

## THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

### Lesson 23, chapter 7

We have now completed 2 of the 3 chapters that Matthew devoted to Yeshua's Sermon on the Mount. Every now and then it is probably profitable to remind you that Matthew did not write in chapters; ending one and beginning another. Rather this was a literary invention that would come more than a millennia later in the world of Church academics. The intent of adding chapters (and verses) was to make study of the Bible easier and sections of the Bible more convenient to universally identify and thus to communicate about them among ourselves more efficient. Nonetheless, such artificial boundaries that chapters establish must be taken lightly in Scripture study because they can interrupt a long flowing thought process, at times dividing it in half, even making the same long thought appear to be two separate ones occurring as separate instances when they aren't.

The concept of chapters didn't enter into writing until the 4th century; long after the biblical canon, Old and New Testaments, were established. And even then, it was only sparingly used of novels and some narratives. Thus we have to be careful when applying the same Western literary concept of a chapter that tries to find logical beginnings and endings to episodes in a story, to the Bible. Modern literature is always written around the structure of chapters. The Bible, however, was not constructed that way because the concept of chapters didn't even exist within Jewish literature at that time. So going by chapters can, when studying God's Word, at times mislead more than help. Such is the case as we study the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew; the words of chapters 5, 6, and 7 were one long continuous flow of divine thought without interruption. Thus as a mental exercise, as we read the opening words of chapter 7 we should read them as merely a continuation of the final words of chapter 6.

Before we read chapter 7, let's do a Reader's Digest summation of what we've found so far in the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon was aimed at the Jewish people that formed the bulk of all who were present in the hills above the Sea of Galilee. And since the population of the Jewish nation was no more monolithic than any other people, but rather consisted of groups that held to common beliefs but were also naturally segregated by occupation, education and wealth, Yeshua recognizes and acknowledges individual swaths of various Jewish groups when He offers what Christendom calls the Beatitudes (blessings) to open His speech.

Nearly immediately afterward He pauses to frame exactly what His speech is going to entail. It is going to be an instruction on the Torah. And because nearly all the people sitting before him were more educated in Synagogue Traditions than they were in actual biblical Torah, then He knew that there would be some who might push back on what He was going to say and perhaps accuse Him of teaching wrongly. Teaching wrongly meant that what He would say might not always match with what they had heard the Scribes and Pharisees teach in their local synagogue. Therefore He made it abundantly clear that despite what they might at times think He was saying, in fact nothing He would say would add to, subtract from, or change even the tiniest element or principle of the Torah or anything recorded in the entire Hebrew Bible (although it certainly would challenge some of the Traditions). He went so far as to say that anyone (obviously including Himself) who taught against the Law and the Prophets, or disobeyed those laws and commandments, would be considered least in the Kingdom of Heaven. Alternatively, anyone who properly taught and obeyed the Law and the Prophets would be considered greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Let's stop and think about that for a minute. Why did Christ invoke the idea of the Kingdom of Heaven, and even more where one would fit within the Kingdom societal structure based on obedience to the Torah? It is because upon John the Baptist beginning His ministry of making a road in the wilderness for the Lord, the Kingdom of Heaven made its first appearance on earth.

In the Hebrew Bible (***the Tanach***, the Old Testament) the words "the Kingdom of Heaven" are not found. There is one mention in 2nd Chronicles 13 about the kingdom of the Lord (literally the kingdom of Yehoveh), but it is a general term and cannot be compared to Christ's mention of the Kingdom of Heaven (or its synonym the Kingdom of God) as a real and actual entity unto itself. Yeshua speaking about the Kingdom of Heaven was a new revelation. This is why so many of His parables were about trying to explain to people (especially to His Disciples) what the Kingdom of Heaven was and how it operated and how it

pertained to them.

Believers, please pay close attention. The Kingdom of Heaven descended from Heaven and began its existence on earth during Yeshua's lifetime, having never existed on earth before. And as a result everything about the Law and the Prophets had to now be understood within this new reality of the Kingdom of Heaven having arrived. This meant that the simple literal sense of obedience to every Torah commandment, law and principle now incorporated an even higher spiritual sense and manifestation to it that included not only the here and now but the future time when the end of all things would arrive. Thus it is not that the higher spiritual sense that Yeshua regularly spoke about replaced the simpler literal sense of the Torah; it is that both were now in play. Thus Christ's strong instruction that just because He was about to introduce the Jewish people to that higher spiritual sense that went hand in glove with the recent arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, in no way meant that the people now had license to ignore or disobey the Law of Moses..... or that the Law itself had changed. What we read in later chapters of Matthew, and even later in the Epistles, tells us that some Jews (a relative few) got the message; and others didn't. We shouldn't be surprised; the Church is still struggling to properly understand Jesus's message in light of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

After that He went on to deal with a number of Torah commandments which, because of the arrival of the Kingdom on earth, followers of His ought to obey even more strictly, and in another higher and better way than their fathers before them did. That is, the essence of what Christ instructed is very nearly the opposite of the common doctrine taught within institutional Christianity that says that Christ came to make the Law much easier upon His followers (some going so far as to claim He abolished the Law and the principles and commands of the entire Hebrew Bible). So Yeshua gives some examples of what He's talking about. For instance: murdering your brother is a capital offense under the Law and so must not be done; everyone knows that and most people will never murder anyway. But now, upon the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven, even being angry with one's brother is considered as a very severe offense akin to murder. This is because murder happens when anger occurs first. So I ask you: which is easier? To avoid murder, or to avoid anger? That's a rhetorical question because we all know that not being angry is much more difficult. Next Christ speaks about adultery and says that the Law commands that a married man or woman is not to have sexual intimacy outside the bonds of their marriage. Yet He says that now, upon the arrival of the Kingdom, a man even looking in lust upon a woman is just

as serious as the actual act of adultery. Men: which is easier? To avoid adultery, or to not even look at another woman lustfully? Other examples are given, but you get the idea.

He sums up this portion of His teaching by saying that the point of it all is:

<sup>CJB</sup> **Matthew 5:48** *Therefore, be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*

Perfection, says Yeshua, while of course involving our behavior (following the do's and don'ts of the Law), is more reflected by our deepest inner thoughts. Thus perfection..... here meaning our moral perfection.... is the goal for Believers. If we don't get angry with our brother (a moral failure says Christ) we surely wouldn't murder him. If married men don't look lustfully at other women (another moral failure) then we won't be tempted to commit adultery.

As Yeshua continues into what Bibles label as chapter 6, He expands the concept of moral perfection by addressing two regular activities of Jews: giving alms to the poor and prayer. Clearly neither of these things, on the surface, involve disobedience to the Law. That is, Jesus doesn't admonish the people that don't sufficiently give alms or don't pray enough; rather giving charitably and praying was a given among Jewish society. Instead the issue is about proper intent. That is, the inner moral condition and motive of the worshipper was the point. And if giving and prayer are accomplished with the proper moral intent, then drawing attention to one's self in the doing is the last thing we would ever think to do. So if people make a public show of giving or praying, then it is evidence that they are not giving and not praying with proper inner moral conviction.

Once again in light of the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, Christ says here is how we ought to pray and He proceeds with what the Church calls The Lord's Prayer. In it Christ shows us the elements that prayer should contain but also the humility and moral attitude with which prayer ought to be made. Every prayer should be addressed to The Father, should glorify The Father, and we should acknowledge that because He is the Creator and because His will is always done in Heaven, then His will also needs to be carried out on earth (especially because the Kingdom of Heaven has now extended its range to include earth.... or better, earthlings..... people). Yeshua goes on to show us that we should ask The Father to provide for our physical and spiritual needs, and to

be merciful and forgiving to us. At the same time our prayers should demonstrate that we acknowledge our obligation to be merciful and forgiving to our fellow humans, and that we have no right to expect such compassion from The Father if we insist on holding back our compassion toward others.

After showing us how to pray Yeshua gives us some other do's and don'ts about common activities within Jewish society such as fasting because fasting was often associated with prayer. His next subject has been central to humankind since the Garden of Eden: accumulating wealth. Or in modern thought: making money. The subject is large and many faceted, so Yeshua addresses it from a number of angles. The first angle is how we are to view the notion of wealth, itself. We are to see it for what it is: temporary and subject to destruction. Building further on the matter of money and wealth Yeshua offers instruction about being generous with our wealth, and uses the common colloquial terms of that day to categorize the level of, or lack of, such generosity: the good eye and the evil eye. Then He goes on to explain about the eye being the lamp of the body, which essentially means that a good eye is outwardly indicative of a generous spirit, and an evil eye is outwardly indicative of a stingy spirit.

After that Yeshua makes a principle out of what He has said thus far. It is that no man can have two masters; and the choice is between money and God. And despite what many humans think, you can't have it both ways. Sometimes we overlook the simple fact that having 2 masters is an oxymoron and that is how the Jews would have understood it. It would be like claiming that you had two 1st dates. One or the other was the first and only one can claim that title, no matter how we might try to spin it. Thus in our 4 dimensional Universe it is only possible for a man to have 1 master; all other influences will be subservient to that master even if we don't realize it.

Since the obvious answer is built into the question of the 2 masters (God must be that master), then the next issue is: so what do I do about the material things that we all need..... like food, shelter, and clothing? I want to comment here that in no way was Yeshua suggesting that material possessions and money are wrong or evil. Rather it is that one must not focus our life on, and be controlled by, money and wealth accumulation. Yeshua uses nature to point out that birds and plants are beautiful and well fed without planting and sowing, and well clothed without making their own garments. Rather God provides it all for them. Therefore while He values all of His Creation, He values humans more than all other life forms. So Christ's argument is that if The Father provides so well for birds and plants He

will certainly provide even more for human beings.

In the next to the last verse of chapter 6 Yeshua draws us back to the monumental importance of the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, and what this is to mean to us. He says that first and above all else, we are to seek this Kingdom and we also to seek God's righteousness. God's righteousness is His will to save. And to be saved is the requirement for membership to the Kingdom. So seeking God's Kingdom and His righteousness are two sides of the same coin. Then, says Jesus, after seeking these two things seek for all the physical and material needs you have. So it is not a matter of having the one or the other; it is a matter of priority and emphasis by the worshipper.

So the bottom line to Yeshua's instruction to put God first in everything is that if we do so, then there is no need to worry about anything, and especially not to worry about the future. By definition, worry is the opposite of faith. Therefore faith solves the universal human problem of worry.

Let's read Matthew chapter 7.

### **READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 7 all**

Verse 1 takes us back to how we are to treat our fellow human beings (which is more often than not the meaning of "neighbor"). By saying "do not judge" some believe that Christ has announced a 100% injunction against reasonable conclusions drawn from personal observations and experiences. As Davies and Allison point out, if that were the case we wouldn't even be able to choose between true and false religions. The judging being spoken of is not referring to a judicial setting; rather it is about how we measure a person and their actions in rather typical day to day activities. Let me pause here to make a point that I believe is much needed in Christianity. Just as judging another person is not being rigidly prohibited, but rather it must be done within the bounds of mercy and compassion, the issue is that nearly every matter of human interest is not as black and white as we'd like to make it.

It is ironic that especially gentile Believers at once rebel against the idea of following a rules-based religion (which is what they accuse Jews of doing), but at the same time want their Pastors and priests to give them a simple rule to follow regarding many circumstances they might encounter so that they can quickly solve a conundrum. Thus many Christians view the permissions and prohibitions

of the Law of Moses as too difficult and inflexible, and yet at the same time want black and white, yes and no answers to complex matters. Let me illustrate by giving you an example of two extremes. I've heard the Catholic Church defend their priests from punishment for child molestation on the basis of Jesus having told us we're not to judge. I also know of women who were judged as sinful by the church elders because they heard that she had fled her husband in fear; and this without any personal knowledge of the facts. It's only that for them divorce is prohibited for any reason and so a woman who separates from her husband under any circumstances is automatically judged to be wrong and committing a sin.

When we live our lives according to favorite verses or even parts of verses lifted out of context, or without considering all that the Bible has to say on a subject, then our viewpoints become skewed and polarized. The issue about judging that begins chapter 7 is not that we are to check our brains at the door of our homes, workplaces, or church, but rather we are not to invoke what Martin Luther called "self-centered wisdom". We are not to try to make ourselves look better, or more wise, or especially more pious by disparaging another. Thus we are to be very careful and considered in our conclusions about a person, and always operating within the moral insights that God's Word provides for us. The key is to thoroughly know God's Word such that we don't fall back on what amounts to sayings and partial truths.

Let me be clear on what this instruction not to judge means. It means not to condemn or deplore our fellow man, and this because we are not his judicial judge. Rather God is our judicial judge in Heaven. And thus, says the second part of the verse, the reason we don't want to judge others (denounce others) is so that God won't judge us IN THE JUDICIAL SENSE. In other words, Christians today regularly talk about the final judgment, meaning a verdict is going to be rendered upon us: either guilty or innocent. That is the meaning of the second part of verse, but that is not the meaning of the first half of the verse. This interpretation is borne out by the words of verse 2.

**CJB Matthew 7:2 *For the way you judge others is how you will be judged- the measure with which you measure out will be used to measure to you.***

Let me give you an illustration that might help with this. An official judicial trial judge (the kind we're all familiar with), sitting on the bench in a courtroom is not going to have God judge him at the Great Judgment in the same way he applied

our civil and criminal laws to violators. So if a judge, following the law in good faith in a court setting, determines that the accused is legitimately guilty of robbery and sentences that person to spend a year in jail, that judge is not going to later be subjected to that same treatment by God. Rather it is that in a non-judicial setting, by the criticisms and belief of an ordinary person, that our personal wisdom can best decide what was in another person's heart, what their inner motives for their actions were, and so we make a determination of how God views them, then such an attitude means that we have made ourselves subject to God judging us in the ultimate divine judicial setting; and then we will bear the eternal consequences of God's verdict. So judging others from the sense of damning them and deploring them is a sin of high order, and it is bad for our eternal health, says Christ. And the only reason I can think of that He would bring up the subject is because it is something that He witnessed happening all too often among the Jewish community.

I don't want to waste an opportunity to point something else out that seems to be pushed to the background within Christendom. Verse 2, as with things Christ has said earlier in His sermon, again invokes a quid pro quo. What you do to others will have a direct result in what God does with you. Yes, God of course is loving, merciful and compassionate. Yet, that doesn't mean that The Father is like a kindly grandfather that looks the other way when his children and grandchildren sin. Rather, there are things we can think and do that will be proportionately responded to by The Lord. Measure for measure is often the biblical term used to express that. This is an old idea in the Bible; but Christ again demonstrates that no Torah principle or law has been abrogated by Him.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Obadiah 1:15** *For the Day of ADONAI is near for all nations; as you did, it will be done to you; your dealings will come back on your own head.*

Matthew 7:3 continues with the concept of judging others (condemning and deploring others) when Christ speaks of censuring someone who has a splinter in their eye, but you have a log in your own. On the surface anyone can understand this. We have an old folk saying that well captures the meaning: it's the pot calling the kettle black. The idea is that the pot has been far more blackened by the soot of a fire (rendering it blemished) than the smaller kettle (originally meaning a tea pot) could ever be. And yet the pot points out the same flaw it has, even in larger proportion, than the lesser flaw on the kettle.

Thus Yeshua takes a subject that might be difficult to envision because it can



exist too much within the realm of theory, and He makes it easy to visualize by using extremes: an entire log versus a tiny splinter. What He is talking about is an example of extreme hypocrisy. And the irony is that the self-righteous one with the enormous flaw is condemning the other person for their rather tiny flaw. It is not that the one is flawed and the other isn't. Both are flawed, because both are human. And in another sense, if you are condemning the same, but much less prevalent, flaw of another are you not in essence condemning yourself?

Let me take this to another level. What underlies this statement is the issue not only of hypocrisy in the **P'shat** sense, but of inner moral defect in the **Remez** sense. Hypocrisy is rather easily seen and detected because it manifests in our words and our actions. But inner moral defect can be hidden away, such that only God can see it. Further, just as anger presages murder, so does inner moral defect presage hypocrisy. The result of someone who has a log in their own eye trying to lead someone who merely has a speck in their eye, is a classic example of the blind leading the blind. That is what is so wonderful about hearing and drinking in the words of Yeshua. We are hearing from a God-man who has no log or even splinter in His eye. He is without sin, bears no wrong motives, no inner moral defects, and no hypocrisy. It is the opposite of the blind leading the blind. It is the one who sees leading those of us with so little sight.

I will make a confession for myself as a Pastor and Bible teacher that I suspect many of my calling may well share. We barely have more sight than those that we attempt to lead. We are not Jesus. We are closer to the blind leading the blind. It is just that God, in His mercy, has opened our eyes the slightest bit more with the purpose of our helping and being a shepherd to those whom He loves. I am really not much more than Balaam in the Old Testament, who was full of flaws yet God, for His own divine purposes, opened Balaam's eyes enough to show Him something important and wonderful.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Numbers 24:1-5** <sup>1</sup> *When Bil'am saw that it pleased ADONAI to bless Isra'el, he didn't go, as at the other times, to make use of divination, but looked out toward the desert.* <sup>2</sup> *Bil'am raised his eyes and saw Isra'el encamped tribe by tribe. Then the Spirit of God came upon him,* <sup>3</sup> *and he made his pronouncement: "This is the speech of Bil'am, son of B'or; the speech of the man whose eyes have been opened;* <sup>4</sup> *the speech of him who hears God's words; who sees what Shaddai sees, who has fallen, yet has open eyes:* <sup>5</sup> *"How lovely are your tents, Ya'akov; your encampments, Isra'el!*

**"The speech of him who hears God's words"**. That is the key to this passage. It is God's words, not the thoughts and oratory of Bible teachers or Pastors or even prophets, which are wonderful. It is God's words that have the power to remove the log and open our eyes and relieve us of our blindness. This is why we must take Christ's words to heart and never doubt them. My only goal.... the goal and purpose for Seed of Abraham Torah Class.... is to present you with God's words in such a way that they will also open your eyes, at least as much as they opened mine. Yet the words of **Numbers 24:5** tells us something critical for the Church. The Gentile Balaam says: **"How lovely are your tents, Jacob; your encampments, Israel!"**. Unless and until Gentile Believers acknowledge the loveliness of Israel before God, and their important place in redemption history from the past, in the present, and into the future, God's words will fall flat upon us. Those wonderful words will not be properly understood or applied, they are taken out of their ultimate context, and our sight will remain greatly blurred as was Balaam's **until** He sincerely sought and believed God's words.

Verse 6 can sound rather harsh to us, and there is an inference at the beginning of the verse that can be misunderstood. "Don't throw what is holy to dogs" is what I'm speaking about. In our time dogs are beloved pets, even considered by many to be family members. That was in no way the case in the 1st century, especially among Jews. Dogs were wild animals; they were unclean scavengers that roamed the streets of cities, usually in packs. They were detested and avoided because they were considered unclean, even dangerous. Thus that is how we must understand the word dogs as used here. While it is true that in a few passages in the Bible the term "dog" is used as an expression applied to homosexuals, usually as male prostitutes (the term homosexual didn't exist then, and in fact was only coined in the 19th century), that is not the case in verse 6. Christ is once again using nature, so to speak, to make His point. First it is dogs, and then it is pigs.

Let's try to put on our 1st century Jewish mindset to understand how the crowd would have understood Christ's words. What did people throw to dogs? Their garbage. Leftover or spoiled food. Dogs were the cities' sanitation workers of the time. So what is food that is holy? Only the food that has been taken to the Temple, much of it sacrificed, and then given to the Priests as their portion to eat. Therefore it would be terribly inappropriate to give the Priestly food to things (dogs) that are unclean.

Then next part of the verse, "don't throw your pearls to pigs" is but another angle

on the same subject. Pigs were unclean animals when used as food. Contrary to what some think, within the Hebrew religion of Yeshua's day touching a live pig did not mean that you contracted uncleanness from it. Rather it was that a pig was not permissible for food. The word "unclean" came to be used as a very broad and general term whether for the inherently unclean, whereby coming into contact with it indeed transmitted ritual impurity to the one who did the touching (such as touching a dead body), as well as for animals that you couldn't consume as food but touching them as live creatures had no effect at all (pigs, shellfish, and shrimp for example). So dogs were deemed unclean by Tradition, while pigs were pronounced as not permitted as food. Thus in Christ's story both dogs and pigs are unclean to the Jewish people, but each for a different reason.

Pearls were the most valuable of precious objects. They were more valuable than gold. Thus the idea is that that of highest value ought not be presented to that which is not worthy. I can do no better than to quote from the ICC Commentary on this matter:

***"In Matthew 7:6 this rule, by virtue of its new context, becomes a comprehensive statement about the necessity to keep distinct the realms of the clean and the unclean".***

The new context is that the Kingdom of Heaven has arrived on earth. But it is a new context that surrounds an old rule. We find the essence of this rule in the Book of Exodus.

***CJB Exodus 29:32-34 <sup>32</sup> Aharon and his sons will eat the ram's meat and the bread in the basket at the entrance to the tent of meeting. <sup>33</sup> They are to eat the things with which atonement was made for them, to inaugurate and consecrate them; no one else may eat this food, because it is holy. <sup>34</sup> If any of the meat for the consecration or any of the bread remains until morning, burn up what remains; it is not to be eaten, because it is holy.***

This passage in the Torah provides the basis for Christ's statement about not throwing holy food to dogs (unclean creatures). That is, not even spoiled or unused holy food was to be eaten by dogs or anyone or anything for that matter. Why? Look at Exodus 29 verse 34. After the Priests have eaten their portion, the remainder is NOT to be merely thrown out; it is to be burned up thus destroying it so that no other creature.... not even scavengers who were created by God for the purpose of ridding the earth of what is unclean... can have it.

Further: within the new context (the Kingdom of Heaven), the pearl (the most precious object) was used metaphorically as the Kingdom itself. Thus the Kingdom is not for the unclean. I think to put this in the form of a rule or principle it is this: while we are commissioned to take the Good News of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world, we are not to waste our time with the hard hearted and those who outright reject the message.

I'll leave you for today with the words of Messiah Yeshua that Matthew records in chapter 10 regarding this exact issue.

**CJB Matthew 10:5-15** <sup>5</sup> *These twelve Yeshua sent out with the following instructions: "Don't go into the territory of the Goyim, and don't enter any town in Shomron, <sup>6</sup> but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Isra'el. <sup>7</sup> As you go, proclaim, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is near,' <sup>8</sup> heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those afflicted with tzara'at, expel demons. You have received without paying, so give without asking payment. <sup>9</sup> Don't take money in your belts, no gold, no silver, no copper; <sup>10</sup> and for the trip don't take a pack, an extra shirt, shoes or a walking stick- a worker should be given what he needs. <sup>11</sup> "When you come to a town or village, look for someone trustworthy and stay with him until you leave. <sup>12</sup> When you enter someone's household, say, 'Shalom aleikhem!' <sup>13</sup> If the home deserves it, let your shalom rest on it; if not, let your shalom return to you. <sup>14</sup> But if the people of a house or town will not welcome you or listen to you, leave it and shake its dust from your feet! <sup>15</sup> Yes, I tell you, it will be more tolerable on the Day of Judgment for the people of S'dom and 'Amora than for that town!*