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## LESSON NOTES

### TWO PATHS, TWO DESTINATIONS<sup>1</sup> (Matthew 7)

Lord's Day, January 24, 2016

A Beginning Study of the "Sermon on the Mount"



#### OVERVIEW

Jesus really gets down to it this week. He steps on lots of toes, including mine. Consider part of His teaching in Matthew 7. Watch out for folks who love large gates and wide paths. They preach as if they were gentle souls, but inside are ferocious predators. So, how do you tell if they are "wolves in sheep's clothing?" It is simple, and profound. Look at their fruit.

People don't get grapes from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles. Good trees produce good fruit. In fact, a good tree can not bear bad fruit; a bad tree can only bear bad fruit. Trees that bear bad fruit? They become friends with chainsaws and fireplaces.

You recognize predators by their fruit. If they are getting the praise for "good deeds," they are wolves. If they fill their pockets with other people's generosity, they are predators. If they love you, as long as you support them, they're ferociously subtle enemies, not only of you, but of Him. The good fruit? When the Lord God Jehovah succeeds—His purposes are being fulfilled—then you are dealing with a true sheep of the Shepherd.

#### BROAD CONTEXTUAL ISSUES

Regarding Matthew 5-7, a commentator from Lifeway once wrote regarding Matthew 5-7...

"This is no lightweight 'preacher speech' delivered after dinner on the grounds. It was a manifesto for upside-down living. It was basic citizenship for residents of the kingdom of God. And for the disciples, it was nothing less than rewriting the rulebook for what it means to truly [*sic*] follow Jesus."

<sup>1</sup>The Lifeway title was Two Paths: One Choice which directly contradicts the teachings of Jesus the Christ where in Matthew 7 He clearly states one path leads to destruction, and the other leads to life in God's presence. There may be only one choice that "makes sense," but people do indeed choose the wide path, and then with Holy Spirit's intervention, they make another choice—the "wide narrow gate, the narrow road."

I commend their statement and challenge you to consider this as we begin a study of the “sermon on the mount.” So many have heard/read/watched these three chapters in Matthew that they will think they “know them.” Trust me, neither they nor we do. Unless you fully recognize, intellectually *and* spiritually, the theology being taught by Jesus as revolutionary, you do not fully know Matthew 5-7.

Jesus’ sermon was and is shot over the bridge of the religious right. The orthodox of their time, the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes, were so enamored by their orthodoxy, they failed to see they had turned God’s Law into a mishmash of human hypocrisy and human exaltation. That is, if I know the Law and practice the Law better than anyone else, I am righteous. Balderdash! This is the key message behind the teachings of the Lord God Jehovah we find in the Scriptures we call the “New Testament.” No wonder the poor were enamored, the rich threatened, and the religious right incensed. Jesus put it on the line. He turned the world upside down: theologically, spiritually, socially, and eventually economically.

Theologically, Jesus revealed the meaning of the plural pronoun used in Genesis 1:26. Spiritually, Jesus proclaimed real spirituality was connection to the great I AM, not our narcissistic knowledge of God and self-exalting obedience to the commands of the I AM. Socially, Jesus tore the curtain from top to bottom, forever eliminating any human barrier between humans, and between humans and the Lord God Jehovah. Economically, Jesus destroyed the presumably causal linkage between God’s blessing and material gifts. A whole new meaning of “blessing” became evident to all who would listen to the Son of God in Matthew 5.

#### CONTEXT: HISTORICAL, RELIGIOUS, AND POLITICAL

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In order to understand Matthew 5-7, you must understand the contexts in which Christ came to this earth as Jesus of Nazareth. Among some of the key issues, be sure you understand the implications of:

1. The time between the Hebrew Scriptures and the “New Testament.”
2. The criteria for what constituted the canon.
3. The dramatic changes occurring in Judaism, especially why those changes were erupting (e.g., the pig in the temple; or, the ongoing debates between the Hillel and Shammai schools of Scripture interpretation).
4. The writings between the Hebrew Scriptures and Matthew—there was a lot of “scripture-writing” going on, but it was not recognized as guided by Holy Spirit. Distinguishing between the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha is critical.
5. The history of the Herod’s which affected the Palestine of Jesus’ time.



## KEY ISSUES AND CONTEXTS—PREPARING TO STUDY MATTHEW 5-7

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1. Context. After being led into the desert by Holy Spirit, Jesus has just survived a 40-day fast and several encounters with Satan. Relying upon Scripture, Jesus was eventually served by His angels and then proceeded to choose a few good men as students. His teaching, preaching, and healing was so popular throughout Syria that large crowds came south to Galilee to hear Him. Matthew and Luke record one of those times when Jesus “taught the crowds.”<sup>2</sup>
2. Matthew 5:1-6—Upon seeing the crowds, Jesus went upon on a hillside, and sat down like all teachers sit. His disciples came close, perhaps to hear better so they could repeat the teaching to the crowds. Here is the opening salvo:
  - ⌘ Closer to God<sup>3</sup> are those who are poor in spirit. They may be poor in your eyes, but I say they have the kingdom of heaven.
  - ⌘ Closer to God are those who mourn. You may be embarrassed by them now and look away from them because they are sad, but they will be comforted.
  - ⌘ Closer to God are the meek. You may think nice guys finish last, but the meek shall last for they shall inherit the earth.
  - ⌘ Closer to God are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. You may think they are fanatics, but they will be filled in ways you, who thirst after pragmatism and rationality, can never or ever will be filled.
3. Matthew 5:7-12—He continued His teaching ...
  - ⌘ Closer to God are those who show mercy [grace]. You may think the merciful are weak, but they will be given grace when others will not.
  - ⌘ Closer to God are those whose *raison d'être* is pure. You may not always see their reason for being, but God does and they will see God Himself.
  - ⌘ Closer to God are those who seek peace (the Greek here, “eh-ray-nayn” [εἰρηνην] connotes “reconciliation,” not just an absence of conflict or war). You who enjoy, if not live for, the grittiness and passion of conflict may attribute the reconcilers as wimpy, but the Lord God calls the seekers of reconciliation His children.

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<sup>2</sup>Opinions differ regarding whether this Sermon is a summary of what Jesus taught on one occasion or a compilation of teachings presented on numerous occasions. Thirty-four of the verses in Matthew's record occur in different contexts in Luke than the apparently parallel Sermon on the Plain found in Luke 6:17-49. Some of the differences are important. For example, Matthew speaks of being poor in spirit, whereas Luke is clearly talking about being poor in the traditionally material sense.

<sup>3</sup>The meaning of “blessed” was adulterated as much then as it is now. Too often we use the phrase “blessed by God” as a synomic phrase for “gift from God.” Not all gifts from God are blessings, because some can become a curse if they separate us from the Lord God. Similarly, not all gifts are curses, but become blessings, because they bring us closer to the Lord God Jehovah. Being close to God is the real meaning, both theologically and pragmatically of “blessing;” being separated from Him is the curse.

⌘ Closer to God are those who suffer for doing and being God's example of doing and being right. Those who suffer because of this? They inherit the kingdom of heaven. Yes, you are closer to God when they insult you for My sake than when they praise you. You are closer to God when you suffer or are lied about because of Me. Take the time to rejoice! Why? Your reward in heaven is great, and you're in great company. These same spiritual morons persecuted My prophets before you were ever here on earth.

4. Matthew 5:13-16—Here's what all this means. Given that you are indeed merciful, poor in spirit, meek, sufferers for righteousness, and even mournful for Me, you are the salt of the earth. You make things taste better; you preserve the word; you keep pure what has been given to the whole earth. But remember—salt which loses its abilities is not good for anything, except to be used as filler for a road! People trample and urinate on that road.

Similarly, given that you're merciful, meek, suffer for righteousness, and have a pure reason for being, you are the light of the world. You enlighten by lighting up the world with righteousness and exposing the evil in the world. You are the light. Make sure your light shines. After all, people don't put a light under a bowl; they put it up high so everyone can see. When you shine in this way, Father God can be praised because your acts of righteousness are seen by the light you show.

## KEY TEXT ISSUES—MATTHEW 7

Matthew 7:1-12. *Perspective, perspective, perspective; humility, humility, humility.*

When you put yourself in the role of judge others, you are putting yourself in jeopardy by the real Judge.<sup>4</sup> You are neither the Lawgiver nor the Judge. Don't judge.

Think about it. Why are you concerned about the sawdust in your brother's eye when there's plywood in yours? Where do you get off saying, "Hey, you're not right—let me help you with that sin." Especially, when there's a plywood sized sin in your life.

You two-faced charlatan—take the plywood sized sin out of your life before you even begin to think about the sawdust sin in others' lives. When you do, you will indeed be able to help, because then your humility about a plywood sized sin will help you help your brother with his sawdust problem.

By the way—don't give what is sacred to the vile and unclean. When you try to feed pigs pearls, they often will turn on you and eat you.<sup>5</sup>

You're not alone—ask and it will be given to you—knock on the door and it will be opened. Why? Everyone who asks receives, and if you seek, you find; if you knock, the door will be opened. Why? Think about your own life. If a child asks his/her parent for a slice of bread, will the parent give her/him a rock? Asks for some steak and gets a rattlesnake? So, if you who are

### MATTHEW 7:1-12

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. <sup>2</sup>For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

<sup>3</sup>"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? <sup>4</sup>How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? <sup>5</sup>You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

<sup>6</sup>"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.

<sup>7</sup>"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

<sup>9</sup>"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup>Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? <sup>11</sup>If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! <sup>12</sup>So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up [the actual verb is "is" εστιν, not πληρωω "fulfill" as in Matthew 5:17] the Law and the Prophets.

<sup>4</sup>We are not to judge for that role is left to God alone. Consider James' declaration (James 4:11-12):

*Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?*

<sup>5</sup>No, I'm not kidding—pigs are indeed carnivorous. I've seen them eat anything dead, including baby pigs.

evil—yes you are evil—know how to give good gifts, why would not your Father in Heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!!??

Now, here's the bottom line. You want to know what the totality of the Law and Prophets is? Here it is—Do unto others what you would have them do to you. This **is** God's ultimate command.

- Q Why did the Christ declare that we were not to judge others?
- Q What is your answer to Christ's question—"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"
- Q Why are we to be concerned about planks first, according to Christ?
- Q Who are the dogs and/or pigs we should avoid giving that which is sacred? What are these sacred things?
- Q What happens when we don't ask, or knock? Why would Christ need to teach us to ask, and knock? Why don't we ask or knock?
- Q What is the evidence Christ provides that Father God will indeed open the door, and give good things to those who ask, and knock?
- Q Why does the "golden rule" summarize the "Law and the Prophets?"
- Q What does it take to deploy this rule? [Hint: you can not be a "good Samaritan" by crossing on the other side of the road, nor by assuming the victim needs stitches. Out comes the needle and thread while he's having trouble breathing? Until you know what your neighbor *needs*, you can not obey the "golden rule." It takes a relationship to know what your neighbor *needs*.]

Matthew 7:13-23. *It's easy to do what's righteous*. The road to perdition is wide—people seem to love it for many enter that road. Since the other gate is small and the path narrow, only a few find life. Why not?

Well, watch out for folks who love large gates and wide paths. They preach as if they were gentle souls, but are inside ferocious predators. How do you tell if they are “wolves in sheep’s clothing?” It is simple, and profound. Look at their fruit.

People don’t get grapes from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles. Good trees produce good fruit. In fact, a good tree can not bear bad fruit; a bad tree can only bear bad fruit. Trees that bear bad fruit? They become friends with chainsaws and fireplaces.

You will recognize predators by their fruit. If they are getting the praise for “good deeds,” they are wolves. If they fill their

pockets with other people’s generosity, they are predators. If they love you, as long as you support them, they’re ferociously subtle enemies, not only of you, but of Him. When the Lord God Jehovah succeeds—His purposes are being fulfilled—then you are dealing with a true sheep of the Shepherd.

And, by the way, not everyone who calls out to Me with loud declarations of fealty will enter God’s presence—only those who fulfill the purpose of My Father who is in heaven. Sure, lots of folk will claim they did a lot to honor Me—exorcism, miracles, good deeds, etc.—but I know their heart, their *raison d’être*—it was not Me. Their reason for being was themselves. I will speak very plainly—I have never known you—get away, you who work against the Law!

- Q Why will many not find the small gate and the narrow path? What can one do to improve the number of people who find this gate and path? [Hint: see Matthew 5:14-16 ]<sup>6</sup>
- Q Why do we tolerate false prophets? [Hint: see 2 Timothy 4:3 and an otolaryngologist.]
- Q What are elements of bad fruit? Which are the most difficult to ascertain?
- Q Why do we want authority to save us—we make big protestations of respect when we want something—but refuse actually to accept their authority? For example, why are people enamored with Jesus the Christ being a savior, but not our master, our Lord?
- Q Why will the Judge deny these loud protestors solace on the last day? [Hint: see the last word of verse 23]

## MATTHEW 7:13-23

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. <sup>14</sup>But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

<sup>15</sup>“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. <sup>16</sup>By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup>Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup>A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot 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, by their fruit you will recognize them.

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

<sup>6</sup>You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Matthew 7:24-29. So *what have you learned from Me?* My words must be put into practice. Hearing their wisdom, reflecting on their revolutionary implications, and treasuring their intelligence does nothing.

When you put these words of Mine into practice, you are like the wise contractor who built his house on the Rock. Sure, rain came. Winds blew. The walls shook, but the house did not fall. Its foundation was on the Rock.

Now for those of you who are still seeking the wide gate, the wide road, thus ignoring My words? You're like the

fraudulent contractor who ignored the Rock and chose sand for a foundation. The rain came. Floods followed, and the wind blew the house down with a mighty crash.

The crowds were stunned. Have I chosen sand? Do I have a plank in my eye? I learned I've committed murder through my anger. I've learned that the poor are closer to God. I've learned to keep my attempts at fasting and giving between me and the Father. I've seen an amazing teacher. This Jesus does not teach like the others, quoting one rabbi or another, comparing and contrasting until we overcome with boredom. This Jesus teaches as if He were the authority. They were amazed. Are you?

Q Why do people seek the sand, instead of the Rock?

Q How does one test whether one's foundation (one's *raison d'être*) is sandy, or rocky?

Q What storms are good tests regarding one's foundation?

Q Why were the people impressed with the teachings of Jesus? Why should you be?

## MATTHEW 7:24-29

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup>The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. <sup>26</sup>But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. <sup>27</sup>The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

<sup>28</sup>When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, <sup>29</sup>because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.



**7:1** The Christian is not to judge hypocritically or self-righteously, as can be seen from the context (v. 5). The same thought is expressed in 23:13-39 (cf. Ro 2:1). To obey Christ's commands in this chapter, we must first evaluate a person's character—whether he is a "dog" (v. 6) or a false prophet (v. 15), or whether his life shows fruit (v. 16).

Scripture repeatedly exhorts believers to evaluate carefully and choose between good and bad people and things (sexually immoral, 1Co 5:9; those who masquerade as angels of light, 2Co 11:14; dogs, Php 3:2; false prophets, 1Jn 4:1). The Christian is to "test everything" (1Th 5:21).

So, in the beginning of the chapter, Jesus takes us out of the judging business and puts us into the fruit-inspecting business. We are not to judge for that role is left to God alone. Consider James' declaration (James 4:11-12):

*Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?*

**7:6** Teaching should be given in accordance with the spiritual capacity of the learners. *dogs.* were held in low esteem.

**7:8** *ask . . . seek . . . knock.* Greek present imperatives are used here, indicating constant asking, constant seeking and constant knocking. Persistent prayer is being emphasized.

**7:13** *narrow gate.* The gate that leads into the kingdom of heaven. It's synonymous with "life" (v. 14). *destruction.* Separation from God in hell.

**7:13** *false prophets.* People who have not been sent by God but who claim that they have (see 24:24; Jer 23:16 and note).

**7:21** *Lord.* A title that sometimes means only "sir" or "master" but here seems to mean more than that in view of the fact that Jesus is the one who makes the final decision about a person's eternal destiny.

**7:22** *that day.* The day of judgment (cf. Mal 3:17-18). prophesy. In the NT this verb primarily means to give a message from God, not necessarily to predict.

*demons.* In Mark 1:23 we learn demons are indeed sentient; i.e., demonic possession intended to torment and destroy those who are created in God's image, but the demon in Mark 1:23 recognized that Jesus was a powerful adversary, capable of destroying the forces of Satan.

**7:29** *authority.* The teachers of the law quoted other rabbis to support their own teaching, but Jesus spoke with divine authority. See Matthew 2:4 where we learn the Jewish scholars of the day, professionally trained in the development, teaching and application of the Law from the Hebrew Scriptures. Their authority was strictly human and traditional.

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<sup>7</sup>Adapted, revised and edited by D. Thomas Porter from Compton's Interactive NIV © 1996.