

Sermon On the Mount Pt 5 How Do You Know?

Isaiah Wilson / General Adult

Sermon On the Mount / Matthew 7

Introduction

Last week we spent the whole night in Matthew chapter 6, and the question underneath all of it was where you would go to check whether your righteousness is real. Jesus gave us two places to look. Giving, prayer, and fasting test who you are performing for. Treasure, vision, and worry test who you are actually trusting to take care of you. Same diagnostic, run twice, in the two places nobody else can see. And sitting at the center of all of it, at the literal center of the whole sermon, was a prayer. Not a rule. An address to a Father.

Tonight we finish it.

We have twelve verses left inside the bracket. Then Jesus does something He has not done yet in this sermon. He stops describing and starts asking. He has been telling this crowd what a kingdom life looks like from the inside. In the last fifteen verses he turns around and puts a choice in front of every single person sitting on that hillside, and He does not let anybody leave without making it.

One more thing before we open the text. Back in week one I told you about a vow, and I told you I was going to leave it alone for a while. We come back to it tonight.

The Log and the Speck (7:1-5)

Matthew 7:1 BSB

¹ “Do not judge, or you will be judged.

That is probably the most quoted sentence Jesus ever said, and it is almost always quoted by people who stop reading at the end of it. So let's not stop there.

Start with what this cannot mean. Five verses from now, Jesus tells you not to give what is holy to dogs, which requires you to have decided that somebody is a dog. Fourteen verses from now he tells you to watch out for false prophets who show up dressed like sheep. You cannot obey that command without evaluating somebody. You have to look at a person, listen to what they teach, and reach a conclusion about them. Jesus commands that, in this same chapter, less than a page later. So whatever verse 1 means, it does not mean shut off your judgment and call everything fine.

Here is what it does mean. Look at the next verse.

Matthew 7:2 BSB

² For with the same judgment you pronounce, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

The issue is the measure. Not whether you use one. Which one you pick up, and the fact that it swings in both directions. You are not standing outside the courtroom handing down verdicts on people. You are standing inside it. Every standard you reach for gets handed to somebody else and used on you.

Then He gives us the picture.

Matthew 7:3–5 BSB

³ Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye but fail to notice the beam in your own eye?

⁴ How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while there is still a beam in your own eye?

⁵ You hypocrite! First take the beam out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Back in week three I told you that Jesus overstates things on purpose in this sermon. I used this image as my example when we were working through the eye and the hand.

Nobody has ever had a construction beam in their eye. That is the point. He reaches for the most absurd picture available because He wants you to see how this situation actually looks from the outside.

So picture it honestly. A man walks up to his brother with a plank sticking out of his face and offers to perform eye surgery. Now notice, he is not lying about the speck. The speck is really there. He sees it clearly and he is right about it. And he is the last person on earth who should be touching it.

Look at the word Jesus uses on him. Hypocrite. That is a stage word. An actor's word. And this is the fourth time you have heard it in two chapters. He called the trumpet blowers that. He called the street corner prayers that. He called the men with the sad faces during their fast that. Now He calls this man that. Chapter 6 spent eighteen verses telling you to stop performing righteousness where people can watch. Chapter 7 opens by naming the cheapest way anybody has ever done it. You can put on a full show of caring about holiness and never once turn it on yourself. Pointing at a speck costs you nothing.

And this is the same problem we have been tracking since week three. The Pharisees had traded the real target for a smaller one they could check. Measuring yourself against the person sitting next to you is that same trade. Held up

against God's own character, you are missing. Held up against your brother's speck, you are doing fine. Only one of those is the actual mark.

Now go back to the end of verse 5, because most people misquote that part too.

Matthew 7:5 BSB

⁵ You hypocrite! First take the beam out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

He does not say leave your brother alone. He does not say the speck is none of your business. He gives an order of operations, and there is a second step in it. The speck still comes out. What changes is the sequence, and the reason for the sequence is eyesight. A man with a beam in his face cannot do delicate work on somebody else. He will do damage. He is not disqualified from ever caring about his brother. He is disqualified until he has dealt with what is in his own way.

So the question this passage puts to you is not whether you are allowed to notice things about people. Of course you are. The question is whether you have ever run the same inspection on yourself, with the same energy, that you run on everybody else.

Dogs and Pearls (7:6)

Matthew 7:6 BSB

⁶ Do not give dogs what is holy; do not throw your pearls before swine. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.

That verse is jarring, and it lands one sentence after Jesus finished talking about your brother's eye. Which is exactly why it is here.

We just spent five verses being told not to set ourselves up as anybody's judge. Now, immediately, Jesus says something you cannot obey without making a call about somebody. You do not get to hand off what is holy without first deciding who is standing in front of you. So the two verses are not fighting each other. They are holding each other in place. Verse 1 takes away your right to sit on the bench. Verse 6 tells you that you still have to be able to tell.

The word for dog here is not the one you might expect. Greek had two. One was the household animal, the one under the table, the one a family fed. That is not this word. This is the other one. The scavenger. The pack animal in the street that nobody owned and nobody fed, that ate whatever it found. Pair that with a pig, an animal this crowd would not touch, would not raise, would not eat, and you

have two pictures of something that has no category for what you are handing it. A pearl to a pig is not treasure. It is a small hard thing that is not food. That is the whole problem. The animal is not being insulted. It is being described as unable to receive what is being offered.

So the point is not permission to look at a person and file them away. That is the thing verse 1 just took out of your hands, and you don't get it back one sentence later. The point is that something holy can be handed to someone who has already decided it is worthless, and when that happens the thing does not stop being holy. It just gets trampled.

Ask, Seek, Knock (7:7-11)

Matthew 7:7-8 BSB

⁷ Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you.

⁸ For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

Now stop and look at where this sits.

For two solid chapters, Jesus has been raising a standard that nobody in that crowd can meet. Anger counts as murder. Looking counts as adultery. Love your enemies. Be

perfect as your Father is perfect. Then giving that nobody sees, praying that nobody hears, and a warning that you cannot serve two masters and you already know which one you have been serving. Anyone tracking with him by chapter 7 is in trouble, and they know it.

And right here, in the last stretch before he closes, he tells them where to go get what they do not have.

Three words. Ask. Seek. Knock. And the tense he uses on all three is the ongoing kind. Not ask one time and see what happens. Keep asking. Keep looking. Keep standing at the door.

Then verse 8, and I want you to notice that there is no qualifier anywhere in it. Not the deserving ones. Not the ones who have gotten their lives cleaned up first. Everyone. Which is the only version of that sentence that would do this crowd any good, because we have already established who is sitting there. Sick, poor, occupied, tired, and now being shown a standard they cannot reach.

Then Jesus argues it out.

Matthew 7:9–11 BSB

⁹ Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?

¹¹ So if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

He picks two pairs, and I don't think He picked them at random. A stone and a loaf of bread. A fish and a snake. Look at those pairs. In that part of the world, a smooth flat stone off the ground looks like the flat bread they baked. Certain eels and snake-like fish pulled out of Galilee look close enough to a snake that you would have to check. He does not pair bread with a rock the size of a house. He pairs it with the thing that looks like it.

Hold onto that, because we are about to spend the rest of the night on things that look like other things. Two roads that start at two gates. A wolf in a sheep's coat. A tree that looks like a tree. Two houses on the same street. Every single image in the last half of this chapter is a counterfeit standing next to the real thing, close enough that you have to look hard. Jesus starts that pattern here, and He starts it by telling you what your Father does with it. He does not hand you the fake.

Now watch what he says about the fathers in the room. You who are evil. He drops it in the middle of the sentence like it is not up for discussion, because to Him it isn't. If a man who is genuinely broken still knows better than to put a stone in

his kid's hand, then how much more the one who is not broken at all.

Back in chapter 6 he taught this crowd to ask their Father for bread. He is still on bread. Same Father, same loaf, and now he tells you what kind of hands you are asking.

So here is what this passage is doing where it sits. The standard has not moved. Nothing gets easier. What Jesus adds is that the person holding you to it is the same person you are supposed to go ask, and He is not stingy, and He does not trick you. What is required of you is more than you have. Which is why you keep asking.

The Bracket Closes (7:12)

Back in the first session I told you that the middle section of this sermon is built inside a frame. That Jesus opens it with a phrase, then closes it with the same phrase, and that everything in between is meant to be read through it. I told you the front end of the frame was in chapter 5. I want to read that to you again.

Matthew 5:17 BSB

¹⁷ Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them.

Matthew 5:20 BSB

²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

The Law and the Prophets. Then, in the very next breath, what fulfilling them looks like. A righteousness that goes past the most disciplined religious people anybody in that crowd could name.

That was four sessions ago. Since then we have been all the way through murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation, and enemy love. All the way through giving and prayer and fasting. Through the Lord's Prayer, through treasure and worry, through the log and the speck. Every bit of it has been sitting inside that frame.

Here is the back end of it.

Matthew 7:12 BSB

¹² In everything, then, do to others as you would have them do to you. For this is the essence of the Law and the Prophets.

There it is. The same phrase, at the other end.

This is not a rare phrase that appears twice and nowhere else. What makes it a frame is not that the words are

unusual. It is where Matthew put them. At the front door and the back door of the same room, with nothing before or after that uses them again in this sermon. That is what a bracket is.

And notice what he brackets it with. Not a warning. Not a rule about worship. He closes the entire middle of his sermon by telling you to treat people the way you want to be treated, and then says that this is what the whole of Israel's Scripture was driving at.

There were versions of that saying already floating around in the Jewish world of that day, and they were usually put the other direction. Do not do to your neighbor what you would hate done to you. That is a real ethic, and it is not nothing. But you can satisfy it in your sleep. You can go your whole life hurting no one and never once take a step toward anybody. Jesus turns it around and points it forward. Now it costs you something, because now you have to move first, and you have to keep asking yourself what you would want if you were the one standing over there.

That is what we have been chasing since week three. The mark was God's own character. Verse 12 is what that character looks like when you aim it at the human being in front of you.

The frame is closed. The bracket is shut. And Jesus has said everything He is going to say about what this life looks like.

Now He turns around and asks whether it is yours.

The Turn

Everything from here is a pair.

Two gates. Two roads. Two trees. Two kinds of fruit. Two men standing in front of Jesus on the last day, both of them calling him Lord. Two houses. Not one of the last fifteen verses of this sermon leaves you with a single option in front of you. Every time, there are two, and every time, you are standing in front of them.

But watch how the pairs work, because they don't all work the same way, and the difference matters.

The first pair is a choice. Two gates, and you pick one. You can see them. Jesus describes both, tells you where each road ends, and tells you to go through one of them. That is a decision, made out in the open, with the information in front of you.

Every pair after that is a revealing. Two trees that look like trees until something grows on them. Two men who sound identical until one of them hears an answer he was not expecting. Two houses that look like houses until the weather comes. In all three, nobody is choosing anything in

the moment the difference shows up. The difference is already there. Something arrives that makes it visible.

That is the shape of this whole closing section, and it is the shape of the question we have been walking toward since the first night. Choose, and then find out what you chose.

One more thing to watch for, and I will tell you now so you can catch it when it happens. Jesus paints pictures all the way through this sermon. Salt. Light. A speck and a plank. Birds and lilies. He does it in the gate section, he does it in the tree section, he does it in the house section. There is exactly one stretch in these fifteen verses where he stops using pictures entirely and just says it. That stretch is the hardest thing in the sermon. When we get there, notice that the illustrations run out.

Two Gates (7:13-14)

Matthew 7:13-14 BSB

¹³ Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.

¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the way that leads to life, and only a few find it.

The first thing to notice is that this is a command. He does

not lay out two options and then step back. He tells the crowd which one to take.

And then He describes them, and the description is not flattering to the popular one.

Wide gate. Broad road. Easy to find, nothing in your way, and Jesus says many people are on it. Then the other one. Narrow gate. Hard road. He says few find it.

Now hear those two words carefully, because they get softened constantly and we are not going to do that tonight. Many. Few. Those are Jesus's words about the size of the two groups, spoken to a crowd of people who had walked for days to hear Him. He does not say the crowds are all fine. He does not tell them the wide road probably arrives at the same place by a different route. He tells them the wide road ends in destruction and most people are on it.

I am not going to explain that away and I am not going to decorate it. Jesus said it in front of a hillside full of people and let it sit there.

Here is what the passage does not say, and this matters just as much. It does not say the narrow gate is hidden, or locked, or reserved. Jesus is standing in front of a crowd telling them exactly where it is. Few find it, and he is at that moment showing it to hundreds of people. The gate being narrow is not the same as the gate being closed.

So what makes it narrow?

Look back at the last two chapters. Not the anger you managed to keep off your face. The anger. Not the affair you did not have. The look. Give where nobody applauds. Pray where nobody hears. Love your enemies. Be perfect as your Father is perfect. That is the gate. It is narrow because you cannot bring anything through it that you were counting on. Every single thing this crowd might have carried up that hill as evidence, their record, their reputation, their comparison to the guy next to them, is too wide to fit.

And notice he does not just give you a gate. He gives you a road.

Matthew 7:14 BSB

¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the way that leads to life, and only a few find it.

A gate you go through once. A road you walk the rest of your life. Jesus puts both in the same sentence and attaches life to the far end of the road, not to the gate. That is the whole distinction we started this series with, back on the first night. Something happens completely, in a moment. And then there is the walking, which takes everything you have got, for as long as you have got.

Two Trees (7:15-20)

Matthew 7:15 BSB

¹⁵ Beware of false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

Jesus goes straight from the road to a warning about who you might meet on it, and the warning is built entirely on the fact that you cannot tell by looking.

Sheep's clothing. Underneath, a wolf. Not a wolf who slipped past the gate by accident. A wolf who dressed for this. Somebody put on the outfit deliberately and walked into the flock, and the only reason it works is that from the outside it works. There is no tell. That is the point of the sentence. If there were a tell, you would not need the warning.

So Jesus gives you the test.

Matthew 7:16 BSB

¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?

Not by their claims. Not by their sermons. Not by how much power appears to be moving around them. By their fruit.

Matthew 7:17-18 BSB

¹⁷ Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.

Here is what a tree is not able to do. It cannot produce something other than what it is. A thornbush is not being stubborn when it fails to grow grapes. It is being a thornbush. Fruit is not an achievement the tree pulls off. It is the tree's own nature showing up on the outside where you can see it.

Which is the thing this entire series has been saying since night one, arriving in Jesus's own words. Righteousness was never the fee at the gate. It is what a life looks like once it belongs to the kingdom. A tree does not grow fruit in order to become a tree. It grows fruit because that is what it is.

And then verse 19...

Matthew 7:19 BSB

¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Now, I need to slow all the way down here, because there are two very different things that can be true about a tree with nothing on it, and both of them are in your Bible, and we teach both of them in this church.

The first is the one Jesus has been describing since verse 15. The tree was never that kind of tree. The wolf did not become a wolf. He arrived as one, and the coat was always a coat. Time did not change him. Time just ran long enough for the fruit question to get asked.

The second one is different, and Jesus said it Himself later, on the last night of his life. He told his disciples He was the vine and they were the branches, and then He said that a branch that does not stay connected to Him gets thrown away, and it withers, and it goes in the fire. Same ending. Same fire. But that is not a branch that was never attached. Jesus calls those branches His. They were on the vine. What happened is that they stopped remaining.

We have taught this here, and we have not been vague about it. A person can genuinely come to Christ, be genuinely born again, and later walk away and forfeit it. Not by struggling. Not by failing. By turning around and going back to what they were pulled out of. Scripture warns believers about that directly, and it does not warn people about things that cannot happen to them.

So hear both, because you need both.

Some trees never were. Some trees were, and stopped being tended, and died anyway. And here is the uncomfortable thing they have in common, which is the

only reason Jesus put this test in your hands. From the outside, at a distance, in the winter, those two trees look exactly alike. Both of them are standing there with nothing on the branches.

Matthew 7:20 BSB

²⁰ So then, by their fruit you will recognize them.

He says it twice. Verse 16 and verse 20, front and back of the same paragraph, the same sentence both times. He is not running out of material. He is making sure you cannot leave without it.

And notice, for the last time tonight, what He does not give you. He does not give you a way to check the root. You cannot open a tree up and inspect it. You get the fruit. That is the whole diagnostic, and it is the only one there is, and it works exactly as well on you as it does on anybody else you might be tempted to point it at.

Two Claims (7:21-23)

I told you a few minutes ago to watch for the place where Jesus stops using pictures.

Matthew 7:21 BSB

²¹ Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My

Father in heaven.

No salt here. No birds, no lilies, no gate, no tree. He is not illustrating anymore. He is just saying it, and He says it about people who call Him Lord.

Sit in that for a second before we go any further. Everybody in this paragraph is religious. Nobody in it is an atheist. Nobody wandered in. These are people who use his name, who address Him correctly, who say the right word to the right person. Lord. That is the confession. That is the word the church has used for two thousand years to identify its own.

And Jesus says that is not the thing that settles it.

Matthew 7:22 BSB

²² 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?’

Now look at what they actually bring.

Prophecy. Casting out demons. Many mighty works. Not attendance. Not a decent life. Not membership. These are not people with a thin résumé. If you handed that list to any church in America and asked whether that person was a believer, the answer would come back in under a second.

And look at the phrase they repeat. In your name. They say it two times in one verse. They are not claiming they did it alone. They are claiming they did it with Him, under His authority, on His side. That is not the language of an outsider. That is the language of a coworker.

Matthew 7:23 BSB

²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness!’

I never knew you.

He does not say you fell away. He does not say you started well and drifted. He does not say the fruit went bad. He says never. There was never a point where this was real.

And that word is doing something specific, so I want to be exact about it. Jesus is talking about a particular group of people here, and He is telling you what is true about them. He is not laying down a rule that covers everybody who ever ends up outside. We just spent time on the other case, the branch that was on the vine and did not stay. Both are real. Do not take verse 23 and swing it backward over every person you have ever watched walk away from the faith, because that is not what it says and it is not what we believe. This verse is about people who were never His to begin with. It is not the only way to end up outside. It is the way these particular people did.

Now hear the word He uses. Knew. Not knew about. Not heard of. In the language of Scripture that word is relational, and it carries everything. It is the word for the deepest kind of knowing one person can have of another. He is not saying he lacked information about them. He is saying there was never anything between them.

Which means the entire verdict turns on something that never showed up in the résumé.

They had activity. They did not have Him.

And here is the part I am not going to protect you from, because I would be lying to you if I did. This is not a passage about somebody else. Jesus preached it to a crowd that had walked for days to hear him. He preached it to people who were, at that exact moment, doing the most religiously committed thing available to them. He aimed it at the room, and the room was full of people who assumed they were fine.

So I have to aim it at this room. Some of us have been in church our whole lives. Some of us serve. Some of us have seen God do things through us that we could not have done ourselves. None of that is on the list of things Jesus accepts here. He looked at prophecy, deliverance, and miracles, and He called it lawlessness, because it was done by people who never actually belonged to Him.

Twenty one years ago I stood up in front of witnesses and said two words. I do. And I told you on the first night of this series that the moment those words came out of my mouth, I was a husband. Completely. Not partly. Right then.

I also told you there was one more thing about that vow, and that I was going to leave it alone for a few weeks. Here it is.

Imagine a man who says those exact two words. Same church. Same witnesses. Same syllables, in the same order, at the same volume. And he never meant a single one of them. He had no intention of building anything. He wanted what the words got him. The standing, the name, the look of the thing.

Now run that forward twenty one years.

He is going to look married. He will have the ring on. He will have the photographs. He will be able to tell you the date, and the church, and what the weather was like. Every external marker will be in place. And there was never a marriage there. Not one that eroded. Not one that started well and got neglected until it died, which is a real thing that happens to real marriages and is its own tragedy. This is the other thing. There was nothing there on the first day, and the years did not cause that. The years just made it impossible to keep hiding.

That is what verse 23 is. Not a marriage that failed. A vow that was never meant, finally holding still long enough to be seen for what it was.

And I want to say the hard part out loud. The man in that story could not necessarily be picked out of a lineup on his wedding day. Standing there in the suit, saying the words, he looked exactly like I did. That is the whole reason Jesus has spent fifteen verses on things that look like other things. A wolf in a sheep's coat. A tree with no fruit yet. A stone shaped like bread. Two men saying Lord, Lord in identical voices.

He never stopped saying the words. He said them right up to the end. He is saying them in verse 22.

Two Houses (7:24-27)

Matthew 7:24 BSB

²⁴ Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

Notice what he builds the whole ending on. These words of mine.

Not sincerity. Not effort. Not a general principle about

building carefully. This sermon. Everything from the poor in spirit on the first night to the fruit test ten minutes ago. That is the foundation He is talking about, and He is talking about it while the crowd is still sitting there with it ringing in their ears.

And He gives you two things a man does with it. Hears them, and acts on them. Both. Together. That is the whole formula, and it is the same formula the last section just tested. The man in verse 22 heard plenty. He could quote it. He used the name. What he did not have was the second half⁵

Matthew 7:25–27 BSB

²⁵ The rain fell, the torrents raged, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because its foundation was on the rock.

²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

²⁷ The rain fell, the torrents raged, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its collapse!”

Now, before we go anywhere else, notice what is identical in these two stories, because almost everything is.

Both men heard the words. Jesus says so about both of

them. Both men built. Neither one is standing around doing nothing. Both houses got finished. And the same storm hits both of them. Same rain. Same rivers. Same wind. Jesus uses the same three things in the same order twice. The man on the rock does not get better weather. He gets the same weather.

So the storm is not the judgment on one house and the mercy on the other. The storm is what comes for everybody. It is the thing that arrives at every house on the street, and the only thing it does is answer a question...

That is the third time tonight. The fruit did not make the tree what it was. It showed you. The last day did not make those men strangers to Jesus. It showed you. And the storm does not make one house weak and the other one strong. It shows you. In every single one of these, the difference is already there, sitting quietly, and something arrives that makes it visible.

Foundation work is the one part of building a house that nobody ever sees. When it is finished, it is buried. It does not show up in a photograph. Nobody walks past and admires it. And on a clear day, a house on sand and a house on rock look exactly the same, because the part that is different about them is underground.

Which is where we started. Four weeks ago Jesus told this crowd that their Father sees in secret, and He said it three

times in a row so nobody could miss it. Give where nobody can see. Pray where nobody can hear. Fast without arranging your face. That whole chapter was about the part of your life that is buried, and here at the very end He tells you why it mattered. That is the part the house stands on.

Matthew 7:27 BSB

²⁷ The rain fell, the torrents raged, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its collapse!”

And great was its fall.

He could have stopped one clause earlier. The house fell. That would have been enough to make the point. He adds a sentence about how far it came down, and he ends the entire sermon on it. The last picture Jesus leaves in front of that crowd is not the house standing. It is the sound of the other one coming apart.

The Crowds (7:28-29)

Matthew 7:28 BSB

²⁸ When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at His teaching,

Matthew tells us how it landed, and the word he uses is strong. Not impressed. Not moved. Knocked sideways. The

crowd is reeling.

And then Matthew tells us why, and it is not what you would expect him to say.

Matthew 7:29 BSB

²⁹ because He taught as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

Think about what the crowd had been listening to their whole lives. The scribes were serious men. They knew the text. They had spent their lives in it. But when a scribe taught, he taught by leaning. He would tell you what Rabbi so and so had said about it, and what a different rabbi had said back, and where the weight of opinion had settled. His authority was borrowed, every time, and everybody knew it. That was not a weakness in their system. That was their system. You do not speak for God on your own.

Then a carpenter's son from Nazareth climbs a hill and starts talking, and He does not cite anybody.

Go back through what you just heard for four weeks. You have heard it was said, but I say to you. Six times. He takes the actual commands of God, given at Sinai, and He does not tell you what the rabbis concluded about them. He tells you what they mean, on His own say-so. He tells you who is blessed. He tells you which gate to walk through. He tells you what your Father does and does not see. And at the very

end, He tells you that the words that will hold a life together when everything comes down on it are His words.

Nobody talked like that. That is why Matthew says the crowd was reeling. It was not the content alone. It was that a man was saying it without standing behind anybody.

And that is the answer to the question sitting under this entire last section, the one nobody in the crowd said out loud but every one of them had to be thinking. Who is this, to say all of that? Who gets to draw a line down the middle of the human race with two gates and tell me which side I am on?

Matthew answers it in one line at the very bottom of the sermon. He is not repeating an authority. He is the authority.

Which means the rock in verse 24 is not a metaphor for good decisions. He said the foundation is His words. And His words are not backed by anything except Him. To build on this sermon is to build on Him. There is nothing underneath it holding it up except the person who said it.

That is why the demand is what it is. And it is also the only reason the demand is survivable.

Close

Five weeks ago we started on a hillside with a crowd that had nothing.

Sick people. Poor people. People living under an occupying army, taxed off land their families had worked for generations. People who had walked for days because somebody in their house could not see, or could not walk, or could not get free. That is who was sitting there. Not the powerful. Not the comfortable. Not people with margin.

And the first thing Jesus said to them was that the kingdom starts with them.

Then he described what that kingdom looks like on a person. Poor in spirit. Mourning. Meek. Hungry for righteousness. Merciful. Pure in heart. Peacemakers. He said all of that before he asked them for anything at all.

Then he started asking. Not just don't murder. Don't hold your brother in contempt. Not just don't commit adultery. Don't look at her that way. Keep your word without swearing on anything. Don't hit back. Love the people who hate you. Be perfect, the way your Father is perfect.

Then he took it to the places nobody can see. Give where no one applauds. Pray where no one hears. Fast without arranging your face for it. Stop trying to serve two masters, because you cannot, and you already know which one has

been getting the better end of it. And in the middle of all of it, at the exact center of the whole sermon, he put a prayer that starts by calling God Father.

And then tonight, he turned around and asked whether any of it was ours.

A gate. A tree. Two men saying the same word. A house. And underneath every one of them, the same question, which is the question I told you on the very first night we would end on.

How do you know if any of this was ever real.

Here is the sentence we have said together every week:

Righteousness is not the price of the ticket in. It is the shape of a life once it actually belongs to the kingdom Jesus is announcing.

Now look at what tonight did to that sentence.

A tree does not grow fruit to become a tree. It grows fruit because it is one. That is the same sentence, in Jesus's own words, out of his own mouth, at the end of his own sermon. He did not spend three chapters raising the entrance fee. He spent three chapters describing what grows on a life that is actually his.

And that is exactly why the fruit matters so much. If righteousness were the price of admission, then a tree with nothing on it would just be a tree that still owes. But it is not the price. It is the evidence. Which means a tree with nothing on it is not behind on a payment. It is telling you something about what it is.

I said in week one that this thesis does not soften anything Jesus asks. Tonight is where you find out I meant it. It does not lower the bar. It removes the option of partial credit. There is no such thing as a partly true vow, and there is no such thing as a house that is mostly on rock.

I want to come back to the wedding one last time, and then I want to give you something to do.

I told you tonight about a man who said the words and never meant them, and how twenty one years would eventually make that impossible to hide. That is verse 23. That is a real category and Jesus put it in front of a crowd of religious people on purpose.

But there is a second man in this passage, and he is the one I have actually been thinking about all week.

He meant it. On the day he said it, every word was true. And then the years happened, and he stopped tending it. Not in one dramatic moment. He just quit doing the small things

nobody sees. And a marriage that was completely real on the first day can die of that. We know it can. We have watched it happen to people we love.

Jesus put both of those men in this chapter. One tree that never was, and one branch that was on the vine and did not stay. And I am not going to stand up here and tell you which one you should be worried about, because I do not know, and neither of them is a category you can check by feeling around inside yourself for a feeling.

That is why he gave you fruit instead. Fruit is the only thing in this chapter you can actually look at.

So here is the question...

Do not go home and ask yourself whether you are saved. That question will keep you up and it will not get you anywhere, because you will just be feeling around in the dark for a feeling, and Jesus did not give you that test.

He gave you this one. Go find the part of your life that nobody sees.

Not the part the church sees. Not the part your family sees. The part that is buried, the part that is underneath, the part that would never show up in a photograph of your house. What you do with your money when no one is keeping track. What you say to God when there is no one in the room. Who

you have decided not to forgive, and how comfortable you have gotten with that decision. What you actually want when you are alone.

That is the foundation. Jesus said so. And if you look down there this week and find that there is more sand than you were expecting, hear this before you leave, because this is the last thing I want you to take with you.

The man who told you to build on rock is the rock. His words are not held up by anything except Him. Which means the fix is not to go try harder at a standard you already know you cannot meet. The fix is to go to the One who said, in this same chapter, ask and it will be given to you, and keep asking, and keep seeking, and keep standing at that door, because everyone who asks receives.