

☒ LIFE OF JESUS

April 25, 2021 | *The Sermon on the Mount Part 3*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

- Are a person's speech or actions more significant in developing their reputation?
- Read Matthew 7 (Again, reading all the Sermon on the Mount will provide beneficial context).
- Pray God would help you live in a manner that is consistent with your faith.

THIS WEEK

☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

God has been incredibly gracious to His people. Our ability to mediate this grace to others is the mark of a true follower of Christ.

☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

Live in a manner that is consistent with your faith.

☒ MEDITATE

"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" (Matthew 7:21).

GETTING STARTED

+ *Use this section to prepare your heart for the truths you will encounter this week and to connect this passage's main point to your own life.*

Q: *Grace is a gift from God, but how does receiving grace then make demands on our lives?*

Q: *How can you demonstrate your faith in Christ to a watching world?*

Matthew 5 emphasizes reaping what you sow and seeking the true intent of the Law. Matthew 6 emphasizes authentic righteousness. In many ways, Matthew 7 begins to link the teachings of Chapters 5 and 6 together. The Sermon on the Mount concludes by answering two implied questions that continue to be relevant for Christians today. How should I live as a Christian? How can I recognize true followers of Christ? With these ideas in mind, Jesus concludes this strategic message to His followers.

The answers to these implied questions involve putting the principles discussed in the Sermon on the Mount into action. Although our confession is a sure sign of our salvation, the veracity of our confession and our belief to others often depend upon actions. They cannot peer into our hearts to evaluate the truthfulness of our words, but they can see how we put the teachings of Christ and the rest of the Bible into action. This is not an unreasonable expectation. If we claim that our confession makes a real difference in our lives, both now and in eternity, then the difference should be apparent to those who observe us.

Q: *What is the relationship between faith and works for a believer in Christ Jesus?*

Q: *Why is there a temptation to drive a wedge between a believer's faith and works?*

APPLICATION POINT – The most common way to abandon orthodox Christianity is not through total denial of the Christian faith. It is rare for a person to abandon every single aspect of their faith in Christ. Instead, it is more common for people to embrace the parts of the Christian faith they like and exclude the parts they don't. For example, many Christians have mistakenly embraced God's love to the exclusion of His righteous judgment of sin, thinking that a loving God could not possibly make moral demands upon us or hold us accountable for our sin. Those who go down this road embrace only part of the teaching of Scripture. They make no attempt to hold everything the Bible says together.

In the same way, denying either faith or works has been a recurring issue throughout the history of Christianity. Faith and works are both integral to the Christian faith. We are saved by faith for good works (Ephesians 2:3–10). The absence of either becomes problematic. Make sure you are consistently examining your beliefs about God, Christ, and Christianity to ensure you are holding everything the Bible says together. This often requires even the most astute theologian to reconsider some strongly held beliefs. The rest of us should expect nothing less for ourselves.

▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Matthew 7 addresses multiple, interrelated topics. This lesson will group them under the following three headings:

1. THE GOLDEN RULE (MATTHEW 7:1–14)
2. RECOGNIZING AUTHENTIC FOLLOWERS OF JESUS (MATTHEW 7:15–23)
3. BUILDING ON THE ROCK (MATTHEW 7:24–27)

GOING DEEPER

+This section will study the themes of Matthew 7 in more detail to see how they encourage Jesus’s followers to live in a manner that is consistent with their faith.

1. THE GOLDEN RULE

▣ MATTHEW 7:1–14

🗨️: *How is the Golden Rule applied in Matthew 7:1–6?*

🗨️: *How is the Golden Rule applied in Matthew 7:7–11?*

Matthew 7:12 expresses what is often known as the Golden Rule. It is the basic principle guiding behavior within society, and Jesus says it is also the basis of the teachings found in the Law and the Prophets. Treat others how you would like them to treat you. At the heart of the Golden Rule is the recognition of the personhood and the value of others. The world is not all about us.

The Golden Rule is exemplified in two ways in these verses—judgment and generosity. Each of these two themes has its own specific emphasis, but both are examples of the Golden Rule in action. In His first application of it, Jesus points out our tendency to be harsher with others than we would like them to be with us. Such judgmentalism elevates our own importance and worth over the other person's and is a poor representation of God's concern for justice. In His second application, He commends generosity among His followers. God the Father is generous to us in the same way parents are generous to their children. We can freely approach God with our requests because we serve a good Father who delights to give generously to His children. Thus, God is a model of the generosity we must show others.

Q: *How are Jesus's words about judgment misapplied today?*

Q: *How do you see the Golden Rule being subverted in our culture? What attitudes or rules are replacing it?*

APPLICATION POINT – Matthew 7:1 has the ignoble reputation of being one of the verses most quoted by non-Christians against Christians. The thought is that Christians should never condemn any type of behavior because of what Jesus says in this verse. This has always been an exercise in not following a thought to its logical conclusion and ripping a verse out of its theological context. First, while many people may quote this verse spontaneously in response to what they see as judgmentalism, no morally sane person would take this verse to be an absolute prohibition against condemning certain behaviors. Even in our morally confused society, nearly everyone admits that some behaviors are immoral and should be condemned. No one truly takes this verse as an absolute standard. Everyone eventually judges. The real tension when Matthew 7:1 is quoted in this manner as the standard for what is moral and what is immoral. Christians must rely on the Bible. What standard can non-Christians uphold?

Second, those who would quote this verse to thwart what they see as judgmentalism have an incredibly narrow reading of Scripture. They would have to read just a few verses further into Matthew 7 before to see Jesus making moral judgments (Matthew 7:5, 6, 11, 13, 15, 21) and commanding His followers to do the same (Matthew 7:16,

24). Remember, as Christians, we want to hold everything the Bible says together to produce a consistently biblical theology. Those who would isolate and hold up this verse as the singular standard for how Christians should engage the world with the claims of Christ are not nearly as biblical as they seem to think.

🔗: *How is Matthew 7:6 related to the Golden Rule?*

🔗: *What are the limitations of the Golden Rule?*

Matthew 7:6 may at first seem like a misplaced statement in the middle of a treatise on the Golden Rule. The statement itself is often seen as an enigma. What in the world do dogs, pigs, pearls, and sacred things have to do with the rest of what Jesus is discussing?

The answer to these conundrums is found in seeing Matthew 7:6 as a warning to be cautious when extending the Golden Rule beyond the community of faith. This verse limits the application of the Golden Rule to keep Christians from being abused by those who do not live by the same grace as the followers of Jesus. The point of verse 6 is that it is foolish to expect non-believers to respond the way Christians will when receiving the kind of grace that underlies the Golden Rule. Jesus wants His followers to know they are not obligated to continually extend the application of the Golden Rule to those who refuse to receive it in faith.

The Golden Rule, at least as Jesus expresses it in Matthew 7:12, is proactive rather than reactive. We are not to wait to see how others will treat us before making the love of Christ known. If, however, others repeatedly refuse to respond favorably to grace, we are not obligated to continue to open ourselves up to their abuses of God's grace. This does not mean we begin leading with cruelty. The inverse of the Golden Rule is not the standard being sought here. But when our proactive mission to demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ is met with hostility, Christians are not obligated to continually assume the grace they would extend to others will be reciprocated. To do so would be to cast our pearls before swine. The Golden Rule is not a call to be abused.

🔗: *How should we balance perseverance in our Christian witness while continuing to heed Jesus's warning?*

🔗: *How should we respond when Jesus does or says something unexpected?*

APPLICATION POINT – Jesus was a countercultural voice to the religious authorities of His day. He often did and said things they did not expect or appreciate. Strangely enough, this is also true for Christians today. No matter how clear a picture we think we have of Jesus, we can still find ourselves confronted by Jesus in unexpected ways, much like in Matthew 7:6, which requires two things on our part—humility and faithfulness. We should feel humbled when we realize our Savior’s depth is always beyond our full comprehension, no matter how well we think we understand Him. We need to be faithful in doing the hard work of identifying the missing piece in our understanding of our Savior. We also need to combine these virtues as we seek to live in obedience to Jesus’s commands even when we do not fully understand. Jesus is the one who gets it right. We have to be faithful as we try to keep up.

2. RECOGNIZING AUTHENTIC FOLLOWERS OF JESUS

■ MATTHEW 7:15–23

❓: *Are Jesus’s words concerning the way to life inclusive or exclusive?*

❓: *How does Jesus say His followers will be recognized?*

Inclusiveness is highly valued in our society—at least as an ideal, though one often wonders how much in practice. Indeed, the virtues of racial and socio-economic inclusiveness hardly need a defense and are frequently promoted. Christians should desire and seek this kind of inclusiveness. Theological inclusivism, on the other hand, has no place among professing Christians. Today, many people want to argue that all religions are the same and that religious people, along with non-religious people, will eventually come to understand they are all on the same path seeking the same goal. Such an argument utterly ignores Jesus’s claim in Matthew 7:13–14. According to Jesus, everyone alive is on one of two paths. One path leads to destruction. The other leads to life. Thus, religious or theological inclusivism cannot include Christianity. Jesus’s words simply will not allow for another way leading to life. In the same way, Christians cannot endorse religious inclusivity. Although there are times when Christians may stand with the adherents of other faiths on certain moral and ethical issues, Christians ultimately proclaim an exclusive Savior, Jesus Christ. Salvation is found only in Him. Christianity is inclusive because anyone and everyone are welcome. Salvation and a restored relationship with God are open and available to any and all. But it is exclusive because Jesus is the only way, the one path to the Father. Not all roads lead to heaven.

Since this is the case, how can true followers of Christ, those on the narrow path, be recognized? According to Jesus, His followers will be known by how their actions testify to His influence in their lives. Jesus gives us an easy-to-understand illustration. In the same way thorn bushes and thistles cannot produce fruit, those who are not His followers have not been influenced by His grace and cannot demonstrate it with their actions. This is crucial for evaluating those who claim their ministry is tied to Jesus. False teachers may give the outward appearance of a follower of Christ, but close investigation into their character and ministry will show them to be imposters.

🔗: *Since false prophets seek to deceive others, they will also try to point to “good fruit” in their ministry. How can Christians see through their deception?*

🔗: *In what ways should Matthew 7:13-14 influence our church growth goals?*

APPLICATION POINT – It is exciting to see churches grow numerically. When churches are faithful to the gospel and discipleship, it is evidence of the continued work of the Holy Spirit and of the progress of God’s mission. Naturally, every church wants to see growth in its membership. Jesus’s words in Matthew 7:13–14, however, should caution us against prioritizing numerical growth over faithfulness to God’s Word. The question “How can we grow our church” can never take priority over the question “How can our church remain faithful to God’s Word.” To prioritize growth in numbers over faithfulness is to promote the wide gate leading to destruction. Sadly, many “churches” have forfeited their ability to point those in need of a Savior to Jesus because they recognize precisely what Jesus was saying in these verses. They will see greater numerical growth if they lead people through the wide gate. That path is easier, but it leads to destruction. If your church is to be used by the Holy Spirit to lead the lost to life, it must remain faithful to God’s Word, even if it means the apparent loss of numerical growth.

The same principle is true as you share your faith with others. It is natural to yearn for the person you are sharing with to turn to Christ in faith. If you are not careful, this desire can tempt you to compromise the truth of the gospel in an attempt to “widen” the way that leads to life, but this widening is not possible. Salvation is based upon the exclusivity of Jesus Christ, and true followers of Christ cannot reject the parts of Jesus’s message, which are identical to the message of the entire Bible, that they do not like.

🔗: *How does Matthew 7:21 limit the test given in Matthew 7:20?*

Q: *Do the subjects in Matthew 7:21–23 know they are failing to do the will of the Father?*

Matthew 7:21–23 is one of the most foreboding passages in the Bible. There will be those who, on the day of judgment, will offer their works as proof of their commitment to God and Jesus Christ, but Jesus will claim He does not know them. These verses limit the application of the test found in Matthew 7:20. Good works, or good “fruit,” may be evidence of a follower of Jesus, but these good works do not constitute faith itself. Nor are good works able to save. There will be those who give every outward indication of following Jesus, but their good works merely cover a life that is not committed to seeking God’s will.

Q: *How are unbelievers able to masquerade as followers of Jesus?*

Q: *How can we best ensure that we are doing the will of the Father?*

APPLICATION POINT – Throughout this lesson, we have seen the importance of holding everything God says in the Bible together. We cannot attach ourselves to the parts we like and ignore the rest. Such an inconsistent approach to God’s Word will lead many people to find themselves in the disastrous scenario we see in Matthew 7:21–23. As followers of Jesus, we must also be wary of being seduced by sensationalism. It is easy for false teaches to gravitate to one of the Bible’s teachings and give the impression of biblical fidelity in one area. Jesus anticipates many will prophesy, cast out demons, and do many mighty works—all in His name. If we are given to sensationalism, we will be easily deceived, but if we look beyond the sensational and demand complete biblical fidelity, we will be able to see through the façade of religious drama to discern whether someone is being authentic to the entirety of Scripture.

3. BUILDING ON THE ROCK

■ MATTHEW 7:24–29

Q: *What kind of analogy does Jesus use to show the difference between those who hear and receive His words versus those who do not?*

Q: *What do the rain, floods, and winds illustrate in Jesus's analogy?*

Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount by encouraging His listeners to hear and apply His message using a construction metaphor to illustrate His plea. Just as a house built upon solid ground can withstand even the most extreme weather patterns, a life built upon His teachings will be able to withstand trials and temptations. The key is holding fast to what Jesus teaches.

One element of Jesus's metaphor warrants further elaboration. The reference to the rain, floods, and winds obviously represents trials of some kind, but Jesus does not explain these in detail. Apart from such additional guidance, it is best to leave the hardships Jesus has in mind open to a broad range of possibilities believers may encounter. These hardships could include physical suffering from disease or illness or even persecution. They could also include the challenges created by the mundane nature of life. Whatever the case, Jesus said a life built on the foundation of His message will be able to withstand these hardships.

Q: *What assurance do Jesus's words offer His followers?*

Q: *What kind of hardships are you currently facing? How can the Sermon on the Mount help you face these hardships?*

APPLICATION – No one likes to think about, much less experience, hardships. Oftentimes, Christians reason that hardship is a sign of God's disfavor. They believe they are undergoing hardship because they have been unfaithful to God's Word. In some instances, they may be right. Living in a way that is contrary to God's Word often invites unnecessary hardship into our lives. This passage, however, does not allow us to think that hardships always stem from disregarding God's Word. Instead, Jesus claims God's Word is the anchor that will help us endure the hardships we inevitably encounter. No matter what kind of hardship we face, whether physical or emotional,

internal or external, we need to commit to persevering in our faith with the help of God’s Word. The Sermon on the Mount, along with the rest of God’s Word, provides us with the sure foundation needed to live for God in times of trial and in times of prosperity.

🔗: *What does it mean that Jesus taught with authority?*

🔗: *What is the general attitude toward authority in our society?*

At the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew remarks that the crowds were astonished by Jesus’s teaching because He taught with authority, unlike the scribes. “Authority” in these verses refers to the right to influence others in both their thinking and their actions. This comment on authority endorses Jesus’s message, but more importantly, it establishes a connection between Him and God. Only God possesses absolute authority, but Jesus was teaching within this authority.

🔗: *How should God’s authority influence your daily life?*

🔗: *Why does our culture demean authority?*

APPLICATION POINT – The concept of “authority” is under fire within our society. There have always been those who challenge authority, but in the past it has typically amounted to the challenger wanting to gain authority over the establishment. The rebel wants to overthrow those in authority in order to gain it for himself. In recent years, however, there has been a shift in the way people challenge authority. Now, it is common to object to any semblance of authority as an attempt to suppress others. The idea is not to struggle for authority but to rid the world of any and all authorities as the only way to ensure the weak and vulnerable are not exploited by those who would grab power. Of course, the vacuum created by the absence of authority is never filled with the justice promised for all. Instead, it just makes exploitation that much easier. Such an attitude toward authority is clearly out of step with a biblical worldview, primarily because the Bible recognizes that God and God alone stands in the place of supreme authority

over His creation. As Christians, we need to embrace the authority of God in our lives. That includes receiving God's Word and even respecting the authorities He has put in place.

NEXT STEPS

The Sermon on the Mount is filled with practical illustrations and easily understood teachings. After studying this lesson, review some of the application points from the previous two lessons, as well as this one. How have you done in applying these application points? If needed, renew your commitment to Jesus's teachings on the Sermon on the Mount. Living in obedience to Jesus's teachings does not require us to move mountains.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

God, help me to speak correctly into a lost world.

Father, help me to avoid hypocrisy.

Lord Jesus, show me the narrow gate and help me to walk that path.

Lord, may I bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

