

The Sermon on the Mount

The Beatitudes

For the purposes of this class we will use the slightly longer version of this sermon found in Mathew chapters 5, 6 and 7. It begins with the “Beatitudes”. We struggle with these a bit, Jesus’ words don’t seem to reflect what we observe.

Mt 5:3 “Blessed ^{1,a} are the ² poor in spirit, for ^b theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Shouldn’t this be “rich in spirit”? The greek word for “poor” here is “ptosso”, which means “beggarly”. Is Jesus really saying that we are to be spiritual beggars?

There are a pair of psychologists named David Dunning and Justin Kruger that have written books on what is called the “Dunning-Kruger” effect. In short this can be understood as incompetents have a false sense of their competence and the competent have a false sense of the difficulty to become competent. Another really smart guy said “the fool thinks himself wise, the wise man knows himself to be a fool”.

Consider that Jesus wants us to be aware of our spiritual poverty, not so that we remain poor, but so that we can strive for better, knowing that by comparison we will always be beggars.

Mt 5:4 “Blessed are ^a those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

This one is a bit easier. We are comforted at the passing of those loved ones that we know are in God’s presence. But we can also gain great comfort from those around us that have the gift of empathy. Somehow these messengers can fill our hearts with peace, even joy in our grief. It can be a life-changing experience. We can be profoundly grateful that He has sent such people into our lives just at the moment we most need them. For those given this gift, it is a calling.

Mt 5:5 “Blessed are ^a the ¹ gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

This one is perhaps the hardest of all for us. It simply is not what we observe happening in the world around us. Especially when the word here is “meek” rather than “gentle”.

The word “gentle” here has long been translated as “meek”. The NASV renders it this way and it is more nearly a word-based rather than an idea-based translation. The problem with the word “meek” is that it is commonly misunderstood to mean “weak” or “timid”. But there is no virtue in weakness. Rather think of the gentle giant, the big, strong warrior capable of violence even brutality, but think of him on the living room floor with small children climbing, jumping, poking and prodding all with a chorus of gleeful giggles. How can these children be kept safe? Well, there is no need, they couldn’t be safer. This is the story of “Beauty and the Beast”. There are two strong individuals portrayed in that story, the beast and Gaston. Which of them was the stronger, and which the more meek?

Mt 5:6 “Blessed are ^a those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Most of us can both identify with this, and still acknowledge that it’s not necessarily automatic. We get that pursuing righteousness is necessary, we have also all experienced times that we haven’t always felt satisfied. We may even have come away feeling like a failure at times. We can take comfort in understanding that this is not a singularity, but a daily requirement. Just as we drink and are slated, we eat and are full, in a few hours we hunger and thirst again. We may sometimes have to wait. Keep the faith. He will.

The Sermon on the Mount

Mt 5:7 “Blessed are ^a the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

This one is easy to understand. And for some of us, nearly impossible to do.

Mt 5:8 “Blessed are ^a the pure in heart, for ^b they shall see God.

We so want to be pure in heart. That word could also be translated as “clean”. For me that’s a bit easier, “pure” implies having never corrupted the spirit, “clean” suggests that it will be necessary to wash up from time-to-time. I can do that.

Mt 5:9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for ^a they shall be called sons of God.

What could be better? The word for “son” here can also apply to animals and could perhaps be translated as “offspring”. And since it is quite often the women among us that take on this task, maybe we should understand it that way. Bringing peace to a confrontation is truly to be the agent of the Prince of Peace.

Don’t confuse this with “peacekeeper” which is a Colt .45 revolver and has a very different connotation.

Mt 5:10 “Blessed are those who have been ^a persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for ^b theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Be very careful not to assign to yourself “persecution” when someone simply disagrees with you, or even questions your intelligence. Most importantly never claim this when you are called out for being unkind or disagreeable, if it isn’t “for the sake of righteousness”, it may really be for the sake of justice. Persecution is a serious matter, not to be declared lightly. Of course when we are standing for righteousness, we must stand firm. And accept the consequences with joy. This is not for the faint of heart.

Mt 5:11 “Blessed are you when *people* ^a insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

At first blush this seems just like the previous verse, but note the difference, the previous is “for the sake of righteousness”, this one is “because of Me”. In the first case it’s a matter of accepting persecution for doing what’s right, this is accepting persecution, false accusations, and outright evil because of Jesus. This was often an issue in the first century when Jesus’ followers were literally hunted down. It does still happen today, thankfully not very often in America, but it does happen, chiefly in countries whose governments are directly tied to a false religion.

Mt 5:12 “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for ^a in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

It would be a treasure to be in such good company. But few of us will travel to distant lands in the hope of obtaining this.

Consider these nine “beatitudes” in groups of three. This is a construct that Jesus often employed. Note that the first three are somewhat passive and might be thought of as the starting point in our journey, “poor in spirit”,

The Sermon on the Mount

“those who mourn”, “the gentle”. Compare those to the next three “hunger and thirst for righteousness”, “merciful” and “pure in heart”. These are attributes of those who have advanced a bit on the journey. And finally “peacemakers”, “persecuted for the sake of righteousness”, and “persecute you ... because of Me”. These are traits of the spiritually mature.

Where are you on this path, and do you have a roadmap, a goal for advancing in your walk to the point that you will willingly accept persecution? First-century Christians had to face this reality early on in their journey, we mustn't let our luck be a hurdle to growth.

Righteousness

In this sermon Jesus exhorts us to the behavior, spirit and attitudes that He expects of His disciples.

Mt 5:13 “You are the salt of the earth; but ^a if the salt has become tasteless, how ¹ can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

Today we use salt almost exclusively as a seasoning. There are few exceptions, one can buy salt cod, salt pork and a few other items. In the first century salt was far more valuable as a preservative. There was no refrigeration, so anything that couldn't be dried (grains and fruits) or fermented such as meats and vegetables had to be preserved with salt. Jesus isn't suggesting that we endeavor to make the earth taste better, but to be the agents of preservation, saving the world from decay and degradation. This is our value.

Mt 5:14 “You are ^a the light of the world. A city set on a ¹ hill cannot be hidden;

Mt 5:15 ^a nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a ¹ basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

Mt 5:16 “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may ^a see your good works, and ^b glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Is Jesus suggesting that we practice works righteousness? Are we not to do our good works quietly, in the background, without notice?

Jesus has appointed us to be His source of light, He has no plans to hide us away. We must of course always do this in a manner that glorifies God, the problem is that we like to have a little credit too.

Mt 5:18 “For truly I say to you, ^a until heaven and earth pass away, not ¹ the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

Mt 5:19 “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches ¹ others *to do* the same, shall be called least ^a in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever ² keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

All of the Hebrew Bible points to Jesus' coming. The commandments are meant to teach us right from wrong, in the very next passage He will use those as a springboard to push us from simple obedience to spirituality.

Fulfilling the Law

Mt 5:21 “You ^a have heard that ¹ the ancients were told, ‘YOU ^b SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and

The Sermon on the Mount

'Whoever commits murder shall be ² liable to ^c the court.'

Mt 5:22 "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be ¹ guilty before ^a the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You ² good-for-nothing,' shall be ¹ guilty before ^{3,b} the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be ¹ guilty *enough to go* into the ^{4,c} fiery hell.

The Law taught us that murder is wrong, Jesus tells us why it's wrong. Further, He would have us understand the spiritual underpinnings of the Law. Murder is the outward expression of anger, hate, murderousness. But Jesus is more interested in our spirit than our actions. If we have the Spirit of Christ, murder, envy, theft, anything that harms others will simply not be part of our nature.

Mt 5:23 "Therefore if you are ^a presenting your ¹ offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

Mt 5:24 leave your ¹ offering there before the altar and go; first be ^a reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your ¹ offering.

Mt 5:25 "Make ^a friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.

Mt 5:26 "Truly I say to you, ^a you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last ¹ cent.

So how do these teachings follow from the admonition about anger? Consider the point about harming others. If we have harmed another, what is the remedy? If someone has cause to take us to court, we may have done them a wrong. So not being angry isn't the end of the matter. It's actually about doing good rather than harm. Not just the absence of harm, but the presence of promoting the welfare of others.

Mt 5:27 "You ^a have heard that it was said, 'YOU ^b SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY';

Mt 5:28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman ^a with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Again, Jesus is more concerned with what is in our heart than what we do with it. If the problem is in our heart we may be able to resist for a time, but we will eventually fail. Even if we somehow maintain the discipline, our spirit is still blackened and that is His priority.

He goes on to other applications of this same idea. It's not about the physicality of what we do, it's the spirit that goods us into it

Mt 5:29 "If ^a your right eye makes you ¹ stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you ² to lose one of the parts of your body, ³ than for your whole body to be thrown into ^{4,b} hell.

Mt 5:30 "If ^a your right hand makes you ¹ stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you ² to lose one of the parts of your body, ³ than for your whole body to go into ^{4,b} hell.

Don't try to just mask the physical, sacrifice it to the spiritual.

The Sermon on the Mount

Mt 5:31 “It was said, ‘WHOEVER ^a SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE’;

Mt 5:32 ^a but I say to you that everyone who ¹ divorces his wife, except for *the* reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a ² divorced woman commits adultery.

Divorce had been made easy, too easy, in Jesus’ time. He wanted them to understand that it’s not enough to follow the strict outlines of the Law, but consider also the ramifications to the woman, the position this leaves her in, and do what kindness and justice dictate rather than selfishly applying what was essentially a loophole.

Mt 5:33 “Again, ^a you have heard that ¹ the ancients were told, ‘YOU ^{2,b} SHALL NOT ³ MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR ⁴ VOWS TO THE LORD.’

Mt 5:34 “But I say to you, ^a make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is ^b the throne of God,

Mt 5:35 or by the earth, for it is the ^a footstool of His feet, or ¹ by Jerusalem, for it is ^b THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING.

Mt 5:36 “Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

Mt 5:37 “But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is ¹ of ^a evil.

In a very similar vein, eschew legalities and embrace the spiritual underpinnings of what the Law required, or permitted. Don’t be strict about the procedures of making and keeping oaths, just be honest and forthright.

Mt 5:38 “You ^a have heard that it was said, ‘AN ^b EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.’

Mt 5:39 “But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but ^a whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

Mt 5:40 “If anyone wants to sue you and take your ¹ shirt, let him have your ² coat also.

Mt 5:41 “Whoever ¹ forces you to go one mile, go with him two.

Mt 5:42 “Give ^a to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

This was originally a commandment regarding the punishment for harming an unborn child that had been reinvented to allow for general retribution. It wasn’t the intent of the Law, and retribution is usually just a manifestation of vengeance. Getting even may be good for our ego, not so much for our soul.

Mt 5:43 “You ^a have heard that it was said, ‘YOU ^b SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR ^c and hate your enemy.’

Mt 5:44 “But I say to you, ^a love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Mt 5:45 so that you may ¹ be ^a sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous.

Mt 5:46 “For ^a if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

Mt 5:47 “If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

Loving the lovely is a good thing. Loving the unlovely is a God thing. He has good cause to make life difficult

The Sermon on the Mount

for the unrighteous. We can be grateful that He doesn't.

In summary Jesus provides us with the bottom line. What the Law was meant to teach it had failed to teach. Not because the Law was inadequate, but because where men meet law, there are always loopholes. So Jesus had no intention of replacing the Levitical Law with a different law that we would abuse. Rather He gave us the ultimate goal.

Mt 5:48 “Therefore ^{1,a} you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

The Hebrew word for sin is a term of archery. It means to miss the mark. So what does the archer do when he misses? He takes better aim, recalculates the windage, steadies his body, but no matter how many times he may miss, the next arrow is always aimed at the center of the bullseye. Perfection must be the goal.

Alms and Prayer

Mt 6:1 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men ^a to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

Mt 6:2 “So when you ¹ give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they ^a may be honored by men. ^b Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

Mt 6:3 “But when you ¹ give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

Mt 6:4 so that your ¹ giving will be in secret; and ^a your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.

Isn't this in direct conflict with “let your light shine”? As always, Jesus is rarely about the “what” and all about the “why”. In the first instance our purpose is to be that God is glorified. Here He is forbidding us to do these things in order “to be noticed”, it's all about our motivation.

Mt 6:5 “When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to ^a stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners ^{1,b} so that they may be seen by men. ^c Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

Mt 6:6 “But you, when you pray, ^a go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and ^b your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.

Mt 6:7 “And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their ^a many words.

Mt 6:8 “So do not be like them; for ^a your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

This is the same idea, if your goal is to be noticed then notice is the only reward you will get. If the goal is a closer relationship with God, that is the reward you will get.

So He gave us a model.

Mt 6:9 “Pray, ^a then, in this way:

The Sermon on the Mount

'Our Father who is in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.

Mt 6:10 'Your ^a kingdom come. ^b

Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Mt 6:11 'Give ^a us this day ¹ our daily bread.

Mt 6:12 'And ^a forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Mt 6:13 'And do not lead us into temptation, but ^a deliver us from ^{1,b} evil. ² [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]

If we omit the bracketed phrase and consider the original prayer that Jesus taught, it has seven parts. The first four are about honoring God, acknowledging His plan, and accepting His will. The last three are about us, our physical needs, our need for forgiveness and our need for help with our weaknesses. In Hebrew numerology four is the number of man, and this is our due to God. Three is the number of God; His gifts to us.

One of those gifts is forgiveness. There is a prerequisite.

Mt 6:14 "For ^a if you forgive ¹ others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

Mt 6:15 "But ^a if you do not forgive ¹ others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Fasting

This is everyone's favorite topic. Well, maybe not, fasting isn't something Christians practice very often any more. For centuries it was common to fast every Friday, that gave way to meatless Fridays, then fish Fridays, to all-you-can-eat Friday fish fries. Recent research shows some significant health benefits of fasting, and Jesus seems to be suggesting that it also has some spiritual benefits. Those are, as always, dependent on what our motivation is for fasting.

Mt 6:16 "Whenever ^a you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites *do*, for they ¹ neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. ^b Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

Mt 6:17 "But you, when you fast, ^a anoint your head and wash your face

Mt 6:18 so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your ^a Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.

Fasting seems not to be deemed to be a "good work" that others can observe and glorify God, those are reserved for the good things we do for others. Fasting is something we do only for ourselves, only for spiritual insight, growth and a time for prayer. These are a great benefit, but only to ourselves. It seems a bit odd that fasting is essentially a selfish act, but we do have a few of those. We guard ourselves, we train ourselves and we groom ourselves for dedication, for service and to prepare ourselves for eternity. Not such bad things to be indulge ourselves with.

Treasures

One of those selfish acts is gathering and storing treasures. These do no one else any good and in fact may not do us any good either if it's the wrong kind.

The Sermon on the Mount

Mt 6:19 “Do ^a not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

Mt 6:20 “But store up for yourselves ^a treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

Mt 6:21 for ^a where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Mt 6:22 “The ^a eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is ¹ clear, your whole body will be full of light.

Mt 6:23 “But if ^a your eye is ¹ bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

Mt 6:24 “No ^a one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and ^{1,b} wealth.

Jesus wants our priorities right. Life and the difficulties it brings can lead us to hoarding, miserliness. He isn't saying not to save, He does expect us to be good stewards of His blessings. He is saying not to let it become our obsession. So how do we know that we have a healthy balance? He doesn't leave us in the dark about that, first we examine our heart. Where is that? If it's obsessed with our bank account we have a problem. If we find that our heart is grateful, generous, empathetic then we can be comfortable. Second we take note of how we see our world. If we find ourselves drawn to the comfortable, luxurious, attractive then we need to rethink our priorities. If, on the other hand, we tend to see other's needs, suffering or want, then our life is filled with light.

Anxiety

There is a reason that Jesus brings this up immediately after He talks about money. That is one of things that can cause us great anxiety, especially if we believe, or even feel, that our well-being requires comfort or prosperity.

Mt 6:25 “For ^a this reason I say to you, ¹ do not be ^b worried about your ² life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

Mt 6:26 “Look ^a at the birds of the ¹ air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?

Mt 6:27 “And who of you by being ^a worried can ^b add a *single* ¹ hour to his ² life?

Mt 6:28 “And why are you ^a worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin,

Mt 6:29 yet I say to you that not even ^a Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.

Mt 6:30 “But if God so clothes the ^a grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *clothe* you? ^b You of little faith!

Mt 6:31 “Do not ^a worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’

Mt 6:32 “For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for ^a your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

Mt 6:33 “But ¹ seek first ² His kingdom and His righteousness, and ^a all these things will be ³ added to you.

The Sermon on the Mount

Mt 6:34 “So do not ^a worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will ¹ care for itself. ² Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Note that things that Jesus lists as areas of concern and the things that He omits. He mentions food and clothing but not shelter. For many of us a place to live without fear of eviction is high on our list of worries. He also seems to put more emphasis on the worrying itself than on what we worry about. Jesus is not promising us here riches, wealth, even prosperity. He is promising us that if we worry we are going to miss out on some valuable gains. He isn't saying don't plan, He's saying don't worry. We have all known some meticulous planners that are contented and at peace. We also have known some prosperous people that actively harm themselves with worry about things over which they have no control. Be at peace.

Not Judging

Jesus does not want us to be harsh in our judgment of others. That is not to say that He doesn't expect us to have good judgment or to be discerning. This passage is often abused by those who wish to sin and not be accountable, and we know that is not an option. The fact of sinfulness cannot be disputed, the intrinsic value of the sinner is not ours to determine. So how are we to understand this passage? Before you answer see the section below entitled “Judging”. First, I propose that we read this as advice for healthy relationships. Second, I advise careful self-examination about our attitudes toward others. Do we want to encourage them to repent, or do we just want them to know how morally superior we are?

Mt 7:1 “Do ^a not judge so that you will not be judged.

Mt 7:2 “For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and ^{1,a} by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

Mt 7:3 “Why do you ^a look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?

Mt 7:4 “Or ^a how ¹ can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye?

Mt 7:5 “You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Far too often we prefer to see the failures of others simply to obscure our own.

Discernment

Jesus immediately follows the prohibition about judging with the requirement to be discerning.

Mt 7:6 “Do ^a not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

So how do we balance these two things? How do we avoid judging and still be able to recognize the dogs and swine among us? The answer is almost always to first examine our self. Notice that this is not about how we are treated, it's about how others treat what is holy and sacred. Those we protect.

The Sermon on the Mount

Good Gifts

God does give us gifts. He gives us lots of gifts. In fact, what do we possess that isn't a gift? Be aware, be grateful and be confident in those gifts. After all we didn't earn any of the ones that we currently have.

Mt 7:7 "Ask, ^{1,a} and ^b it will be given to you; ² seek, and you will find; ³ knock, and it will be opened to you.

Mt 7:8 "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Mt 7:9 "Or what man is there among you ¹ who, when his son asks for a loaf, ² will give him a stone?

Mt 7:10 "Or ¹ if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?

Mt 7:11 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, ^a how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

Oh, and if you want to be like Him, give good gifts.

The Golden Rule

Mt 7:12 "In everything, ^a therefore, ¹ treat people the same way you want ² them to treat you, for ^b this is the Law and the Prophets.

Enough said.

The Narrow Way

I have long used this teaching to decry the lazy approach of some people to the exercise of spiritual thought and commitment. Reading it again this time, I am constrained to examine my own propensity to take the easy road, to pass through the wide gate. I find myself convicted that Jesus did not mean for me to read this for the benefit of other's spiritual walk.

Mt 7:13 "Enter ^a through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it.

Mt 7:14 "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Nothing that's worth doing is ever easy.

Judging

There are scenarios in which we must exercise sound judgment. Or perhaps we must be cognizant of God's judgment, because He has and does judge the actions of those that do harm to others, sometimes indirectly by doing harm to the cause of Christ. Whether it is by our own observations or being closely attuned to God's direction, we must be able to discern good fruit from bad.

The Sermon on the Mount

Mt 7:15 “Beware of the ^a false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ^b ravenous wolves.

Mt 7:16 “You will ^{1,a} know them by their fruits. ² Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they?

Mt 7:17 “So ^a every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.

Mt 7:18 “A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.

Mt 7:19 “Every ^a tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Mt 7:20 “So then, you will ¹ know them ^a by their fruits.

Mt 7:21 “Not ^a everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*.

Mt 7:22 “Many ^a will say to Me on ^b that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many ¹ miracles?’

Mt 7:23 “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; ^a DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’

We must train ourselves to recognize God’s truth from falsehood. And for our own part we must always remember that it’s not enough for us to know Him. We have to do whatever it takes to make sure that He knows us.

Firm Foundation

Jesus ends this sermon with a lesson that summarizes neatly how to examine ourselves and know that we are on the right path.

Mt 7:24 “Therefore ^a everyone who hears these words of Mine and ¹ acts on them, ² may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.

Mt 7:25 “And the rain fell, and the ¹ floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and *yet* it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.

Mt 7:26 “Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not ¹ act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.

Mt 7:27 “The rain fell, and the ¹ floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell — and great was its fall.”

Notice that the difference between being on the right track or not is action. We must not only know His teaching, we must act on it. And don’t miss the fact that being on the wrong track comes with a dire warning.