

THE LIFE THAT SERVES GOD

Matthew 6:24-34

Intro: There are many absolutes in Scripture. "Ye must be born again," is one very important absolute. Another is, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." We had still another in verse 21 of the chapter we are studying now: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21). It would be very interesting to read through the Bible, making a record of all of the absolutes you find there. It would be a real eye-opener in these days when so many try to tell us that truth is relative, not absolute.

In the last verse we had last Sunday, Matt. 6:24, we have a verse that is an expression of absolute truth, from start to finish, concluding with, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon," or *God and money*. Many have tried it, but have always failed. Money, and the love of money, can enslave men. It influences everything in their lives, when money becomes a man, or a woman's, master. Luke, in chapter 18, verse 18, tells us about "a certain ruler who thought that he wanted to have eternal life. But when the Lord told him that he would have to sell all that he had, and give the money to the poor, he went away very unhappy because, as Luke tells us, "he was very rich" (Luke 18:23). This does not mean that you can't be saved if you have money, but it does show us that a man's love for money can rob him of the kind of love for God that will cause him to put God first regardless of the consequences.

So it stands as one of the absolute truths of the Word of God that "ye cannot serve God and money." One is going to be your master, but not both of them. Inevitably you are going to love just one, and you will hate or reject, and "despise the other." When we despise anything, it is because we think little or nothing of it. That is the way most people feel about God if He is to be compared with money. There are going to be multitudes in hell because their master in life was money. And remember that you don't have to have a million dollars to be caught in the trap of loving money.

Now the Lord followed that section having to do with money, with some words which might take us by surprise. First of all we need to understand what the Lord meant when He said, "Take no thought." You find this verb in verses 25, 27, 28, 31, and 34.

When we first read this passage, we might feel that the Lord was saying

about our lives, that we are, as we say today, *not to give it a thought*. But we have to think about what we are going to eat, drink, and wear. Those are among our most basic needs as human beings. If the Lord didn't want us ever to think about these things, then it would be wrong for you ladies to plan any meals. You parents would be sinning if you planned to buy clothes for your children. We all do this, and we have to do it. And the Lord knows that we do. In fact, the Apostle Paul told Timothy that the man who does not provide for his family "has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5:8). You are not going to find that the Lord said one thing on a subject, but that the Holy Spirit led the writers of Scripture to say something else.

So what is the solution?

Well, the solution is to find out what the exact meaning of the verb is. It is the Greek verb *μεριμνάω*. It does not mean just *to think*, but it means *to worry, to have anxiety* about anything. It is the word that the Apostle Paul used in Phil. 4:6 when he wrote, "Be careful about nothing ..." The person who worries is not a person who is trusting God, and we are to be a people who trust the Lord for everything.

But we all have a strong inclination to worry, don't we? It is human to worry. But worrying is sin when the Bible tells us, as it does in Phil. 4:6 in so many words, "Don't worry about anything"

So in verse 25 we have:

I. A GENERAL STATEMENT OF THE WILL OF GOD ABOUT TRUSTING GOD (Matt. 6:25).

A person who lives for money is going to be doing plenty of worrying. He or she has no security at all that his money is safe. Those of you who were alive during the depression of the early 1930's will remember how many men who lost all of their savings in the crash of the stock market, took their own lives because their money was gone. What a pitiful situation to be in!

Here the Lord told His disciples not to be worried about what they were going to eat, or drink, or wear. And then He asked a question: "Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? That is, isn't your life more important than your food, and your body than the clothes that you put on it? And who is it who gives you life? And who takes care of your

body? Obviously the Lord does. So if He takes care of our lives and our bodies, will He not provide what is necessary to keep us alive? The way our country is going, we may have an opportunity to trust the Lord even more than we do now for the food we eat and the clothes we wear. So this passage may take on new meaning for us in the days ahead. Who knows?

But the Lord went on to give two illustrations to show how foolish it is to worry.

II. TWO ILLUSTRATIONS TO STRENGTHEN THEIR FAITH (Matt. 6:26-27).

A. Illustration #1 (v. 26): "the birds of the air."

It is amazing how we have illustrations all around us to support our faith, and to teach us how we need to trust the Lord.

We all know what birds are. We see them every day. But did you ever see a group of birds plowing up some ground, then planting some seed, and waiting for the harvest time to come? We have never seen that. We have seen a lot of barns, but never any bird barns. And did you ever hear of a bird psychologist trying to help a group of psycho birds get through a difficult time? You have never seen that. Well, but how do they get the food that they need. Obviously they need food to live just like we do. What was our Lord's answer? He said that the same One Whom we call "our Father" when we pray, is the same One Who feeds them – the same One Who feeds all of them!

And so then the Lord asked another question. "Are ye not much better than they?" The answer is obvious. "Yes, we are not only better, but, as our Lord said in His question, "much better"?"

So, if the Lord takes care of the birds, will He not also take care of us? A little child can give the right answer to that question. So why, then, should we worry?

But then the Lord went on to:

B. Illustration #2: physical growth, or the length of one's life (v. 27).

This is a question for men (although I have heard of girls who wanted to

be taller than they are). But it is men who are concerned about their height. I was listening to a football game yesterday, and there was a player who was 5' 10" trying to keep a pass receiver who was over 6' from catching a pass. I am sure that the one who was 5' 10" wished more than once that he was over 6'. And you don't have to be a football player to wish that you were taller. *But what good does it do to worry about it?*

How much is a cubit?

Well, it is supposed to be the length of your forearm, from your elbow to the tip of your middle finger, generally thought to be about 18 inches.

But there is evidence also that this measurement that the Lord was speaking about had to do with the length of his life. And that might be more reasonable. A person would have to be very small to want to be 18 inches taller.

Whatever the meaning, how much does it help to worry about it? None at all! We are all just like the Lord wants us to be, and we are only going to live as long as the Lord has planned that we shall live. So we had better find a better use for our time because worrying won't help it at all. In fact, worrying can prove to be detrimental to our health. Two men can eat the same food. One will get tall; the other will only grow to normal height. Or one can die relatively young, while the other may live to be an old man. What difference does worrying make? None at all!

But let us go on to the next point that our Lord made.

III. THE PROBLEM OF CLOTHING (Matt. 6:28-30).

What about clothing? The Lord had said, "Behold the fowls of the air." Now He said in this place, "Consider the lilies of the field." He was speaking of wild flowers. They weren't planted; they just grew where they were. And what could you say about them? That even Solomon in all of his finery as one of the richest men in the world in his day, could not compare with the glory of the flowers which the Lord had made.

Compared with the life of a human being, wild flowers are not to be compared with them. And yet their glory far exceeds the glory of man. And they had absolutely nothing to do with it! Besides, the flowers are here today, and gone tomorrow.

What is the problem with a person who worries about clothes? Our Lord tabbed them as being "of little faith." A God who can do what He does with flowers, clothing them with such beauty, is surely able to take care of us who are worth far more than flowers.

We are living in a day when men worship creatures and creation, but never give a thought to the Creator. In fact, I guess that most people don't believe in creation. And so they miss completely the kind of lessons the Lord was teaching His disciples. Creation shows the glory of the Creator. And if we keep that straight, there are many, many lessons that we can learn from creation that will help us in our need to trust the Lord for all of the necessities of life.

IV. THE LORD'S CONCLUDING EXHORTATION WITH REASONS FOR SUPPORTING HIS WILL (Matt. 6:31-34).

A. The will of God about worry (v. 31).

While I was teaching at Multnomah we had a young man in the student body who had a beautiful tenor voice. I loved to hear him sing, and more than once he ministered to me in connection with some trials I was going through at the time. The chorus of one of his songs which I could have gladly heard him sing all of the rest of my life, had these words. Perhaps some of you know the song. This was the message:

All your anxieties, all your cares,
Bring to the mercy seat, leave them their,
Never a burden He cannot bear,
Never a friend like Jesus.

The Apostle Peter used a noun formed from the same root as the verb we have been considering today when he wrote,

Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you (1 Pet. 5:7). We are to take all of the things that we get anxious about, and throw them upon the Lord because He cares about us.

So we are not to worry. To worry is sin. If we are worrying about anything, we are not trusting the Lord as we should. **And then the Lord gave four reasons why we ought to trust the Lord:**

A. Because the unsaved Gentiles worry about these things (v. 32a).

I like that little verse which goes like this, since we have been talking about birds:

Said the Robin to the Sparrow, "I should really like to know
Why these anxious human beings rush about and worry so."

Said the Sparrow to the Robin, "I think that it must be

That they have no heavenly Father such as cares for you and me."

That is true of unregenerate Gentiles, but shouldn't it be different with you and me. I don't point an accusing finger at you because I have failed so often myself. It is only by God's grace that we can cast all of our care, all of our anxieties, all of our worry, on the Lord. But this is what it means to live by faith. And this is what it means *to serve God with our lives*.

But let us go on to a second reason as to why we should trust the Lord with our cares.

B. "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things" (v. 32b).

We forget this, don't we? The Lord made quite a point of this in His Sermon on the Mount. Cf. Matt. 6:7-8. The Lord knows every burden we carry, everything that we are inclined to worry about. He knows all of our anxious thoughts. And He is the One Who loves us because we are His children, and He is the One Who can take our burdens, and give us peace. And the Lord Who was always speaking from the greater to the lesser, and from the lesser to the greater, is just as concerned about the little burdens as He is about the big burdens. What a lot of comfort there is in those words, "Your heavenly Father knoweth," and they are especially comforting because they have come from the Lord Jesus Himself.

But let us look at a third encouragement for our faith.

C. The promise of the Lord (v. 33).

Why do we have things that worry us, not just about what we will eat and drink and wear, but a multitude of other things? They are constant reminders to us that we need continually to be trusting the Lord. And often special needs arise when we forget this.

To seek "first" the kingdom of God is what it means to be laying up treasure in heaven. It means to put the Lord and His will and His work "first" in our lives. And the promise is that when we do, "all these things shall be added unto you." This is one place where we in America need to

beware of the judgment of the Lord ahead. We have this year seen millions of crops ruined by terribly hot weather, or by flood. We are a nation that has forgotten God, and the Lord will make sure, as He has done so often in the past, that we do not forget Him. This is a wonderful promise that we have in verse 33, but there is a very big and important condition attached to it.

Finally,

D. In worry we are often concerned about tomorrow, and tomorrow is in the Lord's hands (v. 34).

We have enough to be concerned about with today. Don't borrow trouble from tomorrow. Tomorrow may never come, or it may be that when tomorrow comes we will say, "Today is the day that I worried about yesterday." And the Lord made it a good day instead of a hard day. Serving the Lord by faith is a day by day way to live. God gives us grace for today, and when tomorrow comes He will give us grace for that day as well.

Concl: There is a lot in this passage to rebuke us, isn't there? But there is also much to encourage us. Let us remember that to worry is sin, but to trust the Lord, is the way to serve the Lord. Let us not allow money or needs of any kind keep us from trusting the Lord day by day to meet our needs, and to keep our hearts in peace in the midst of all of our trials and testings.

YOU, YOUR BROTHER, AND YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER

Matthew 7:1-5

Intro: We come today to the last of the three chapters in Matthew's Gospel where we have the Sermon on the Mount. I am sure that you agree with me when I say that this is a very rich section in the Word of God. Coming as it does from our Lord Jesus Christ, it has to be of great importance. Before we look into the first five verses, let me remind you of some facts which we have learned from chapters 5 and 6.

First, Matthew made it very clear in the first two verses of chapter 5 that this message was for His disciples. (Read vv. 1 and 2.) Therefore, I believe that we are safe in assuming that this is teaching for all of the people of God in every generation. And it is very practical teaching. It is not practical to the exclusion of doctrine, but it is a very, very practical message.

Second, the Lord seems always to have had in His mind the scribes and the Pharisees. Although they were supposed to have been the spiritual leaders of the people of Israel, most of them did not know the Lord, and so their teaching of Scripture was corrupt. Besides Scripture and tradition had been so mixed together that the people were not able to discern between what was the truth and what was not the truth. Therefore, the Lord had a lot of correcting to do.

The other point that I would like to make, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones was very emphatic in pointing this out, is that our Lord emphasized what Dr. Lloyd-Jones called, "being under the watchful eye of our heavenly Father." Our Lord indicated that when He spoke of our Father "who seeth in secret." We are often guilty of forgetting this, and when we do, we get careless about our lives - what we say, what we think, where we go, and so on.

Now it is good to keep all of these in mind as we move into chapter 7. Immediately we have:

I. AN EXHORTATION AND A WARNING (Matt. 7:1).

(Read Matt. 7:1.)

I know some grandparents who have a grandson who is a homosexual. And when they rebuked him for his lifestyle, He responded by saying,

"Oh, oh, 'judge not, that ye be not judged.'" And this is the way that many take this verse—that it is wrong to condemn anything. But is this what the Lord meant? That is what we must decide, and our decision must be true to the Word of God.

If you will just think back over what we have learned so far in this Sermon on the Mount, you will realize that the Lord had sharply criticized the scribes and Pharisees. The Lord had called them hypocrites, and He had told His disciples that they were not to be like the Pharisees. And the Lord even pointed out specific ways in which He did not want His disciples to be like the scribes and Pharisees. The Lord had even said, and His words are recorded in Matt. 5:20 that the scribes and Pharisees as a group were not saved, and that if the disciples were satisfied to be like them, they would not be saved either. (Read Matt. 5:20.) Those are very strong words. You read back over those two chapters which we have just covered and you will see that the Lord was not saying that under no circumstances were His disciples to be critical of others. The Lord never contradicted His own teaching.

Look on in this very chapter and you will see that our Lord was very harsh in some of the things He said. See 7:6. And then look at verses 15-20. And then read verses 21-23.

At the end of Matthew 23 where we read of the severe criticism that the Lord had for the scribes and Pharisees, look at what He said in verses 37 and 38. (Read.) Why did the people kill the prophets? It was because they did not like what the prophets were saying when they criticized the lifestyle of the people. But who had sent the prophets? God did. So there is a time when it is important to speak words of denunciation when people are despising God and His will and His Word and His Son.

Even before the ministry of our Lord was over, we read about the beheading of that great preacher, John the Baptist. And why, in the final analysis was his head cut off. Because he boldly declared to Herod that it was not right for him to have his brother's wife.

Read the epistles of the NT, and you will find that the Apostles spoke out against all kinds of sin. And they paid a price for their stand, but they had the blessing of God upon their ministries.

We need to be discerning where doctrine is concerned. And yet so many in the church today are willing to overlook the clear teaching of Scripture

on certain doctrines because they believe that doctrine is divisive. And look at the way that church has gone in its methods and programs. We have brought the world into the church, and often human psychology is given a more prominent place in church ministry than the Word of God has. We have to be concerned about these things, and speak against them whenever we have the opportunity.

But it fits right in with the spirit of the age for people to say that the Bible teaches that we cannot be critical of others. Writing back in the 1950's Dr. Lloyd-Jones had this to say, and his words apply just as much to our generation today. He said,

We are living in an age when definitions are at a discount, an age which dislikes thought and hates theology and doctrine and dogma. It is an age which is characterized by a love of ease and compromise—'anything for a quiet life,' as the expression goes. It is an age of appeasement... It is an age that dislikes strong men because, it says, they always cause disturbance. It dislikes a man who knows what he believes and really believes it. It dismisses him as a difficult person who is 'impossible to get on with' (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, Vol. 2, p. 161).

We see this so clearly in our country today. People are willing to do away with moral standards and put up with almost anything as long as they can live their lives the way they want to and continue on with their prosperity. Our nation hasn't learned it yet, but there is a terrible price to pay for the way we are going, and this is because we are not using discernment and good judgment. We think that our society can continue on if every man is doing what is right in his own eyes. When that happens, people are not inclined to consider at all what God thinks. Do you hear people speaking today about what pleases God, or about what displeases Him? That isn't what is coming out of Washington.

Well, if the Lord was not eliminating all criticism so that we ought to close our eyes to all of the evil that is going on in our nation, and the world, *what then did He mean?*

He was talking about the person who always, or even most of the time, feels that he is right, and everyone else is wrong. And notice in verses 3 and 4 and 5 the Lord spoke of "thy brother." Who would be a disciple's brother? In the context of the sermon a brother is a fellow-believer in Christ, a fellow-member of the family of God, those who because of their faith in Christ have God as their "heavenly Father." So what our Lord was

speaking about here in particular was trouble in the family of God. We can have trouble with people who are not believers, the people of the world, but here in this context our Lord was speaking about the family of God. We will get to those verses in a moment.

But let us be clear that the Lord was speaking of those people in the family of God who feel called to set everyone else right, but who obviously are very proud, and whose attitude is highhanded toward other members of the family of God.

The Lord has not appointed us as judges of each other. Often we can intrude into other people's lives when it really isn't our business to do so. Our criticisms can be very unjust because we move into people's lives in a hasty way without knowing all of the circumstances, but we set ourselves up as judges.

However, we can also be guilty of exercising judgment against others even when we may not say a word. But this is where we need to remember that even what we think is completely known to our heavenly Father. We can harbor a very critical spirit toward someone, and perhaps take a great deal of pleasure when things go wrong for that person which obviously we do not like.

But let us look back on the first two verses of Matthew 7. What did the Lord mean when He said, "That ye be not judged." And then He went on to say what we read in verse 2. (Read.) *What kind of judgment was He speaking about?*

I believe that the Lord had a twofold warning that He was giving in these verses:

1) We know that the time is coming when we are going to stand before our Lord to give an account of our lives here on earth. Cf. 2 Cor. 5:10:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

And we also have that statement which the Apostle Paul also made in Rom. 14:12: "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." I am not going to have to give an account for someone else, but I am going to have to give an account for myself. And you will have to give an account for yourself. Nothing can be hidden from the Lord. He knows our hearts, our thoughts, and all of the pride that may be there. So it behooves us to live for eternity. That day may come sooner than we

think, and so it ought to make us realize that we need to live this day and every day to please God.

— But I believe there is another idea in the judgment which our Lord spoke of:

2) Sometimes we experience judgment from the Lord in this life if we persist in doing what displeases the Lord. What caused some Corinthians to come unprepared to the Lord's Table, we do not know. But it would not be surprising if broken fellowships within the church, were one reason. Sometimes the judgment is a withdrawal of the Lord's blessing. Sometimes it is physical illness that is the judgment. Sometimes it may be a financial reverse. Sometimes the Lord may touch the lives of those who are very dear to us. In some way, if we are displeasing the Lord in our relationships with each other, the Lord is going to get our attention. How careful we need to be that we are pleasing the Lord.

— Here in these verses we have a statement of the ways of the Lord. We all can be thankful for the patience and for the mercy of the Lord, but we need to fear the Lord, and to fear the consequences of continued disobedience. Did Saul get away with all of those years he made life miserable for David? You know the answer to that question. Did Absalom get away with the jealousy that he harbored in his heart toward his father?

I don't think that any of us can fully appreciate how grieved the Lord is when there is criticism among those of us who are His children. Solomon said in Proverbs 6:19 that one of the seven things which the Lord really hates is "he that soweth discord among brethren." And remember that the "he" there includes the ladies as well, just as when the Scriptures speak of brothers it includes sisters too.

— As most of you know, we are studying John 17 in our Sunday evening services, and one request in that prayer that the Lord prayed for those who were His disciples when He was praying and for those who would believe on Him any time in the future, was that they would manifest the same oneness that has always existed between God the Father and God the Son. Can you imagine the Lord Jesus criticizing His Father, or God the Father criticizing His Son? As our text shows, we must not close our eyes to each other's needs, but criticism is not the way to handle them.

— Now let us go on to verse 3. Here we see:

II. THE REAL PROBLEM AND ITS SOLUTION (Matt. 7:3-5).

The Lord illustrated the problem by speaking of a beam in the eye as compared with a mote in the eye. What did He mean by these expressions?

What is a mote?

It is a twig, or a straw, or even dust-like chaff. It is a small, irritating foreign object that we can get in our eyes, which hurts us, and causes real pain.

What is a beam?

This is a piece of timber. The NASB has given us a good translation in these words:

3 "And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?

4 "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? (Matt. 7:3-4).

If I were to ask you, which is the worse, a mote or a beam, a speck of dust or a big piece of lumber, you would respond by saying, "the beam." Both are bad and both would affect one's vision, but the beam is far worse than the mote, a very small particle of something in the eye.

Of course, the Lord was overstating this as far as the beam is concerned, but He was making a point. Let me see if I can express it clearly for all of us.

It seems to me that the Lord was saying that when I become critical about something in someone else's life, I should immediately be suspicious that there is something far worse in my own life. It may be that the Lord has let me see my brother's need because He wants me to see my own need, and my need should appear far worse to me than my brother's need appears to be to me.

From this we need to go on to realize that if I really want to help my brother and not just be critical of him, then the first thing that I need to do is to get the beam out of my own eye. How can I possibly help my brother when my own vision, my spiritual vision, is not clear? All of this makes good sense, doesn't it? A critical person is so concerned about someone else's problem that he doesn't even think that there might be something

even worse in his own life!

So what is the solution? You have it in verse 5. "First cast out the beam out of thine own eye." Whatever the sin might be, in whatever way I am displeasing the Lord, I need to make that right with the Lord first. And when my problem is solved, my attitude toward my brother will undergo such a great change that I will lose my critical spirit only to see it replaced with a sincere, genuine desire to help my brother get the speck out of his eye.

You see, we are making spiritual progress, not when we think we can see what is wrong with that other person, but we are making spiritual progress when our problems seem to be greater than anyone else. Is this not where the Apostle Paul stood when he said that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. 1:15b). If my heart is right with the Lord, then my sins, my needs, my failures, will truly appear to me to be far worse than anyone else's sins. And when I experience the forgiveness and cleansing which God gives, then my heart will be filled with love and compassion for my brother in his needs, and, if only by prayer, I will give myself to helping him to get the speck out of his eye. Then we will both see clearly, and both can rejoice in the blessing of the Lord upon our lives.

Concl: Paul considered this problem when he wrote to the church at Rome, and he made this very important statement which all of us should take to heart. He repeats in his own words what the Lord Jesus said in the text we have been considering today. Listen to his words:
Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way (Rom. 14:13).

It is a very humbling thought to consider what Paul expressed in this verse, that the very thing that I am critical about in my brother's life, may be there because of some way in which I have caused him to stumble. And so I conclude with the words of the Apostle Paul found in Phil. 2:3:
Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.
This is the way to keep our own hearts right, and this is the way to find the blessing of God in greater fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

DISCIPLES IN TRAINING

Matthew 7:6-12

Intro: The message of the Sermon on the Mount is so familiar to most Christians that we forget how new this teaching was to the disciples. They were hearing teaching that they had never heard before. Although they had been taught by the scribes and Pharisees, the emphasis which the Lord made on every subject He touched upon in His instruction, was truth that they had never heard before. And it behooves us to make sure that we are getting the full impact of what the Lord was saying.

Many expositors in approaching chapter 7 have felt that this was a series of what Martyn Lloyd Jones called, "aphoristic statements with very little internal connection between them" (II, 158). By that he meant that they were short and powerful statements of truth. But a careful examination of these statements shows that they are not unrelated, but very closely related. *They all have to do with the preparation of the disciples for the work of the Lord.* And so in this respect also they would have been new to the disciples.

We have no reason to believe that the Lord was only speaking to the twelve at this point in His ministry. As far as we know, they had not yet been called to the work that the Lord had for them. And so this leads me to say that the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, the instruction that our Lord gave here, is not just for those who would eventually be apostles, but this is for all of the Lord's people.

One tragedy in the work of the Lord today, is that the people of our churches, those who make up the congregations, know so little, and, in some cases, absolutely nothing about how the Lord's work is to be done. As a result, the professing church is full of positions and methods and teaching that really does not belong in the church. And it is often the case that even in our Christian schools young people are taught much that is not based upon Scripture, but that which is brought in from the world. There is a very great need for all of us to get back to Scripture not only to learn what we are to believe, and what we are to teach, but also how the work of the Lord is to be conducted. We know so little about the kind of a person it is whom the Lord uses. We know so little about waiting upon the Lord. When the Lord closes a door, so often we try to knock it down. We are trained to think about what others need, but are experts in overlooking what the Lord may be seeking to teach us. And so this why I have given my message today the subject, "Disciples in Training."

"Disciples" is one of the first words the New Testament uses for all of the Lord's people, just as "saints" is a word which was used later. *A disciple is a learner*, and this should be descriptive of all of us. We all should be learning from the Scriptures until the day that the Lord takes us to heaven. I need to be a learner. Each of you needs to be a learner. None of us ever knows all that there is to learn, and so we need to be disciples as long as we live.

So, although you may never teach a class, or preach a sermon, this Sermon on the Mount is for you. It is for all of us. The only way we as the Lord's people can possibly know what the Lord's work is, and how to do it, is by getting as thorough a knowledge of God's Word as we can. If more of us understood this, perhaps the work of churches would not be as riddled with the ways of the world as it is today. When people just as readily accept human psychology as they do Scripture, and put more emphasis on methods and personalities than they do the work of the Holy Spirit, we know that what we call the Lord's work may not be anything that the Lord would want to claim at all. In these day when the world is so corrupt and in disarray in so many ways, how important it is for us to know passages like Matthew 5, 6 and 7, and by God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit, see to it that we are really following the teaching of the Word of God.

Now let me apply what I have been saying to what we learned, or I trust we learned, from the passage we had last week in the first five verses of Matthew 7.

We saw that the Lord was warning His disciples not to have a censorious spirit. That is, they were not to be severely critical of others, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ. The warning that the Lord sounded has to do not only with ways in which the Lord may presently judge us, but it also has to do with the final judgment. Our purpose is to help people, not to criticize them over every little problem we may see in their lives. Such a spirit can be detrimental to our ability to help people. Besides our awareness of a problem in the life of a brother may be the Lord's way of showing us that we have a beam in our own eye. We need to be very careful that we are not a stumblingblock in our brother's way. So we need to be continually searching our own hearts to be sure that things are right between us and the Lord, and between us and our brothers and sisters in the family of God.

Today we come to another lesson in verse 6 that every child of God needs

to learn. It has to do with:

I. WISDOM IN THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL (Matt. 6:6).

The Lord was emphasizing the fact that we need to be discerning in the spread of the Gospel.

We are here in this world as witnesses of Christ, witnesses of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is what is "holy." There is no other message like it. The truths of the Gospel can be considered as pearl because, in the case of the Gospel, it is a priceless message – and yet at the same time it is "without cost." It is a gift from God.

Obviously dogs are not going to be interested in that which is "holy." Neither are swine going to be interested in pearls. So the Lord on the one hand was describing the Gospel, and, on the other, was describing some who can be described as "dogs," and others who can be described as "swine."

The "dogs" that roamed through the cities in our Lord's day were not like the pets which we have today. They were half wild and dangerous, and often terrorized people when they ran in packs. Also, the Law of Moses forbade the eating of swine. The Jews were to have nothing to do with swine. On one occasion you will remember that the Lord drove some demons into a herd of swine, and they ran down a steep place into the lake, and were drowned. Those Jews had no business raising pigs because they were clearly in violation of the Law in doing it.

There clearly are dangers connected with the preaching of the Gospel. People who are otherwise friendly, can become very hostile when the Gospel is preached unto them. We, of course, have to exercise a great deal of discernment in dealing with people, and the Lord was certainly not suggesting that we call people "dogs" or "swine." But He was saying that you will often run into strong opposition in the preaching of the Gospel. This would come from "dogs." And there are other people who are totally indifferent to the Gospel, and you will only antagonize them by persisting in preaching when they make it clear that they are not interested. There is no value in continuing to pursue a person who makes it clear in some way that they do not want what we have to offer them. And we run the risk of bringing greater offence upon the Gospel because of our ignorant zeal. There are open doors, and there are closed doors. Sometimes closed doors are opened, but at a given point in dealing with a person we must use great

discernment And wisdom.

The nature of verse 6 may indicate why the Lord went on to speak of prayer. In chapter 6 we had some wonderful teaching on prayer, but, as is the case with almost any doctrine, you don't get everything in one passage of Scripture. So let us go to verse 7 and the verses which follow.

II. MORE OF OUR LORD'S TEACHING ON PRAYER (Matt. 7:7-11).

I am not suggesting that these verses only have to do with our ministry to others, but that certainly is the primary emphasis when we consider the context. *When people reject us and our message, we do not necessarily forget about them, but their very rejection causes us to turn to the Lord in prayer.* We know that only the Lord can make people receptive of the Gospel message. No one ever has turned to Christ "on his own." We all had to be *drawn* to the Lord. We learn that from John 6:44:

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

And then just a few verses later in the same chapter, John 6, we read these words:

64 But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.

65 And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.

So when men shut the door to us and to the Gospel, our great resource is to our heavenly Father. Of course, this does mean that we do not pray before we witness to people, but it does mean that a rejection does not necessarily put an end to the matter. We may not see a change, but that does not mean that a change will not come. And, as I have said many times before, the Lord was here encouraging importunate, persistent, continuous prayer.

In the margin of the NASB we have this suggested translation, "Keep asking ... keep seeking ... keep knocking." The meaning may even be made stronger if we render these verbs, "Ask, and keep asking ... seek, and keep seeking ... knock, and keep knocking." And it does not just apply to a situation where our message has been rejected, but it means that we must not be discouraged when people let us know that they are not interested in what we have to say about God and/or Christ.

To each of these commands is attached a promise. "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." And then, as though the simple promise in each were not enough, the Lord went on to add what we have in verse 8. And note how inclusive this is. (Read v. 8.)

The very fact that we are to ask continuously indicates that the Lord was not saying that when you ask once, you will immediately receive what you ask for. It may be that sometimes He will deal with us that way, but that is the exception rather than the rule. But behind these words of our Lord is the great burden that was on His heart for the salvation of sinners. Often when we are rebuffed, we find it difficult to approach anyone else, or to introduce the subject of the Gospel to anyone whether he be a friend of a complete stranger. And so the Lord Jesus was here encouraging us to turn to the Father in prayer, asking, seeking, and knocking.

David Brown in the Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown commentary, said this:

We ask for what we *wish*; we *seek* for what we *miss*; we *knock* for that from which we feel ourselves *shut out* (Vol. V, p. 47).

And then the Lord added those very obvious truths which He brought out in verses 9 through 11. (Read.)

As I have said, I feel certain that we do not have to limit these commands and promises to the subject the Lord was treating here in His Sermon on the Mount, but it has a general application to any need or burden that might be upon our hearts. But this was one major lesson that the Lord was teaching His disciples, and that is the constant need we all have to pray – to pray in faith, to pray according to the will of God, and to pray with importunity. To pray like Jacob prayed when He told the Lord, "I will not let Thee go, except thou bless me" (Gen. 32:26).

This is where it is so easy for us to miss blessings which we need. And every child of God needs to learn to pray. When we can't do anything else, we can pray. Through prayer closed doors are opened. We don't work for God, but God works through us – and there is a great difference between the two. Many things are impossible for us, but there is nothing that is impossible for God. God is the only One Who can make people see their need of salvation, and God is the only One Who can save people. Even the faith that we exercise for salvation, is a gift from God. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). The Lord Jesus Christ is "the Author and Finisher of our faith," and through

prayer people understand that Jesus Christ is the only Savior.

Our city, our state, our whole nation is in dire need of Christ. The future is dark indeed unless God has mercy upon us. But it seems that as time goes on we as a nation get more hardened in our sins, and God is not in all our thoughts. But we must believe that by prayer we can see lives changed in these days. I am not an authority on revivals, but from what I do know about them, I don't know of any true revivals in the past where prayer has not played a major role. By God's grace let us be asking and seeking and knocking by prayer until the doors of heaven are opened and blessing are poured out upon us so that there will hardly be room to receive it all.

But I have one more verse, verse 12, and as long as I have known this verse, it has been called, "The Golden Rule."

III. "THE GOLDEN RULE" (Matt. 7:12).

The problem about this verse is that people who don't know the Lord try to live by this verse, but it is a verse, a promise, that the Lord gave to His disciples "in training."

This is really the opposite of what we had in verses 1 and 2, isn't it? If we are harsh in our dealings with people, we can expect that we will receive the same kind of treatment from others. But if we treat other people the way we would like to be treated, we will find that great blessings will come our way.

The Lord said, "This is the Law and the Prophets." This is as though He said, "This is what the whole of the OT teaches us." This doesn't mean that this is all that the OT teaches, but on these matters our Lord has been discussing, this is what the OT teaches. The Lord was not talking about satisfying the selfish desires that we all have in our hearts, but the desires that we have which are God-given, which make us long for acceptance that we might glorify God in a fruitful ministry to lost sinners who know nothing about the grace of God in salvation.

G. Campbell Morgan pointed out the positive nature of what the Lord said in this Golden Rule. Let me read to you what he said:

It is not merely that you are to refrain from harming [another]; you are to do him good. It is not that you are not to rob him; you are to give to him. It is not that you are not to murder him; you are to

love him... We might, out of a selfish self-respect, decline to harm our neighbor, but we cannot do this higher thing without power. We cannot do continuously what we would our neighbor should do to us save as we ask, seek, and knock, and know that our Father is pledged to us in power" (*The Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 76).

The Lord was making it very clear here that if we want His blessing, and if we want to see evidence of His working in the hearts of people we have contact with, then we must live according to the Word of God.

Concl: What are we to conclude from all of this as it relates to the ministry that the Lord has given to us as His disciples and as His servants. It is this: The key to the blessing we hope to experience in serving the Lord, will be seen in the extent to which we are yielded to what the Lord is doing in our hearts. In the Lord's work, the emphasis is always upon the person the Lord is using. "We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

So this means, as Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones pointed out so well years ago when he was preaching on this great text, If we want things to be right between man and man, then we all have to start with God. If we don't love Him first, and show our love by doing His will, then human relationships can never be right. But if we love God first (which also means loving His Son), then we will find that our attitude toward people will undergo a great transformation, and we will begin to love our neighbor with the same desires which we have for ourselves. May the Lord make us what He wants us to be so that we can be His instruments in reaching others with the transforming power of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

TWO GATES AND TWO WAYS

Matthew 7:13-14

— **Intro:** The first two verses of Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount, make it clear that our Lord was speaking to His disciples. As we come, to these two verses today, why would the Lord speak to a group like that about TWO GATES AND TWO WAYS. There is no doubt but that our Lord was speaking of salvation. Why would He speak to disciples about salvation, and begin by saying, "Enter ye in at the strait gate." Isn't it true that if a person were a disciple, he or she would definitely be saved?

Well, in answering that question, let us turn to John 6, a passage to which I have referred many times before.

You will see by looking at verses 32 and following that the Lord was claiming that He was the Bread of Life, and as you go on down through the chapter to verse 53 He spoke to them about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. And then He said in verse 56 that the person who ate His flesh and drank His blood would dwell in Him, and He would dwell in them. Clearly this is profound teaching. But the Lord made it clear in His message that eating His flesh and drinking His blood meant believing in Him. He was not teaching the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, that the elements of the Lord's Supper are actually changed into the body and blood of our Lord. *There is no such doctrine in Scripture.*

But what I want you to see here in John 6 what the Apostle John recorded about the reaction our Lord received from "many...of His disciples. Look at verse 60. (Read.)

Now look at verse 66. (Read.) The Apostle John did not say that they were offended at the Lord's teaching, but they soon got over it, and came back to learn more. No, John tells us

From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him (John 6:66).

Note the word "many" in John 6:60, and then again in verse 66.

— How can we explain this? Some would say that this means they had been saved, but then they turned away from the Lord, so they lost their salvation.

But the Bible teaches that we can't lose our salvation. Note our Lord's

words in John 10:27-29

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

29 My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

We have to remember that salvation is a work of God, and that is brought out in Phil. 1:6 where the Apostle Paul wrote,

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

And so, if it not true that they were saved, but lost their salvation, how do we explain what took place in John 6, that "from that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him"?

The answer is this: They had been attracted to the Lord possibly by His previous teachings, or perhaps by His miracles, or because they hoped that He was the Messiah and had come to set them free from Rome! They were disciples in name only. They had followed the Lord Jesus up to a point, but then they departed from Him, and never came back. And remember that the Apostle John was writing some sixty years after the Lord had gone back to heaven, and so he had had the opportunity to see that what he said here was true. None of them did come back!

We have the same situation in the church and in the world today. Would you say that every person who says that he, or she, is a Christian, really is a Christian? Absolutely not! Some of these people who claim to be Christians, don't believe in the virgin birth of Christ. This means that they don't believe in our Lord's Deity. And so they don't believe the Bible is the revealed Word of God. Many who call themselves Christians believe that other religions are just as legitimate as the Christian faith, that there is more than one way to get to heaven (or whatever they might call life after death). Some Christians, even a lot of preachers, will deny that we are cleansed from our sins by the blood of Christ, and they will go on to deny the physical resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. Such people may call themselves Christians, but by their denials and by other teachings which they accept which are not in the Bible, they show that they are not true Christians.

If you have been reading through the Sermon on the Mount, you have read verses 21 through 23 here in chapter 7. Let me read these words for you.

(Read Matt. 7:21-23.) Notice the word "many" appearing again. Here were people who had been preachers, and miracle workers, and that is what they were depending upon for their salvation. Judas Iscariot would have been included in that number. He preached the Gospel. He performed miracles, *but he was never saved! Are you beginning to see why the Lord would speak to His disciples about salvation, and tell them, "Enter ye in at the strait gate." Our Lord wanted every disciple there to make sure that he was on the right road which leads to life, eternal life!*

The Apostle Paul emphasized this same need in 2 Cor.13:5 where he wrote these words to those who were in the Corinthian church:

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? (2 Cor. 13:5).

"Except ye be reprobates" is rendered in some other translations, "Unless indeed you fail the test," or some very similar translation. The expression means, *to be disqualified*. You test yourself, and discover that you are not a true child of God after all.

How do you test yourself? You test yourself by the Word of God. Our Lord said in the words we have just read that the test is whether of not a person "doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." "Doeth" is in the present tense in the Greek text which means *to do something continuously, day after day, and year after year*. A true Christian makes the Bible his sole guide as to what he is to believe, what he is to be, what he is to do, and what he is *not* to do. A true Christian doesn't just accept the parts of the Bible as God's Word, and forgets about the rest; he believes that all of the Bible is God's Word, and therefore our sole authority, as is often said, "for faith and practice."

Even back in Isaiah's day, the Lord said to him about the nation Israel,

13 Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:

14 Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid (Isa. 29:13-14).

And on one occasion when the Lord was speaking to the scribes and Pharisees, he referred to that passage in Isaiah, and said,

7 Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying,

8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.

9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Matt. 15:7-9).

So you see, the Lord was never swayed by the crowds who followed Him, but was always aware that there were people, many of whom were honestly deceived, thinking that they were true disciples, but who had never been born again. I can't think of a greater tragedy than for a person to die thinking that he is a true Christian, but will discover when he (or she) stands before the Lord, that he wasn't a Christian at all. It is good to be a church member, providing you go to a church where the Word of God is preached and Christ alone is exalted. But being a church member does not save anyone. It is good to be baptized, but baptism doesn't save anyone! It is good to have high moral standards, but we are not saved "by works of righteousness which we have done" (Tit. 3:5). A Christian is a person who is trusting in Christ as his Savior from sin, believing that Christ offered a sacrifice on the Cross that is sufficient for the salvation of everyone who will ever believe in Christ.

Now give yourself the test today, but make sure that you are testing yourself *by the Word of God*. *No other test will do!*

But now let us look at our text. (Read Matt. 7:13-14.)

Here our Lord made it perfectly clear that:

I. THERE ARE JUST TWO GATES, AND TWO WAYS.

The two gates are just two gates, not three or any other number that we might want to choose. There are only two: a narrow gate, and a broad gate.

A lot of people take comfort in what others have told them, that we are all going to the same place after death, but we are taking different paths to get there. Nothing could be farther from the truth. There are just two gates. One is narrow, and the other is wide. And each gate leads to a path which is just like the gates through which people enter. The wide gate leads to a wide way, and the narrow gate leads to a narrow way. But there is a great difference in what you find at the end of the paths. The wide gate leads to "destruction"; the narrow gate leads to "life." Then the Lord said that "many" choose to go through the wide gate, but only a "few" find the

narrow gate that leads to life.

In addition to the fact that there are only two gates, it needs to be said that you can't go from one to the other. There is no middle ground. You and I are either on our way to heaven, or we are on our way to hell. Matthew Henry wrote in his commentary,

There are but two ways, right and wrong, good and evil; the way to heaven, and the way to hell (Vol. V, p. 92).

If you are on your way to hell, you are not going to heaven, but if you are going to heaven, you will not be in hell. But everybody is going to one of these two places. And our Lord did not want any of His disciples think that they were going to heaven, when in reality they were going to hell.

Let us think a little more about the two gates. First,

II. THE BROAD GATE AND THE BROAD WAY.

This is a gate which lets people come any way they want to come. It is a gate which leads to whatever kind of a life you want. You don't have to turn from sin to go through the broad gate. People who choose the broad gate either don't know or don't care where it is going. Their philosophy is that they are going to have all of the pleasure they can get, regardless of what it is. This is where you live for yourself, and you find yourself in the company of other people who want to do the same. People who go through this broad gate may talk about God once in a while, but you will probably here His Name mentioned mostly as an oath that comes out of someone's mouth. But mainly people are not interested in God, or Jesus Christ, or the Bible, or in going to church where they can be with Christians. People are so enthralled with the liberty that they think that have that they see now need for God if they are in the broad way.

People who choose the broad gate and the broad way, live as though they would be here forever, or at least, as though there were no eternity for which to prepare.

One thing that makes the broad gate and way so attractive to people is that "many...go in thereat. It is always easier to follow the crowd. And somehow our hearts deceive us into thinking that if more choose the broad gate in preference to the narrow gate, then the broad gate must be better. But at the end of the way for the "many" is "destruction." Then people will realize when it is too late that they have made the wrong choice which can never be reverses.

But let us go on to a happier subject and think about:

III. THE NARROW GATE.

When the Lord spoke about the narrow gate, He was speaking about Himself. And He is also the way. And this is what people in general despise about the truth of God's Word. And yet our Lord Jesus Christ said this, speaking to His disciple, Thomas:

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:6).

That is very narrow, isn't it? Peter agreed with our Lord because when he was speaking to Jewish authorities, and they had asked him to give an account for his power and his authority, *i.e.*, Peter, he said this:

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

That is really narrow, isn't it? To say that Jesus Christ is the only Savior means that if you believe something else, you are on the broad way that leads to destruction.

But not only is the gate narrow, but so is the way that it leads to.

IV. THE NARROW WAY.

It is narrow, but it is good. In fact, this is the only way to true happiness and peace. Those who go through this gate are committed to a life that is pleasing to God, as I have said, a life of obedience to the Word of God. That sounds very distasteful to people who want the broad way, but God makes a change in the hearts of those who choose the narrow way so that their greatest joy is not in doing what they want to do, but in doing what God wants them to do.

And at the end of the narrow way, is life, eternal life. People receive that new life when they go through the door, but the greatest enjoyment of this eternal life is reserved for us in heaven. The Apostle Peter expressed it this way in his first epistle:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto
a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

But let me point out another possible point that the Lord may have had in mind when He spoke of the narrow way that leads to life. The word "narrow" means *trouble, affliction, pressure*. You see, everyone one is walking on one of these ways, but we continue to have contact with each other. And the world is not satisfied to go on in the broad way, but they resent those of us who are not going with them. When Paul and Barnabas went on their first missionary journey, and they revisited some places where they had preached before, and seen people saved, we are told that they went back to those places,

Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).

Life on the narrow way is never easy, but we have the comfort of knowing that our Lord is with us all of the way. He will never fail us nor forsake us.

But let us not be deceived into thinking that because we are in a minority, that the narrow way is the wrong way. We often feel like we are in a minority. I know that we won't be lonesome on the narrow way, and we certainly will not be lonesome when we get to heaven. But in comparison with those who take the broad way, those who take the narrow way are fewer in number.

But did the Lord give any indication as to which way was the best? Yes, He did! And He did it right at the beginning of our text.

V. THE LORD'S ADVICE.

The Lord gave us a very important word in this connection which we find in Jer. 17:9-10:

9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

10 I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

The Devil is a deceiver. Our own hearts will deceive us. And the world is full of deception. That is why we can be thankful that the Lord has given us His own Word as to the way we should go. And here it is! Don't miss it. Our Lord said, "Enter ye in at the strait gate." That settles it. That is

the only way to go. To go through the broad gate is sin, and it leads to destruction. It leads to hell. To go through the narrow gate, to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, is the way of everlasting life. There is forgiveness for our sins through the narrow gate. There is peace with God through the narrow gate. There is the gift of eternal life through the narrow gate. And for countless other reasons which we learn as we walk the narrow way, the "few" are right, the "many" are wrong.

Concl: When the Lord spoke these words, He was not dealing with some of the other great doctrines of our salvation, such as election and how we are drawn to Christ by the Holy Spirit. He was simply placing before His disciples the fact that all people are responsible for the gate that they take. When those of us who have gone through the narrow gate, get in, we learn that it was God in His wonderful grace that moved our hearts toward the narrow gate and to Christ.

How thankful every human being should be that the Lord has told us that there are only two ways! And those of us who have taken the narrow way need to be especially thankful for the work of the Lord in our hearts. It is not to our glory that we are saved when as one of our hymns states, others make "a wretched choice" rather than coming to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I ask you this morning, Do you pass the test as having chosen the narrow way that leads to life? I hope you have, and I know most of you have. But would to God that He would move upon all of our hearts so that there would not be a single person in this congregation, or anyone who hears this message on the air, who would choose the broad way that leads to destruction. There is only one way to be saved. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

If you can't pass the test today, may God grant that you will turn to Christ and find salvation through the narrow gate.

AN URGENT WARNING

Matthew 7:15-20

— **Intro:** Beware" is a word that most of us are well acquainted with. It is a word of warning. You see it in many different places. People may have a sign on their fence, saying, "Beware of the dog." That means that you better not go into that yard, or that dog might bite you, or do something even worse. I remember times when we would go out to swim in a river or a lake, and there would be a sign which said, "Shallow water – Do not dive! If you go around any power substation in our city you will find a warning sign reminding you that the wires carry heavy voltage which might kill you if you come in contact with it. I don't think pharmacists do this anymore, maybe they do in some instances, but there would often be a skull and cross bones warning you that a certain medicine could prove to be fatal. Even the traffic lights which we see every day has a yellow light which warns us that we should prepare to stop, and a red light indicating that it is not only against the law to go when the red light is before us, but that it could prove injurious to ourselves and possibly to others if we ignore the light and have a collision with another car.

— I am sure that you can think of other illustrations of warnings that you have seen. Parents continually are warning their children of possible dangers that they will face in certain circumstances. The dictionary defines "beware" as a situation in which you are to be on guard because of some dangerous situation which we can face. "Beware" is a word which is designed to attract our attention immediately. It is a word designed to wake us up when we may be going along not thinking in particular about anything, and then we see this word: "Beware"! And if we are wise we will pay attention to what the warning says, and avoid whatever we are being warned against.

There are many warnings in the Bible. They don't all use the word "beware," but some of them do. Let me give you some illustrations.

— When Abraham was sending his servant to get a bride for Isaac, the servant raised the question about what he should do if the woman he found would not be willing to come with him. (He was going to be visiting Abraham's relatives in Mesopotamia where he expected to find the right lady.) But when the servant asked Abraham what he should do if the chosen lady would not come with him, this is what Abraham said, and you will find this answer in Gen. 24:6-8:

6 And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou that thou bring

not my son thither again.

7 The LORD God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence.

8 And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again.

The people of God were forbidden to marry the Canaanites, and this was because the Canaanites might, and probably would, draw the people away from the Lord to worship false gods.

Deuteronomy 6:12 and 8:11 say practically the same thing. These words were spoken by Moses just before he died and as the children of Israel were anticipating entering the land of Canaan. It is a most important warning because if the Israelites had obeyed what Moses told them then, the nation would never have gone into captivity, but they would have experienced continued blessing from the Lord. Let me read to you the passage in Deuteronomy 6. I am reading verses 10-15:

10 And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not,

11 And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full;

12 Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

13 Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.

14 Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you;

15 (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth.

But that whole generation failed to heed the warning, and they paid a terrible price for their disobedience. What a lesson there is for us in this! How careful we should be that daily we are doing the will of the Lord.

But let us look into the New Testament.

Cf. Matt. 10:17 the Lord told His disciples to beware of *men* because they were only too glad to deliver them up to the councils, and have them persecuted by scourging. And then in Matthew 16:6 our Lord told His disciples, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." They thought at first that He was speaking of bread, but then Matthew added this word of explanation in Matt. 16:12:

Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

This is very similar to our text in which the Lord warned His disciples against false prophets.

And there was that instance when a man came to the Lord and he wanted the Lord to force his brother to divide his inheritance with him. And then the Lord issued that man a warning:

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth (Luke 12:15).

This is consistent with the warning that Paul issued to Timothy in 1 Tim. 6:10,

For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

The love of money is really the sin of America, and it breeds all other kinds of sin. When people put our economy ahead of morality, our nation is in big trouble, and it can lead only to more trouble. Let the politicians do what they like, sooner or later they are going to find out that the Lord is sovereign even here in America.

I am sure that most of you will remember Paul's words to the church at Philippi where he said,

1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe.

2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.

3 For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:1-3).

One last passage, the last two verses of Peter's second epistle – chapter 3, verses 17 and 18. He was discussing how false teachers twist the Scriptures to make them say what the false teachers want them to say. And so

this is Peter's warning:

17 Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.

18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever.

Amen (2 Pet. 3:17-18)

So it is very clear that if we want to be able to recognize false teachers and their false teaching, we need to be well ground in the Word of God.

There is a sense in which every negative commandment in Scripture, where we are told what not to do, is a warning, and could have the word "beware" introduce it.

But now that we have had a sample of these warnings, let us turn our attention to our text beginning with Matt. 7:15.

I. A WARNING AGAINST "FALSE PROPHETS" (Matt. 7:15).

Remember that a prophet is primarily a preacher, but he usually claims to speak on behalf of God. But the big question most of the time is, what god does he represent. Our Lord was speaking of men who were prominent in those days who claimed to speak for God, the living God, but they were liars! They come to us as one of us; they "come to you in sheep's clothing." They appear to be true prophets outwardly, but inwardly they have the nature of wolves. False teaching never permanently helps or blesses anyone; it destroys people. And that is what makes the work of the false prophets such a danger, even to the people of God. And this is why we all need to heed the warning to "beware" of them. They may be very friendly, and sound rather convincing in what they have to say, but the world today is full of false teaching. I would assume that the false teachers the Lord was speaking of primarily were the scribes and the Pharisees. They claim to be the spiritual leaders of the Jews, but we see their true nature when they sought so unrelentingly to have the Lord Jesus killed. Not all false teachers are violent like that, but the Lord had every reason to say that "inwardly," that is, in their hearts, "they are ravening wolves." They preyed upon people, to devour them and all that they have.

Now our Lord's words should make us realize at the outset that false teachers thrive on deception. Their master, the Devil, is a master deceiver. We learn that from Gen. 3 where he deceived Eve into thinking that she

could be like God if she would only do what God told her not to do. And so much of the OT is given over to the history of telling us how the children of Israel worshiped other gods, and following those who were false prophets.

When the Lord gave the message which we call *the Olivet Discourse* (Matt. 24-25) because He gave that message on the Mount of Olives, He said this (and I am going to read some selected verses from chapter 24:

4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.

5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many (Matt. 24:4-5).

In Matt 24:11 the Lord said, "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many." And then on down in Matt. 24:24 we read that our Lord said this:

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

So this is no minor issue. It was a major problem in OT times. It was a great problem when our Lord was here on earth. And, you can see from the epistles of the NT, how the apostles were continually correcting false ideas that were coming in among the Lord's people. And today false teaching is running rampant both in the professing church and outside of the church in the world. How we need this teaching! "Beware of false prophets."

So this urgent warning is given in verse 15 – and remember that it is very necessary that all of us pay attention constantly to the warning. And we need to keep false teaching out of our fellowship

But from this warning the Lord went on to tell:

II. HOW TO IDENTIFY FALSE TEACHERS (Matt. 7:16-20).

He tells us at the beginning of verse 16, "Ye shall know them by their fruits." And then He practically repeated himself in verse 20 where it is recorded that He said, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." So it is not by their looks, nor by their friendliness, nor by the clothing they wear, nor by the numbers who follow them; *it is by their fruits*. Therefore, it is very important that we learn what the Lord had in mind when He spoke of "their fruits."

Let me read to you verses 16 through 20. (Read.)

I mentioned a moment ago that if we are to be able to spot error, we need to know the truth of the Word of God. But the fact that Bible teaching is not really wanted, nor sought out by many of the Lord's people, shows why we have so many false doctrines in the church. So the better you know the Word, the more sensitive you will be to false teachers and their false teaching.

When the Lord spoke of a "good tree," He was speaking of a "good person," a person who is truly saved through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and is therefore good in the sight of God.

On the other hand, when He spoke of a "bad tree," He was speaking of a person who was "corrupt," and who brought forth "evil fruit." This term describes what we are by nature – corrupt and unregenerate.

Furthermore, He said that "a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit."

Do you remember that when we were considering verses 13 and 14 last week, that the Lord emphasized that there were only two ways for people to go, *and only two*? It seems that here the Lord was saying that there are only two kinds of trees when you are speaking of fruit. There are good trees, and there are corrupt trees – good people, and corrupt people. And just as it is certain that a good tree will bring forth good fruit, and that a corrupt tree will bring forth evil fruit, so it is equally true that a good tree cannot bring forth corrupt fruit. nor can a corrupt tree ever bring forth good fruit.

But what did the Lord mean by fruit? This is a major subject in Scripture.

He was speaking of the effect which salvation has had in our lives. Fruit has to do with our character, and it has to do with our works. It actually has to do with all that we are. The Bible makes it clear that no person can be saved, can know the Lord Jesus Christ in salvation, and remain the same. But let us look at just a few specific verses.

One difference between a Christian and one who is not a Christian is that the Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the non-Christian is not! The Holy Spirit is the One Who brings us to Christ. We are born again by the Spirit of God.. And the Holy Spirit begins to work in our hearts the

moment we are saved to make us like the Lord Jesus Christ. Even after knowing the Lord for many years, we are still far from perfect, but God is changing us by His Holy Spirit, and this is what we need to look for in our lives as well as in the lives of others, especially with those teachers who claim to have the message of God for us. The verses which should always come to our minds when we think of character, are Gal. 5:22-23:

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Paul had been speaking of "the works of the flesh" (which would be the corrupt tree), and then he went on to speak of "the fruit of the Spirit." These qualities identify one who is a good tree. Note that the word "fruit" in this case is singular ("the fruit of the Spirit"), and notice, too, that these characteristics are not produced by us, but by the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

The Apostle Paul was speaking of the change which the Lord makes in our lives when he was writing to the church at Rome, and wrote these words:

20 For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.

21 What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.

22 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:20-23).

Now we know that this miraculous change, which is called being born again, has taken place in our lives through the Lord Jesus Christ – His perfect life, His substitutionary death, and His triumphant resurrection. We have heard this message from the Bible, which is the Word of God. And it is ours, not by works, not by any way in which we deserve to be saved, but by faith in Christ.

And so in determining if a person is a true servant of the Lord, or a "false prophet," find out what he teaches about salvation. Does he mention salvation at all? Does he believe that we are hopelessly enslaved to our sins, and that only Christ can set us free? Does he believe that the Bible is the Word of God, and that the Bible is the only book which God has given to us? What does he believe about the Lord Jesus Christ? It usually doesn't take very long to find out where a person stands with regard to the truth of the Word of God, and especially concerning what he believes

about Christ.

Also, can you see evidence in this prophet's life that for himself, as well as for others, that he is primarily concerned about a holy life? Put this test to yourself. In 1 John the Apostle John writing by the Holy Spirit has given us the marks of a true child of God. Is this what this teacher teaches who has come to us as a prophet?

These are all things to be especially concerned about.

But let me say just a word about good works which also have to be included when we speak of fruit.

In Rom. 1:13 the Apostle Paul said this:

Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.

And then he followed up that statement about "fruit" with these well-known words:

14 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.

15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:14-16).

Dawson Trotman of the Navigators used to say, "The fruit of a Christian is another Christian," and that is true. It is not all that is included in that word fruit, but it is an important part of it.

So we need to find out from this "prophet," whether or not he believes that people are lost in their sins, and that he is preaching Christ as the only Savior.

A classic passage on fruit is John 15:1-16. And the sixteenth verse seems to indicate that prayer and answers to prayer are fruit in the life of a Christian. I am sure many of you will remember the Lord's words:

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

There is much more that could be said about fruit, but let me mention just two more. One has to do with giving. Salvation affects our attitude toward money. We want to honor the Lord with what He has given to us. When the Apostle Paul wrote that "thank you letter" to the Philippian church for the gift which they had sent to him in prison, he said this:

17 Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.

18 But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God (Phil. 4:17-18).

Finally, I remind you of 1 John 3:14:

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Often these teachers who suddenly appear on our doorsteps, are concerned about getting us away from the church, and becoming a part of their group. Paul said this much about the false teachers among the Galatian churches.

15 Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.

16 Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?

17 They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them (Gal. 4:15-17).

Be very careful about listening to anyone who would draw you away from the fellowship of the Lord's people.

Concl: "Beware of false prophets." We have them today just like every other generation, only maybe more so. Let no one turn us away from our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us never accept "another Gospel," which is really not another because there is only one Gospel. May the Word of God be our guide as to what salvation is, and as to what those who know Jesus Christ as Savior are to be, and how we are to live. Judge all teaching by the Scriptures and you will never go wrong.

Closing verse:

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name (Heb. 13:15).

RELIGIOUS, BUT LOST

Matthew 7:21-23

Intro: In our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, beginning with the thirteenth verse of chapter 7, on to the end of the Sermon, our Lord issued a series of warning to His disciples. He spoke, as the apostles were to write later, assuming that there were those who called themselves "disciples," and who claimed that the Lord Jesus was their "Lord," but who had never experienced true salvation in their hearts.

You will remember how in verses 13 and 14 the Lord exhorted them to enter in, or to make sure that they had entered, the narrow gate which leads to life. And He said at that time that there were "many" who were in the broad way, apparently thinking that it was the right way. And He told them that the broad way leads to destruction. If they were counting on the fact that majority was right, they would be deceived. The way to life declares that there is only one Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. A person can be very sincere, and very religious, and both are good qualities IF they are in the right way. But "many" can be sincerely wrong, and are sincerely wrong. There may be those among the "many" who know that they are not right as far as the Word of God is concerned, but they would rather reject the clear teaching of Scripture than to change. And so the Lord pointed out not only that there were just two gates, and that each person can only go through one gate, but in His own gracious way He said, "Enter ye in at the strait," or narrow, "gate."

These are two verses, 13 and 14, which ought to be told to every person on the face of the earth. As I have said, it is good to be sincere in what you believe about life after death, but sincerity alone is not enough. **We must be right!** And it is up to every one of us to make sure that we are on the way that leads to eternal life. And that way is Christ. He is the door to salvation, and He is our salvation.

When we come to verse 15, as we did last Lord's Day, we have another warning coming from the Lord Jesus Christ. And it has to do with preachers. The Lord was indicating that there are true preachers who will proclaim the truth, but that there are also false preachers who do not tell the truth. They may use Scripture, but they twist the Scriptures to make them say something besides what they obviously were intended to say.

Years ago now I was preaching in my home church in Tacoma, and at the close of the service a lady came saying that she wanted to join the church.

She was an older lady and had belonged to a large church in Tacoma, but just shortly before I was talking to her, that is, a matter of several weeks, she discovered that although the minister was using Biblical language like her former pastors had done, yet he didn't mean what they had meant.

And by that she indicated that they didn't mean what the Bible meant. For example, they still talked about being born again, but they did not mean a work of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It was more of a personal reformation, changing one's ways, but not a change of heart as a work of the Holy Spirit. Many people sit Sunday after Sunday in churches which were formerly evangelical, with pastors who loved the Lord and who taught the Word, but now there is a different breed of preachers in many of the churches in our country.

And so the Lord said, "Beware of false prophets," men who themselves are on the broad way that leads to destruction, blind leaders of the blind, so that both end up in the ditch. In the current discussion that is going on in our country about whether or not character matters, the Scriptures indicate that character is everything! It is impossible for a man to be a true preacher of the Word of God if he himself has not been transformed through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the evidence that he has been transformed will be a godly life, a life devoted to the glory of God and to the glory of His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. A true preacher is faithful to the Bible in his teaching. The Bible doesn't teach anything that a person might want it to say. The teachings of Scripture are clearly and carefully laid out so that it gives light, true light, to those who are in darkness. "Beware of false prophets."

In our Bible reading right now we are in the book of Jeremiah. And if you want to see what the Lord thinks about "false prophets," read that book. The Lord is very jealous for His Word, and He has the harshest of words for those preach a message that is contrary to that which we find in the Word of God. "Beware of false prophets." They are with us today, and with us in great numbers. Stay as far away from them as you can get, and warn others to stay away also.

Today we come to another warning in verses 21 through 23. And this warning is to bring out:

I. THE DANGER OF AN EMPTY PROFESSION (Matt. 7:21-22).

Verse 21 is addressed to all people who claim that Jesus Christ is their Lord. Verse 22 is addressed to those who claim to be the Lord's on the

basis of some service that they have performed.

Now the Lord was not saying that everyone who calls Him "Lord" will be turned away, but that "not every one that saith to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." In other words, some will say it when it is not true that the Lord is their Lord.

The double, "Lord, Lord," shows insistence on the part of those who were saying this. They really think that they are the Lord's people. The Lord seems to be anticipating the time when people will stand before Him as the Judge, and they become frantic when they learn that the door to heaven is shut to them. You can almost feel the dismay and terror in the words of the people the Lord is referring to here. I can't think of anything worse than what people will experience when they stand before the Lord, thinking that they are saved, only to find out that they are rejected.

I call your attention to the word "saith" in verse 21, and the words, "Many will say" in verse 22. Just because people *say* that they are the Lord's, does not make them the Lord's.

Only Matthew and Luke, among the Gospel writers, refer to the times when people will say, "Lord, Lord." Take for example the parable of the five wise and the five foolish virgins recorded for us in Matthew 25. Please turn to that chapter, and I will read the first eleven verses to you. **(Read Matt. 25:1-11.)** As far as their appearance was concerned, there seemed to be no way to distinguish between those who were wise and those who were foolish. But the wise were those who had oil; the foolish had no oil. And after the bridegroom came, it was too late to get it. But notice the words, "Lord, Lord." And the Bridegroom declared that he did not know them. The oil is by some referred to the Holy Spirit, by others to the oil of salvation. But in either case the absence of oil was meant to indicate that the five foolish virgins were not saved, and so the door was closed to them.

Now let us consider what was wrong with those to whom the Lord was referring here in verse 21. The Lord Himself shows us in the last words of the verse. (Read the whole verse again.)

In Luke's account of this part of our Lord's message, he tells us that the Lord said,

And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (Luke 6:46).

The Apostle John tells us of the time the Lord spent with His disciples in the Upper Room when He washed their feet. We find the account in John 13:12-15. Let me read it to you.

12 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?

13 Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.

14 If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.

15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

This was a case where the men who were present really knew the Lord, with the exception of Judas. But He was impressing upon them that since they was their "Lord and Master," they should follow His example.

The Apostle John put it this way in his first epistle: 1 John 2:3-5.

3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

A little farther on when speaking of love which surely is a characteristic of a child of God, the Apostle John said this:

18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him (1 John 3:18-19).

You see, one outstanding characteristic of a true Christian, is that he lives according to the Word of God. He not only believes the Bible to be the Word of God, but he *behaves the Word*. He does what the Lord wants Him to do, and he does not do what the Lord has told him not to do. So that when you hear a person claim to be a child of God, but he lives his life the way he wants to live it with little or no regard for Scripture, you can only come to the same conclusion that the Apostle John did: that person is not telling the truth; he is a liar. *Those are strong words, but sometimes we need strong words to wake us up.*

We all need to ask ourselves, "Do those words of the Lord Jesus describe me – 'he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven'?" And at the risk of saying something which you have heard me say repeatedly, "doeth"

is one of those present tense verbs which in the Greek means *to do habitually, continuously*, not just once in a while, but as a way of life. And let me say again that doing the will of God is both positive and negative. By that I mean that you and I do what our Lord wants us to do, and we refuse to do what He doesn't want us to do. The will of God is found in the Word of God which ought to be to us as it was to the Psalmist when he said, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path (Psa. 119:105).

Let us ask ourselves the question, "Do I really know the Lord, or is my claim to be a Christian just so much talk?" We don't know each other's heart, but we can examine ourselves, and ask God to search our hearts. There is no greater need that you and I have than the need to know the Lord, and to be assured that we know Him. Just look at the way you have lived this past week, and your life will tell you where you stand with the Lord. I continually pray that no one will come to Trinity Bible Church Sunday after Sunday and yet not be saved. I trust that I am among the number the writer of the book of Hebrews was speaking about when he wrote Hebrews 13:17:

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

I know that I speak this for all of our elders. We are not asking you to do our will; we are asking you to do God's will. And if you are not, let us earnestly beseech you to seek the Lord because if it is not your desire to live the way the Lord wants you to live, there is a real possibility that you are not saved.

But let me go on to verse 22.

In that day when you and I stand before the Lord, what will be our claim to salvation? In my case will it be that I have been ministering the Word for over fifty years? Will it be with the apostles that they had cast out demons, and had done many other wonderful works?

When I was in Seminary many years ago one of our professors told us in our class that the wife of a prominent evangelist was asked after his death how she knew that her husband was saved. Her answer was this: "Because he was responsible for leading a million people to Christ." Now from what I know about this evangelist, I have no doubt but that he was saved, but was he saved because he led a million souls to Christ? Are we saved

by the works that we do, or do our works even contribute as a part of our salvation?

These are very important questions, and you and I had better have the right answer. If it takes winning a million souls to Christ, I will never make it, and neither will you.

Let me remind you that Judas Iscariot could have said everything that the Lord mentioned in verse 22. He had prophesied in the Lord's Name, and undoubtedly had seen many people saved. He had cast out demons because the Lord gave all of His disciples that power. And he had done many other wonderful works. Did that mean he was saved? No, it meant that God sometimes uses instruments, uses people that are not even saved. I heard of a Presbyterian pastor who was in the ministry for fifteen years, had preached the Gospel, and had seen people turn to Christ, but after fifteen years he realized that he was not saved, and it was then that his life was transformed.

There is a real emphasis these days on large evangelistic meetings, and megachurches, but the way God may bless a man in itself has nothing to do with proving that he is saved. There is only one way for people to be saved, and that is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death on the Cross. And when a person is saved by the Lord, he or she becomes a new creature in Christ. So the person who is looking to his own works for his salvation, or even as the sole proof of his salvation, is in great danger of hearing the Lord say those terrible words we find in verse 23. Let us call them:

II. THE LORD'S FINAL WORDS OF JUDGMENT (Matt. 7:23).

(Read verse 23.)

Can you imagine words that could possibly be worse than these words? Notice that the Lord did not say, "I knew you, but you fell away, and so I don't know you now." He said, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." You see, whatever you may be trusting in for your salvation other than Christ, is "iniquity"! One possible translation of this word iniquity, which literally means *lawlessness*, is *contempt for the Word of God*. The Bible clearly teaches that salvation is through Christ alone. If we even say that it is Christ plus anything else – our works, or baptism, or church membership, or circumcision (as with the Jews in the early days of the church) – God says it is "iniquity," a contempt for the Word of God!

If God says that salvation is through Christ, and we say that there is more to it than simply trusting in Christ, we are calling God a liar and guilty of the worst kind of iniquity.

Concl: There is a verse in Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia that has made me wonder about some of the ways in which some people add to Christ when preaching about salvation. If Paul was saying that if you add circumcision to Christ for salvation, Christ shall profit you nothing, then he must have meant that if you profess to believe in Christ, but also that circumcision is partly responsible for your salvation, then you are not really saved. What would Paul say about those who claim that salvation is by faith in Christ *and baptism*. Can a person believe that and truly be saved?

Years ago Dr. William Pettingill, who was one of the original editors of the Scofield Bible, and one of the most wonderful Bible teachers I ever heard, wrote a commentary on the book of Galatians. He gave it this interesting title: *By Grace Through Faith Plus Nothing*. That is what our Lord was teaching here. But, oh, how important it is that we understand this now, and not wait until it is forever too late. Believe me, I am not trying to disturb any of you unnecessarily, but I do not want to detract in any way from these words of our Lord Jesus Christ in verses 21 through 23 here in Matthew 7. Oh, that everyone of us could say from our hearts today, what the Apostle Paul said about his own salvation:

... for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day (2 Tim. 1:12b).

Let me close with the words found in John 3:36 which gives the Gospel as clearly as it can be said:

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

I trust that your faith for salvation is in Christ, and in Christ alone. There is no other Savior. If you do not know Him as your Savior, may God grant you the grace to believe on Him right now.

Closing verses: 1 Tim. 2:5-6:

5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;
6 Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

TWO MEN AND THEIR HOUSES

Matthew 7:24-27

— **Intro:** We come today to the end of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. I am going to take one more Sunday on Matthew, chapter 7, the last two verses, but, as you can plainly see, the message itself ends with verse 27. In the last two verses Matthew simply and importantly records the great astonishment which the people experienced as they listened to the words of the greatest Teacher Who has ever lived. But for today we want to look at this parable (because that is what it is) of two men who each built a house. The Lord had a wonderful way of bringing out the greatest truths by telling a simple story.

The Lord was finishing His message. The number *two* plays a large part in what the Lord had said, and said here, in concluding His message. For example, in verses 13 and 14, the Lord spoke of two gates and two ways. There was a wide gate and a narrow gate. The wide gate led to a broad way, and the narrow gate led to a narrow way. The end of the broad way was destruction; the end of the narrow way was life.

— In verses 15 through 20 the Lord spoke of how you could distinguish between a true prophet, and a false prophet. And he likened them to two trees – one which would bring forth good fruit, and the other which would bring forth bad fruit. And He emphasized that a good tree brings forth good fruit, and that it cannot bring forth bad fruit. But He also made the point that a bad tree brings forth bad fruit, and that it is utterly incapable of bringing forth good fruit. So everything here is in terms of two's.

In the verses we considered last Lord's day, verses 21 through 23, we learned again about two different kinds of people – those who will enter the kingdom of heaven, and those who will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Today, in coming to these final words of the Lord's message, we have two men, two houses, and two results.

— This emphasis on the number *two* indicates that we do not have a lot of alternatives. In reality there are only two whereas in one of them there might be a number of choices. But as far as the way people live, there are only two choices: one is the right way; the other is the wrong way. In the wrong way there may be many different choices that can be made, but they are all wrong! In each case that the Lord has portrayed of the right

way, there is just one way – and that truth is emphasized again in the parable which we are about to consider.

Let us notice, first,

I. THE CLASS OF PEOPLE ABOUT WHOM THE LORD WAS SPEAKING.

You see this at the beginning of verse 24 and again at the beginning of verse 26. Verse 24 begins, "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine ... " Verse 26 begins, "And every one that heareth these sayings of mine ... " So the Lord was making the application first of all to the people who had heard what He had been saying, the words recorded for us from the first of chapter 5 to this point in chapter 7. *They had all been hearing what the Lord had been saying.* Let us think about this for a moment – about hearing the words of the Lord.

We are constantly hearing things, aren't we? And it has been that way since we were born. During political campaigns we hear a lot of propaganda that we get sick of before the election, and only time will tell if what we are hearing is the truth, or not the truth. We in growing up have been influenced by many people whose words we have heard. This includes our parents, our teachers, our friends. There is another way that we hear words, but in a different sense, and that is when we read books. Reading the right kind of books can be very, very profitable for us, but reading the wrong kind of books can be very damaging. Even pictures often convey a message to us. In one way or another, from birth to death, we are always hearing, always receiving messages -- some right, and some wrong; some good, and some bad.

But what the Lord was speaking about here is completely different, isn't it? He spoke of "these sayings of Mine." The sayings of the Lord Jesus Christ are completely different from the sayings of anyone else. These are the sayings of the Son of God. We can also say that they are the sayings of God because we have been learning from John 17 that the very words which our Lord spoke to men were the words which the Father had given Him to speak. So, while we say that this was our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, it is just as true that word for word it was God's message delivered by His Son on the Mount. And we are able to read it and hear it and discuss it because it has been preserved for us in our Bibles. If we didn't have the Bible, we would not be able to say that we had heard these words of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I am sure that most of you, possibly all of you who know the Lord, have perhaps many times marveled at the fact that it has been your privilege to hear the Word of God. It has been no mistake, or just something that has happened by chance, that somebody gave you a Bible. Perhaps it was because you were born in a family where your parents knew the Lord and loved His Word, and from the very beginning of all that you remember of your childhood, you remember how your parents read to you from the Word of God, explained to you what it meant, and possibly encouraged you to memorize it, and took you to a church where you were taught the Word and where the pastor faithfully taught the Word of God.

All of us here today have heard the Lord's sayings; we have heard the Word of God. And this ought to be a matter for which we are constantly praising the Lord. And do you know one big reason why we should be praising the Lord? It is because there are millions of people in our nation and throughout our world who have not heard the Lord's sayings. God has put a moral regulator in every human heart so that we recognize that there is a God, and that there are things right and things wrong, but we have had the privilege of learning much more if we have heard the Lord's sayings, or whatever we have learned from any part of God's Word. It was a great God-given privilege that the group of disciples were enjoying that day when the Lord Jesus spoke these words. They were listening to the very Word of God. And we have the privilege of reading what those people heard, exactly what they heard. And since these are the sayings of our Lord Jesus Christ, we do not have to spend one moment questioning whether what we have heard from these three chapters are right or wrong. They can't possibly be wrong because they have come from the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord never taught anything but the truth.

Now this ought to make us concerned about doing one thing among many others. The one thing to which I refer is that of making it possible for others to hear the Lord's words. We need to work these sayings of the Lord into our conversation with others as much as we can. One reason I like to bring as many Scriptures as I can into my messages is because it is very important for people to hear the actual words of Scripture. But how good and how gracious of God that He has made it possible for us to here His Word, while so many people in this world do not have a Bible. Many have never seen a Bible. And many who have a Bible have never read it. But when the Lord said, "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine," we can say now that we are included in that group.

But now we must face the question: *What are we going to do with what*

we have heard? As we read our text we see that there were:

II. TWO DIFFERENT REACTIONS THAT ARE POSSIBLE.

Verse 24 says, "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them. Verse 26 gives the opposite reaction: "And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not. This is the point at which the two parts of the parable go in different directions.

Some people hear the Word of God, and their lives are from that point on completely different. When others hear the Word of God, they might be interested in it at the time, but they soon forget it, and it has no effect whatever upon their lives.

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, he mentioned one thing in particular that caused him great joy. And he expressed his joy in these words:

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe (1 Thess. 2:13).

What a difference it makes when we receive the sayings of the Lord Jesus as the very Word of God! But this applies to all of the Bible. Men like Moses, and David, and Isaiah in the OT were not God like our Lord Jesus is, but they were guided by the Holy Spirit in what they wrote so that word for word they have given us God's Word. And men like Matthew and Paul and Peter were not God like the Lord Jesus is, but they were guided by the Holy Spirit in what they wrote so that word for word they, too, have given us God's Word. And when the Word of God is accepted as the Word of God, the results are amazing in transforming lives. We can only do what God wants us to do, or not do what He doesn't want us to do, if we have trusted the Lord Jesus as our Savior. But the point that the Lord was making is that the evidence that a person has really turn to the Lord, is that he (or she) will live according to the Word of God.

But what do we find next? The Lord gives us:

III. A DESCRIPTION OF THESE TWO MEN.

The one who does what the Lord says is likened unto "a wise man." The one who does not do what the Lord says is "likened unto a foolish man." Here we have God's description of what a truly wise person is, and what a

truly foolish person is. It is wonderful to have been blessed by God with a keen mind, with a high I.Q., and be able to make good S.A.T. scores and make high marks in exams so that companies are waiting for you to hire you when you finish school. But you know that God does not measure wisdom that way. Because a person can be very brilliant, but if he hears the Word of God, and does not do the will of God, God says that he is foolish. And there are going to be a lot of smart, foolish people in hell. But there will also be many smart wise people in heaven. But no one will be there because of their natural ability. A wise person in God's sight is one who does His will; a fool, one who does not do His will.

Now we move on to another point. And this has to do with:

IV. THE TWO HOUSES.

The houses must represent the lives of the two men. Each can be very presentable from the outside. The difference between the two is the foundation upon which they are built. And you will notice that the Lord spoke of these houses as being built by the men who would inhabit them. The wise man built his house upon a rock; the foolish man built his house upon the sand. At the time they were constructed, it would appear to be much easier to build upon the sand, rather than to take the time and all of the hard work to dig down to find rock upon which to lay the foundation. But this is the main difference that the Lord sought to bring out in the parable.

Obviously the "rock" would refer to the Word of God, doing what God tells us to do in His Word. But since the commandments of Scripture are what God is using in our lives to make us like the Lord Jesus. And so the "rock" could also speak of Christ. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Cor. 3:11,
For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

It certainly can be said that everybody is building his house, but the Lord in this parable was speaking about those who had heard His sayings. And so we must limit our interpretation to those who have heard the teaching of the Lord. When we live according to the sayings of the Lord, doing His will, it is like building our houses, our lives, on a rock. But to hear the Lord's sayings, and not do His will, is like building a house on the sand with actually *no foundation*. Unfortunately there are many people who are doing just this. The Word of God has no place in their lives, nor does God, nor does the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is the real tragedy! The

opportunity to hear the Word carries with it great responsibilities on our part. It does not mean that we are capable of obeying the Lord in our own strength, but we are responsible to look to the Lord to make us willing to do His will, and then to enable us to do it.

Finally, we come to:

V. THE TESTINGS.

Be sure to notice that the house, the life, the character of every person, whether wise or foolish, is going to be tested. And they are described by our Lord in this parable by the same words for each person, the wise man and the foolish man. They are described as "rain," "floods," and "wind." They come to every person.

It is known that in that part of the world storms can arise very quickly, and with very little or no notice. When we were in Israel and on the sea of Galilee, we were told that you could start out from the shore on a warm, sunny day, but before you reach the other side you could be caught by a terrible storm, and that sometimes the wind would cause huge waves on water that had before looked like a sea of glass. It can come in the form of some temptation. Or it might be persecution in some form, or sickness, or even the prospect of death. Often it can be a prolonged time of testing where our faith is tried, as with Abraham who waited for at least twenty-five years before Isaac was born. Or as it came to Jacob when he was forced to leave home because of his own deceit. Or it can be like Joseph who was sold by his brothers into Egyptian slavery. Or think of how Moses was tried when he came to the Red Sea with the Egyptian army in pursuit of the children of Israel. The children of Israel were tried time and time again as they went through the desert on the way to Canaan. We have been reading Jeremiah who faithfully preached the Word of God, and always got into trouble because of it. What about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who were put in the fiery furnace, or Daniel in the lions' den? Think of the severe trial it was for our Lord's followers when He was arrested, and then crucified. And what about Paul's thorn in the flesh, and then his imprisonments. The story of the Lord's people is a story of rain, and floods, and wind. In such times we can only stand if we are firmly founded upon the rock of the Word of God and upon the Rock, our Lord Jesus Christ.

But for the foolish man who heard the sayings of the Lord, but failed to bring His life in line with the Word of God, "great" was his fall! With the

wise man, his house stood because it was founded upon a rock.

One thing about the foundation of a house that we all recognize, is that it is not prominent like the superstructure of the house. In fact, with some houses, the foundation is barely seen. But it is the foundation which determines how the house will be able to take rain and floods and wind. Just so, in our lives, the foundation that is laid is scarcely seen by others. It has to do with what is going on in our lives privately before the Lord. One thing about the foundation of our lives that differs from ordinary foundations, is that the foundation of our lives can become stronger and stronger the stronger our obedience is, and the stronger our fellowship with the Lord is.

Concl: And so the Lord came to the end of His message. What a privilege and blessing it was to hear the sayings of the Lord Jesus! How profitable it would be for me and for you if next Sunday we would start at the beginning of chapter 5 and go through this whole message again! I am sure that there is much that I need to hear again, and perhaps you would say the same thing for yourself.

Years later James would write,

19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness [the NASB says, "and all that remains of wickedness], and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (James 1:19-25).

We all are guilty to some extent of hearing, and promptly forgetting. But what we need to do is to hear, *and apply the Word to our lives immediately*. This is what will strengthen our lives, so that when the rain comes, followed by floods, and then made worse by the winds of adversity, we

may be shaken, but we will not fall because our lives have been founded upon the rock.

— There is probably no greater need that any of us has than the need to obey the Lord each time after either through reading, or hearing it from someone else, our hearts have been exposed to the Word of God. And by the way, this is a great reason for reading the Word daily, and often for reading the same portions over and over until the truth of the Word gets into our hearts.

Let us not be forgetful hearers, but may we seek the grace of God that even the things which we have heard today may be used by the Lord to make us more like the Lord wants us to be. Christ-likeness is only possible through obedience to the Word of God.

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THE GREATEST TEACHER OF ALL

Matthew 7:28-29

Intro: I have been saying for the last four weeks that verses 13 through 27 for the conclusion to our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. And last week I pointed out to you the way in which the Lord emphasized the number 2 in His conclusion to His message.

- 1) Two gates, leading to two ways, and ending in two destinations.
- 2) False prophets and true prophets, good trees and corrupt trees, evil fruit and good fruit.
- 3) Those who enter the kingdom of heaven and those who are told to depart from the Lord.
- 4) The wise man and the foolish man, the house built on the rock, and the house built on the sand, the house that stood up under the rain, floods, and wind, and the house that fell.

As we come to the last two verses in chapter 7 this morning, we again are confronted with two - the teaching of Jesus and the teaching of the scribes. And these verses give us Matthew's comment as to the reaction of the people to the teaching of the Lord in comparison to their response to the teaching of their scribes.

Now in all of these *two's*, we are to understand that there are two, and no more than two. There are only two gates for people to go through leading to two ways. The one is narrow and the other is broad. The one leads to life and the other leads to destruction. So if people do not choose the narrow gate, it makes no difference what other gate they might take, they are all classed and one, and they lead to destruction. The narrow gate, of course, is through Christ Who is the way, the truth, and the life. All other gates lead to destruction.

There are just two kinds of prophets - true prophets and false prophets. And you will know them by their fruits. A true prophet produces good fruit, and only good fruit; a false prophet produces bad fruit, and only bad fruit. A true prophet is true to the Word of God; a false prophet may use the Word of God, but he does it in such a way that his teaching is a denial of the Word of God.

The one who enters the kingdom of heaven is the one who does not just say, "Lord, Lord," but who does the will of our heavenly Father. The one who is told to depart from the Lord, may say, "Lord, Lord," but he lives to do what he wants to do.

And finally, the wise man builds his house, his life, upon the rock. The rock represents the Word of God, and Christ Himself. The foolish man has no place for the Word of God in his life, nor does he have any place for Christ. And the whole human family can be divided into these two categories.

Now, when the Lord had finished, we see that as the Lord had been teaching, the multitude listening to Him had been comparing in their minds His teaching with the teaching of their own scribes. And they "were astonished at his doctrine [his teaching], for He taught them [lit.] as having authority, and not as the scribes." The people without being told to do so, realized the great difference between the teaching of our Lord and the teaching of their scribes.

And so this is the comment that the Holy Spirit led Matthew to write in commenting upon the teaching of our Lord in contrast with the teaching of the scribes.

From all that our Lord has said throughout this Sermon on the Mount, we have to realize that all true teaching has two parts. There is that which is doctrinal, and this is followed by the practical. All teaching has some kind of an objective. For example, the chemistry teacher seeks to ground his students in the facts of the science of chemistry, but his ultimate object is to get his students into the lab where they can conduct practical experiments. A history teacher covers whatever period of history that happens to be his field, but his object, if he is a good teacher, is to show that one of the values of studying history is practical, that we will benefit ourselves from what others have done in the past which was right, and that we will not make the mistakes that they made. That is the value of reading the historical and prophetic books of the OT. We can see the mistakes that people made, and the consequences of those mistakes, in order that hopefully, under the blessing of the Holy Spirit, we will not make the same mistakes, and so avoid the judgments of God. If most of our politicians knew the Bible, they wouldn't approve of many of the things that they condone because the Bible tells us what happened to the people, the cities, and the nations who did what they are doing.

So all teaching, if it is real teaching, has practical results.

Let us begin by thinking about the teaching of the scribes. Matthew mentioned it last in these two verses, but I want to take it up first. Then we will understand more about what the people had discovered.

I. THE TEACHING OF THE SCRIBES.

First of all, who were the scribes?

In answering that question, we need to reflect on those who were the teachers of Scripture in the OT. And, of course, this was primarily in the hands of the priest and Levites. The Apostle John tells us in John 1:17 that "the Law was given by Moses." And the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy tell us that Moses was not only the man through whom the Law was given, but he was the first interpreter of the Law. And Aaron stood by his side in this capacity. They were not only teachers of the Law, but it was their responsibility to see that the people kept the Law. And they were assisted by others, priests and elders, in this most important work.

We also learn that in the time of Ezra, who was a priest, he was the major one, along with Nehemiah, who taught the people the Law. Remember the verse that we have been learning in Ezra 7:10:

For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

That is the kind of a teacher Moses was – he taught himself first, and then the people. When we read that Ezra taught his people "statutes and judgments" it means that he taught them to do what he had done: to understand the law of the Lord, and to do it. Any person who teaches the Bible had better follow in their steps. Pastors today are to teach people the meaning of the Word of God, but they must practice what they preach if there is to be power in their teaching.

In Nehemiah 8:8 we read what the Levites did in Nehemiah's day:

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading (Neh. 8:8).

However, as time went on, the priests became influenced by Greek philosophy, and a group of men known as "scribes" became the teachers of the Law. They were what we would term *scholars* today. Most of these, it seems, were Pharisees. And when we move on down to the time of our Lord, it was the scribes and Pharisees who were the major opponents of the Lord even though they claimed to be the true inheritors of the position that Moses had. Let me read to you what the Lord said about them according to the first few verses of Matthew 23. Here are His words:

- 1 Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,
- 2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:

3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers (Matt. 23:1-4).

The major problem with the scribes and Pharisees was that they did not practice what they preached. They taught much that was true (although they also taught much that was not true), but they failed as far as the application of the Word of God to their own lives was concerned. And so though they claimed to be the successors of Moses, they failed where Moses had succeeded. Moses was not perfect, but it was his desire to live according to the Word of God.

So, in the light of what the Lord had been saying, the scribes and Pharisees were "false prophets." They mixed enough of the truth in to deceive the people, but they did not do what they were telling the people to do.

Now in Scripture it is obedience to the Word of God that produces Christian character. And the ultimate object of the teaching of Scripture is the transformation of our lives from what we have been into what God wants us to be. We can't do this on our own, and this is what we need to walk in dependence upon the Holy Spirit each day.

So I hope we understand enough about the scribes and Pharisees to see what their problem was. And remember that they were Israel's main Bible teachers when our Lord was here on earth.

Now let us look at:

II. THE PEOPLE'S RESPONSE TO THE TEACHING OF THE LORD.

We find this in both verses of our text.

A. First, "the people were astonished" (Matt. 7:28).

The word for people here is οἱ ὄχλος. This means *a crowd, a multitude, a great number of people*. And Matthew seems to indicate that this was the common reaction that prevailed among all who had been listening to the Lord Jesus. They "were astonished at His doctrine." They had never heard teaching like the Lord Jesus had given to them. This means that they were *struck with amazement*. A. T. Robertson in his *Word Pictures*

in the New Testament explained this statement in this way:

They listened spellbound to the end and were left amazed. Note the imperfect tense-- a buzz of astonishment. The verb means literally "were struck out of themselves."

You can imagine that the crowd made a great sound as they spoke to each other about what they had just heard. They had listened in silence, but at the end they could not keep silent any longer.

But what else do we learn about their reaction.

B. "For He taught them as ... having authority" (Matt. 7:29).

The word "one" is not in the original text, but was added to by the translators to make it clearer. But it is a stronger translation to leave that word out. "For He taught them as ... having authority." This same Greek word which is here translated "authority" is translated as "power" in Luke 4:32: "And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power."

Again quoting Robertson concerning the teaching of the scribes, this is what he had to say:

They [the people] had heard many sermons before from the regular rabbis in the synagogues. We have specimens of these discourses preserved in the Mishna and Gemara, the Jewish Talmud when both were completed, the driest, dullest collection of disjointed comments upon every conceivable problem in the history of mankind. The scribes quoted the rabbis before them and were afraid to express an idea without bolstering it up by some predecessor [but not with Scripture]. Jesus spoke with the authority of truth, the reality and freshness of the morning light, and the power of God's Spirit. This sermon which made such a profound impression ended with the tragedy of the fall of the house on the sand like the crash of a giant oak in the forest. There was no smoothing over the outcome.

You see, even today people can detect the difference between a true teacher and a false teacher. Many follow false teachers because they have never heard true teaching. But when this crowd of Jews who had never heard teaching like the Lord Jesus gave them, were exposed to the truth, they realized that here was something new, something they had never heard before, and they were drawn to the Lord Jesus and His teaching.

We don't know how many of them actually turned to the Lord on that

occasion, and became true believers in Christ. It may have been that many of them were greatly impressed at the moment, but did not follow on to seek the Lord, and to know Him in salvation.

We, too, have been greatly impressed with the Lord's words in this Sermon, haven't we? I wish that I had done a better job in teaching these three chapters. But I pray that none of us will forget what we have learned so that we will go on living just like we did before these words of the Lord Jesus. My explanation is not the important thing. If that has been helpful, I give all of the glory to the Lord. But what is important is to be seen in the very words which the Lord Jesus spoke on that occasion, words that are just as true and just as needed as they were in that day approximately two thousand years ago.

But I must not close before I attempt to answer the question,

III. WHAT MADE THE TEACHING OF THE LORD JESUS SO POWERFUL, SO OVERWHELMING WITH AUTHORITY?

Let me give you three answers to that question, and I would like to make the application from our Lord to all of us who are here today, and to those who will hear this message on our radio broadcast, or on tapes..

A. It was because of Who He was.

The Lord Jesus Christ was the Son of God, God manifest in human flesh. And all of the power of the Godhead was revealed when the Lord Jesus spoke. And as such, He had supreme authority, supreme power.

Do you remember the time when the Pharisees and chief priests sent officers to arrest the Lord, and what they said when they came back without the Lord? They said, "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46). The scribes were not only mere men, but, in spite of their position in Israel, they were unregenerate, unsaved men. And with all of the authority they had because of their position, their authority was nothing in the presence of and in comparison with the Lord of glory.

But, you might say, how can this apply to us? We aren't Deity; we are only sinners saved by grace. Yes, I am fully aware of that. But we need to remember that the first prerequisite of any servant of the Lord must be that he knows the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior. And although ladies do not have a ministry in the church, you have a ministry. And the require-

ment for you is just the same. If you expect to serve the Lord where you are, your first requirement is that you truly know the Lord. No person can be a true servant of God who is unsaved, and no one can be saved who is not trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior.

So, as with our Lord, who we are is extremely important if we are to serve the Lord.

But there is a second reason for the Lord's power in His ministry.

B. It was because of His perfect life.

You know those statements from Scripture about our Lord and His relationship to sin. He "knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). He was "without sin" (Heb. 4:15). He "did no sin" (1 Pet. 2:22). "In Him is no sin" (1 John 3:5).

But then there was the positive side of His holy character and life. He was the only person who has ever lived who could say, "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29). Also in John 6:38 we read that our Lord said, "For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me." The Lord never did anything that was displeasing to the Father, but He always did that which was pleasing to Him.

You and I have often sinned by doing that which is displeasing to the Father, and we have often sinned as well by not doing that which is pleasing to the Lord. But it is always the case that the more we strive, by the grace of God, to do His will, and not to displease Him in any way, the greater will be the blessing of the Lord upon our lives and upon whatever ministry the Lord has given to us. This is where the scribes failed miserably, and this is where we need to pay close attention to our lives. It is said of godly Stephen, that his enemies "were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake" (Acts 6:10).

Finally, concerning the authority and power of the Lord Jesus:

C. It was because of what He taught.

The Lord was always careful in His ministry to speak only the words, the very words, which the Father had given Him to speak. We can say that the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ was a ministry of the Word of God.

He told His enemies, the Jews. "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me" (John 7:16). He also said to the Jews in another place, "I speak to the world those things which I have heard of Him" (John 8:26), and, "As my Father hath taught Me, I speak these things" (John 8:28). In our Lord's High Priestly prayer in John 17, He said this to the Father,

7 Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee.

8 For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me (John 17:7-8).

Our Lord's entire ministry was devoted to preaching and teaching God's Word. The Word has come to us in our Bibles, but if we want to see the Lord's blessing, the Word of God must be our ministry.

Concl: When the Lord was leaving His disciples, He said this to them about *authority*:

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power [authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:18-20).

We live and serve under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. But only those who know the Savior can claim that authority, and it also requires that we are living in obedience to the Word of God, and that our message is the message of Scripture.

When the Lord spoke of the house built upon the sand, He was speaking not only of the people of Israel, but of the nation itself. And it was a kind of prophecy of the fall of Israel. They had failed to learn of history. Their leaders were unsaved, and so their lives could not be pleasing to the Lord, and they failed to minister the Word of God, and only the Word, to their people. May the Lord help us to understand the authority of Christ in these days when the world needs to be confronted with people who know the Lord, living godly lives, and devoted to the ministry of the Word of God. May we never depart from the example of our Lord.