

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 9: Judging, Asking, and the Narrow Way -- Matthew 7:1-29

We have reached the end of the greatest sermon ever preached, and Jesus does not coast to a gentle finish. He sharpens His words to a point. Having reshaped our understanding of anger, lust, money, worry, and prayer, He now stands at the door of the whole sermon and asks the only question that finally matters: not whether you admired the teaching, but whether you will build your life on it. The hammer falls in the last paragraph, where two houses face the same storm and only one is left standing.

But before the storm, Jesus walks us past a series of warnings, each one designed to keep us from fooling ourselves. He warns about the judging eye that hunts for specks while ignoring its own plank. He warns that there is a wide, comfortable road that most people are happily traveling, and that it does not end where they assume. He warns that some teachers are wolves in wool, and that the only sure way to tell is to watch the fruit. And then He says the most frightening sentence in the Sermon on the Mount: that on the last day, many who called Him “Lord, Lord” will hear Him say, “I never knew you.”

It would be easy to read all of this as a long list of cautions, a finger wagging at our failures. But listen more closely and you hear a Savior who loves us too much to let us drift. He is not trying to crush us; He is trying to wake us. He keeps offering us a Father who gives good gifts to those who ask, a gate that really is open if we will go through it, and a foundation that will hold when everything else gives way. The warnings are the guardrails of grace.

So come and stand with the crowd as the sermon ends. Feel the question pressing on your own chest. Jesus is not asking whether your house looks impressive from the road. He is asking what it is built on, because the rain is coming for every house, the wise and the foolish alike. The difference will not be the weather. The difference will be the rock. And the rock is hearing these words of His and doing them.

Group Discussion: Jesus ends the Sermon on the Mount with two builders whose houses look identical until the storm hits (7:24-27). Why do you think Jesus chose the picture of a house and a foundation, rather than simply telling us to obey, and what does that image reveal about how a life actually stands or falls?

Personal Reflection: Jesus says it is easy to spot the speck in someone else’s eye while missing the plank in our own (7:3-5). Where in your life are you most prone to a sharp eye for others’ faults and a blind spot for your own, and what would it take to deal honestly with the plank first?

Read Matthew 7:1-29

Study Questions

1. Jesus says, "Judge not, that you be not judged" (7:1), and yet a few verses later He tells us not to give what is holy to dogs and to watch out for false prophets, which requires real discernment (7:6, 15). How do we hold together Jesus' warning against judging with His command to judge rightly, and what kind of judging is He actually forbidding?
2. Jesus pictures a man trying to remove a speck from his brother's eye while a plank juts out of his own (7:3-5). In what specific relationship right now are you more aware of the other person's fault than your own, and what would it look like this week to take the plank out first?
3. Jesus promises, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find" (7:7), and grounds it in the goodness of the Father (7:9-11). What is Jesus teaching here about the character of God and the place of persistent prayer in the life of His children?
4. Jesus invites us to keep asking, seeking, and knocking, yet many of us have grown quiet in prayer. Where have you stopped asking God for something because you assumed He would not answer, and what would it mean to bring that request back to Him?
5. Jesus describes a wide gate and an easy road that "leads to destruction," and a narrow gate and a hard road that "leads to life," and He says "those who find it are few" (7:13-14). What does this teach about the nature of salvation and the way of discipleship, and why does the popular road end somewhere other than where the crowd expects?
6. Jesus says the narrow road is hard and the crowd is on the wide one. Where in your daily life are you most tempted to follow the comfortable majority instead of the harder way of Christ, and what is one place you need to choose the narrow gate?

7. Jesus warns of false prophets who come “in sheep’s clothing” and tells us we will “recognize them by their fruits” (7:15–20). How does this teach us to evaluate teachers and teaching, and why does Jesus point us to fruit rather than to charisma, popularity, or impressive words?
8. Jesus says a healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit and a diseased tree cannot bear good fruit (7:17–18). When you look honestly at the fruit of your own life, your words, your relationships, your private habits, what is it telling you about the health of the tree, and where do you long for God to change it?
9. Jesus says, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father” (7:21), and warns that some who prophesied and cast out demons in His name will hear, “I never knew you” (7:22–23). What does this passage teach about the difference between saying we believe and actually obeying, and how does it expose the popular idea that we are saved by faith alone apart from doing the Father’s will?
10. Look back over the whole sermon, from the Beatitudes to the two builders. Name one specific area where you have been a hearer of these words but not yet a doer, and what is the next concrete step in building that part of your life on the rock of Christ this week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Luke 6:46–49, Luke’s account of the two builders and the call to do what Jesus says; James 1:22–25, being doers of the word and not hearers only who deceive themselves; Galatians 5:19–23, the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit as the test of a tree; Acts 2:37–38, the obedient response that builds a life on the Lord; 2 Timothy 3:16–17, Scripture equipping us for every good work as our sure foundation.