

The Sermon on the Mount (Part 3)...

Matthew 7

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you...” (verses 1 and 2). Many people like the first sentence, because they think Jesus commended a universal acceptance of any lifestyle or teaching. But later on (v 16) Jesus says you can recognise a person’s character by the kind of fruit that person bears, and some sort of assessment or ‘judgment’ is necessary for that. But what Jesus is speaking against is being judgmental – that is, judging motives and the inner person which only God can know. According to some rabbis in Jesus’ time, God had two measures which he used to judge people – one was a measure of justice and the other was a measure of mercy. Which measure do you want God to use with you? You should use that same measure with others... In this last section of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus then goes on to give more instructions on prayer, before concluding by presenting his listeners with a series of choices: two ways, two destinations, two kinds of tree, two building foundations...

Judgment and discernment (Matthew 7 v 1 to 6)

- What is Jesus’ point in the somewhat humorous story of the speck of sawdust and the plank of wood? How do we fall into this trap? And how do we help someone who has ‘gone off the rails’? See Galatians 6 v 1.
- Who are the ‘dogs’ and ‘pigs’ in Jesus’ metaphor? What do you think the pearls represent? How does this parable differ from the famous parable of the sower, where the ‘seed’ (which represents God’s Word) appears to be sown indiscriminately?

More on prayer (Matthew 7 v 7 to 12)

- If “your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Matthew 6 v 8), why does Jesus urge us to “ask... seek... knock...”? Why do you think God values persistence and passion in our praying?
- What does Jesus’ half-brother say about prayer? See James 4 v 2 and 5 v 16. What does Paul say about prayer in the context of spiritual warfare? See Ephesians 6 v 18.
- Verse 12 is ‘The Golden Rule’ – have you applied it today?

Choices (Matthew 7 v 13 to 29)

- Can Jesus be accused of being ‘narrow-minded’ (v 13)? In practical terms, how can we keep on ‘the straight and narrow’?
- Watch out for wolves in sheep’s clothing (v 15) – notice again the enemy’s primary tactic: deception. Where do we find ‘false prophets’ today? How do we recognise them? We should pay attention (a) to their manner of living; (b) to the content of their teaching; and (c) to the effects of their teaching...
- In verses 21 to 23, Jesus makes some staggering claims: He is the one before whom people must stand on the Day of Judgment; He is the one people rightly call ‘Lord’. Though listeners may not have realised it at the time, Jesus was claiming to be God. According to these verses, what is the only basis of ‘salvation’ and acceptance by Christ (given that clearly it is not just verbal confession, or even impressive spiritual accomplishments)?
- How would you describe the person who builds his house “on the rock” (v 24)? What about the person who builds his house “on sand” (v 26)? The two houses might look the same from the outside – but what’s the difference? What do you think the rain and winds represent? How can we be sure we are building upon a foundation of rock?
- Why were the crowds amazed at Jesus’ teaching (v 28)?

Prayer – Lord, thank you for such amazing teaching. Helps us to understand these lessons and put them into practice in our daily lives. Help us to put you first, and to love others as ourselves. Amen.