You have to be willing to give up your security. You have to be willing to give up a lot of the things that you trust in.

I'll talk later on in Jesus teaching about the man, the rich man, and it's easier for a man, it's easier for a camel to go through the iron needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Maybe that's another reference to the narrow gate. The inability to take many things with you and if you're burdened down with treasures and riches and you're trusting so much in all these different other sources of security, you'll find yourself not being able to enter in.

You have to be able to give things up in order to enter in and the passage is something that requires a lot of struggle and difficulty. You have to work to make this, you have to struggle to make this particular path. It's not an easy path.

It requires submission to God's will. It requires the giving up of securities. It requires the giving up of comforts and it requires the way of persecution.

This is one that is maybe drawing our mind back to the very beginning of Jesus teaching at the very end of the Beatitudes where it talks about, blessed are you when they persecute you or revile you and say all sorts of things falsely against you for my sake and connecting the experience of the disciples of Jesus with the experience of the Old Testament prophets. Jesus later on in the Gospel of John, he talks about himself as the way. I am the way, the truth and the life.

He also talks about himself as the door to the sheepfold. If you want to come in, you have to come in through Christ. He is the one that is the one means by which you enter.

He's the one who sets out the way before us and the way that he sets before us again is the way of the cross. It's the way that leads towards the crucifixion. Take up your cross and follow me.

It's the challenge to turn the other cheek, to be willing to have your clothes stripped from you, to lose your honour, to lose your place in society, to lose your security, to be willing to give up riches and to be someone who acts in a very different manner from those around you. The language of the way is also important for the early church. If you look through the book of Acts, you'll see on a number of different occasions that the way is used to refer to the Christian movement as a whole.

It's a term for early Christianity. It's the name for the movement. And so Jesus' teaching here probably has a deep resonance for many of the earlier disciples that they see it as their whole movement is defined as the way and this characteristic that's a certain path that must be walked.

That's a way that leads to the cross is one that helps them to understand it's part of their

imaginary structure for their whole belief system. It's the picture that puts other things in place. Jesus goes on to warn against false prophets coming in sheep's clothing but inwardly being ravenous wolves.

It's a proverbial contrast between sheep and wolves. It's something that we find in a number of different sources. Elsewhere in Jesus' teaching to his disciples in chapter 10 verse 16, he will tell them that he is sending them out as sheep in the midst of wolves.

This warning is one that requires that they be wise as serpents yet harmless as doves. All these things that people will do to them, they have to be harmless and they will be like sheep. There's a vulnerability to what they're doing but they'll be sent out among wolves.

They have to trust God for their protection. False teachers in the church may be in view here in the book of Acts chapter 20. We have similar language being used as Paul speaks to the Ephesian elders.

He says to them, I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you not sparing the flock and from your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. So that warning about wolves is found elsewhere in the New Testament and the warning is one to recognise the distinction between true sheep and those who are merely dressed up as sheep.

Those who are dissembling their true character pretending to be something that they are not. Later on we'll see a number of warnings about false teachers within the church or people who are addressing the same sort of constituency. In chapter 24 there are a number of false prophets and false teachers that will come along claiming to be the Christ but they are not the one.

And so you recognise these people by their fruit. Maybe this is teaching the same thing as Deuteronomy chapter 13 and 18. The warning about first of all in chapter 13 people who lead you astray and lead you away from the Lord and from what he has declared to you.

Those are false prophets. In chapter 18 the false prophet is discerned by the fact that what they declare does not come to pass. And if you say in your heart how may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken? When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord if the word does not come to pass or come true that is a word that the Lord has not spoken.

The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him. That warning then is a warning concerning fruits.

If they are a true prophet their word will come to pass. Their word will have weight and truth to it. It will be a word that does not lead you astray from God.

And then the other thing to notice is that conduct is a sign of the true character of something. If you want to know what type of tree something is wait until it bears fruit and at that point you can discern more clearly what type of tree it is. If it's a good tree or if it's a bad tree.

These agricultural images are found throughout Jesus' teaching and they're important ones to reflect upon. There is a time for things to give their fruit often and so maybe there's a sense of waiting for a proper time to judge. That this isn't necessarily something that happens immediately rather you see how these things play out over time.

If you want to see what a good church is for instance see what sorts of people it produces after several years within it. If you want to know if a good church is good for you then pay attention to the people who have been nurtured under that ministry for a number of years. See what sort of character it has produced in them.

That's how you pay attention to fruit. Look at the when someone's teaching you pay attention to their own life. See what fruit it has yielded in their life.

What they're teaching you concerning. And so if you want to recognise the connection between teachers and fruit you will if you recognise that connection between teachers and fruit you'll be better equipped to judge concerning good and bad teaching. This is an example of Jesus calling us to judge to discern to make discriminations.

But these discriminations are not discriminations that put us in the place of God. There's a time to judge concerning false and true teaching and we do that by paying careful attention to the different dimensions of people's fruit. See what these things produce in their lives whether they're good or bad.

If you want to have a good teacher for some particular skill for instance pay attention to whether they're good at it. If they're able to do it themselves then probably they're someone that's equipped to teach you something about it. In the same way someone who has no ability to do something themselves is probably not the person to look to to teach you.

Again this is something that is a flip side perhaps of Jesus teaching concerning taking out the mote or the beam from your eye before you help other people with the mote in their eye. The point is learn from people who have clarity of vision and manifest clarity of vision. Learn from people who have produced good fruit over time and not the people who are just vaunting themselves as authorities.

The warning that Jesus gives here is the same warning that John the Baptist gives. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. And there's an occlusio here as well.

Jesus begins his statement by you will recognise them by their fruits in verse 16 and ends in verse 20 thus you will recognise them by their fruits. It holds all the central part within it and that repetition of the teaching of John the Baptist I think may be important to pay attention to. Jesus goes on to give a warning about those who presume to be true teachers who presume to be members of his people and to be right with him and yet that he does not know them at all.

He presents himself here without any comment as the eschatological judge. He is the one that people are going to be answerable to on the last day. He is the one that they will be giving an account of themselves to.

Lord Lord did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many white mighty works in your name and then I will declare to them I never knew you depart from me you workers of lawlessness. This reminds us or draws our attention forward perhaps anticipating chapter 25 the great judgment scene in the separation of the sheep from the goats. It's the same sort of thing happening here and there are many parallels to be drawn between this part of Jesus teaching and the Olivet discourse.

There are ways in which Jesus is anticipating what he will say then. That separation of the sheep from the goats is one that is one that surprises people just as it does in the separation that people think that they're okay. They taught many good things.

They did all sorts of miraculous works. They cast out demons and yet Christ will say depart from me I never knew you and the cause of discrimination is that they are workers of lawlessness. They are people who have no commitment to righteousness.

They're people who may genuinely have performed miracles. They may genuinely have taught all these different sorts of things but yet they have no commitment to the way of righteousness at all. They are people who are empty clouds.

They are people who are who have no substance to them. They're false teachers and as a result we should beware of them and that warning is something that is throughout the story of Matthew. There will be surprises on that final day.

There'll be many people who think that they're in the clear and then they'll find that they did not walk the narrow way. They did not enter by the narrow gate and they find that they lose all on that final day and yet on the other hand there will be people who are surprised to find that they are indeed welcomed into the kingdom. People who find that by helping someone with a glass of water or by visiting someone in prison whatever it was that they were ministering to Christ himself.

That warning, these warnings also suggest that Matthew is writing to something that isn't a pure church. This is a church that has wheat and tares together. This is a warning against people presuming simply because of their membership in the Jesus movement

that they are in the right position.

That statement that Jesus makes concerning those who have to be removed is also taken from the Old Testament. Psalm 6 verse 8, depart from me all you workers of evil. That statement is one that is chilling.

It's one that is balanced out on the other side with a good and faithful servant but it's a warning to every person who might think themselves to be a true teacher, a true prophet, a true worker minister within the kingdom but yet does not commit themselves to this way. Now there are ways of knowing. There are ways of knowing if we're in the right and we're supposed to pursue what Christ has set before us and as we seek his way, as we obey him, we'll find that I think assurance, true assurance follows that and not just presumption.

There's a warning then against our own failure to find the way, a warning against vicious opponents, wolves in sheep's clothing and false teachers, the danger of being false teachers ourselves and that hypocrisy that can be characteristic of it. We can teach all these things, we can do these great works and yet we are people who are workers of lawlessness. We ourselves are the wolves in sheep's clothing and we never knew it.

We deceived even ourselves. Finally Jesus teaches concerning two houses to build, a wise man and a foolish man. That distinction between the wise and the foolish is one that is found throughout the Old Testament.

It's something that's found, the sorts of contrasts that Jesus is drawing here is similar to the contrast that we find in places like Psalm 1, the contrast that we find at the beginning of Proverbs as well. Proverbs describes wisdom as the means by which a house is built. In Proverbs chapter 24 verse 3, that wisdom of folly contrast is very important there.

The question here is twofold. Are we building upon the right foundation and are we doing and not just hearing? That twofold warning is central to Jesus' final note on which he ends his sermon. Are you building upon the right foundation? Are you building upon Christ rather than upon the sand? And are you someone who is doing and not just hearing? It's very easy.

We spend a lot of time taking in Christian material presumably. I certainly do and the danger is that we're taking in material and there's no actual action concerning it. That we're not actually transforming it into practice.

We're not metabolizing anything. It's not being turned into anything of value. All it is is just going into our ears and not finding any root in our hearts.

The challenge that Jesus gives here then is a very powerful one and again it's the time of testing that will reveal the difference. How do you tell the difference between the two

foundations? Well when the storm comes, when the waters rise and when the winds beat against the house, that's the time when you note the difference. And once again it's that moment of judgment when fates will be decided.

When we'll realize who's in, who's out, who has dug a good foundation, who has built upon the solid rock and who has not. At that point certain people will find themselves suffering incredible loss and others be found to be secure and to enjoy great gain. The rain falling, beating against the house, that challenge.

The challenge maybe calls on, looks back to an earlier series of challenges. The challenge of the pigs and the dogs. If you give your holy things to them you'll find that you are brought to ruin.

That they will trample you underfoot. Here's another image. Another image of a house that's going to fall down if it's not built on a solid foundation, on a true rock.

Maybe this can all be connected to something that happens later on in Jesus' teaching. To the teaching concerning a house that's going to be brought down, not one stone standing upon another. To a house where the pigs are going to trample holy things underfoot because they have been despised by the people who threw them in front of them.

What we're seeing I think may be an image of the temple. An image of this house, this holy place that God had given to his people that was despised by people who put their trust not in God but in the Romans and in other powers that existed at the time. And the challenge that Jesus gives at the end is who are you building your life upon? Who are you identifying with? Who are you serving? Who are you? Are you just giving lip service to Christ? Lord, Lord we did all these things for you.

Or are you actually hearing and obeying, hearing and doing what he said? Are you seeking the narrow path and entering by the narrow gate? Are you prepared to take the difficult way? All of these are powerful challenges that Jesus gives to those who hear him, particularly his disciples. And there are teachings and challenges that resonate throughout the rest of the book. At many points throughout the book we'll be brought to recall these things, these warnings.

And it all ends with a statement concerning the authority of Jesus, the manifest authority of Jesus. When Jesus finished these sayings the crowds were astonished at his teaching. But he was teaching them as one who had authority and not as their scribes.

And when he came down from the mountain great crowds followed him. He's made implicit claims for himself within the sermon. He talks about I have come and I've suggested that that refers to a heavenly mission, a mission from heaven to earth.

He also claims that he will be the judge on the last day and people will come to him and



say Lord, Lord. Now that's not just the teaching of a rabbi or a gifted wisdom teacher or sage. This is someone who's claiming a status for himself that's far greater than that.

And so he speaks as authority and with authority in that way. He speaks as the judge. He speaks also as one who teaches concerning the law like Moses himself and as greater than Moses.

He is the prophet that was to come. He is the prophet that exceeds Moses. He is the one who goes up on the mountain, gathers the people around them and teaches them concerning the law.

This is the way of the kingdom. It's the way of the kingdom that sets the terms for all that happens. It's the great manifesto and that manifesto will be played out first of all in Jesus's life.

Jesus's life is the one in which we see this most clearly lived. He is a teacher who is consistent with his own teaching. If you want to see the alternative to hypocrisy, see it in the authority of Christ and the authority that is born from his own practice that he takes the way where he has to turn the cheek.

He takes the way where he must go the second mile. He takes the way where he must be stripped of his clothing. He takes the way where he must give up all honour and all status and put himself in God's hands.

He's the one who sets the path before us, the narrow way. He is the one who sets the foundation upon which we must build and he is the one to whom we must give our service if on the last day we are to be welcomed into his kingdom. Thank you very much for listening.

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