

## THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

### Lesson 24, Chapter 7 Continued

As we continue in Matthew chapter 7, we will review what we covered in the prior lesson. Let's begin by opening our Bibles and reading the opening verses.

#### RE-READ MATTHEW 7:1 - 6

Around a century ago, Thomas Walter Manson, a biblical scholar who lived and wrote in England said this about the 1st verse of Matthew chapter 7:

***"The whole business of judging persons is in God's hands, for He alone knows the secrets of men's hearts. This does not mean that we are not to use all the moral insight we possess in order to discover what is right and wrong; but that we are to confine ourselves to that field, and refrain from passing judgment on persons. For our judgment is itself a factor in shaping their lives, and a harsh judgment may help a fellow creature on the road to perdition".***

I like what Manson has to say because he looks upon the other side of the coin of what is written in verse 2. That is, in the 2nd verse Christ goes on to explain the reasons why it is beneficial for a worshipper of God to refrain from judging another person. It is that by whatever measure we judge others, God will judge us; so it is better for us that we don't judge others at all. So what Manson addresses is the harmful effect that our judging of another may have on them. Perhaps no greater judgment can come upon a person than to be shamed; and for the most part judgment is shaming. In our day, in the Western world, shaming is mostly an emotional matter that leads to embarrassment and humiliation. Lately it has taken on a political element to it. But that emotional matter can very

well, as Manson says, shape our lives. For instance, when a young person is over and over again reprimanded by being shamed and told they are stupid or worthless, such will eventually become the loom from which the fabric of their life will be woven. But in Christ's day, and still to this day in many parts of the world, such a shaming judgment could immediately alter a person's precious social status; thus a public judgment was very serious and immediate in effect, and it usually demanded a remedy of revenge. Thus for a modern Western Christian the idea of not judging others is rather abstract and can be difficult to conceptualize; although less abstract in the East. Therefore we can get all kinds of strange ideas about what judging and not judging means or looks like in actual practice.

Verse 2 makes a consequence of our wrongful judging of another into an issue of proportional justice. Yet, let's not make the mistake of thinking that how we judge and how God judges are the same things or accomplished on the same plane. Our judgment means that we look with disdain at how someone might appear to us, perhaps in their dress; or we might determine that a person's worthiness according to their race, or nationality, or tribal loyalty is inferior to our own; or maybe we do so from nothing more than what someone says or from a custom they follow that we find primitive or ignorant. And thus we ridicule them, even condemn or deplore them, in an effort to diminish them and inflict shame. The implication Jesus makes is that we don't know that person's intent, motive, and true character, and often not their circumstances. But even more important, we have no idea how God's sees them. Clearly, this judging Yeshua speaks against has nothing to do with criminal activity. Christ is not saying that we shouldn't make a determination as to a person's guilt or innocence based on factual evidence of wrongdoing that includes being eyewitness to a crime.

Ironically, for us to judge and shame another in the typical non-criminal sense results in God judging us in a criminal setting. That is, our judging by deploring our fellow man becomes our sin, our crime, in God's eyes and so God will put us on trial accordingly. When does this trial occur? Most Bible scholars say that the wording in Matthew means it will happen in the future, at the End of Days, when God's judges everyone. No doubt this is true. And yet, His judgment upon us may also have temporal consequences during our lives.

The matter of judging another person is so important to Yeshua that He continues and expands on that basic principle in verses 3 through 5. Here appears the famous metaphorical expression about a log in one's eye compared

to the splinter in the eye of the person that is being judged. The bottom line to this is that the outward behavior exposes that person's inner condition; it reveals their hypocrisy. That is, the person who judges and shames another is nearly universally a hypocrite according to Jesus. They are super sensitive to what they see as wrong in another, because that same wrong exists probably in even greater measure within the accuser's own heart and mind. Thus, the problem and the solution lies not with the accused, but rather with the accuser. The accuser, the one who is judging, is told to remove the log from their own eye (that is, remove the great moral defect) and then they will see clearly enough to more legitimately notice a splinter in another's eye (that is, a minor moral defect). But of course it goes without saying that once we truly realize the enormity of the log in our own eye, and repent of it to God, and hopefully remove it, then being on the look-out for splinters in the eyes of others comes to a halt. Listen to what Paul had to say about this.

***CJB Romans 2:1-6 <sup>1</sup> Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, passing judgment; for when you judge someone else, you are passing judgment against yourself; since you who are judging do the same things he does. <sup>2</sup> We know that God's judgment lands impartially on those who do such things; <sup>3</sup> do you think that you, a mere man passing judgment on others who do such things, yet doing them yourself, will escape the judgment of God? <sup>4</sup> Or perhaps you despise the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience; because you don't realize that God's kindness is intended to lead you to turn from your sins. <sup>5</sup> But by your stubbornness, by your unrepentant heart, you are storing up anger for yourself on the Day of Anger, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed; <sup>6</sup> for he will pay back each one according to his deeds.***

What I'd like for you to take from this is the idea that the act of judging as spoken about in Matthew needs to be understood primarily within the context of shaming. And, that God will pay back both in our present lives, but especially in our eternal future, for doing such a thing that He regards as having no place in the life of His worshippers.

In verse 6 is yet another famous saying of Jesus about not giving to dogs what is holy, and not throwing pearls to pigs. Obviously this is another metaphorical statement but what is it illustrating? It is about the necessity of keeping the ritually clean apart from the ritually unclean. The holy separated away from the profane. To understand it we must see that it is within the context of the arrival of the

Kingdom of Heaven. Listen to this statement in the Book of Revelation that I think helps to clarify what Yeshua is attempting to impart to His listeners. Regarding the new city of Jerusalem, the capital of the Kingdom of Heaven, we read:

**<sup>CJB</sup> Revelation 21:27 <sup>27</sup> *Nothing impure may enter it, nor anyone who does shameful things or lies; the only ones who may enter are those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.***

We are instructed to stay separated from the unclean and the profane, because things and people who are characterized by uncleanness and the lack of holiness have no place in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Let's move on to verse 7.

### **RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 7:7 - 11**

I see these verses as Christ encouraging His listeners after giving them several hard lessons and the severe consequences of disobedience. This ought to be a revelation that leads to a reformation of modern Evangelical Christianity, which tends to paint Jesus as offering His followers a much easier route to righteousness over and against a harsh and rigid rules based Law of Moses. Some denominational doctrines go so far as to make obedience an enemy of grace. And yet we find Yeshua not making new or replacement rules, but rather reminding His audience of the old rules, insisting that the people follow them, and then taking those rules a step further to include not just proper outward behavior but a more pure inward intent and motivation. It is my estimation that not judging and shaming others is a most difficult rule for a human being to accomplish. The ICC commentary on Matthew says this:

***"Because human beings unhappily possess an inbred proclivity to mix ignorance of themselves with arrogance towards others, the call to recognize one's own faults is a commonplace of moral and religious traditions, including the Bible".***

The reality is that Christ, in His Sermon the Mount, has thus far set forth a high ideal of the Law of Moses (and the entire Hebrew Bible) that seems as though He has, under His own authority, moved the goal posts of righteousness. No doubt many in the crowd thought that what He was demanding was laughingly

impossible to achieve. So now in verses 7 through 11, Christ is going to tell them how to apprehend the seemingly impossible. The key, He says, involves action and not passivity.

Ask, seek, and knock are the themes of verses 8 and 9. These are verbs; action words. We must expend actual physical and mental energy to move forward towards the goal of righteousness. It is the opposite of a well worn story that is one of my favorites because it so well illustrates an ill conceived tendency of too many Christians.

A man was in his house when he heard that a flood was coming. He prayed and prayed and believed that because he was a Christian that God would miraculously save him. Almost as soon as he said "amen" an emergency vehicle appeared on the flooded road in front of his house and bid him to come to the truck and to safety. He said "no, God is going to rescue me". The flood waters rose and he had to go upstairs to the second story of his house to stay dry. He prayed again for God to rescue him. Suddenly a boat appeared and bid him to climb aboard to safety. He declined and said, "no, God is going to rescue me". The flood waters continued to rise until he was forced to seek refuge on the roof of his house. He prayed again, even more fervently, and soon a helicopter hovered over him, let down a rope and harness, and bid him to put it on so he could be pulled to safety. He said, "no, God is going to rescue me". A few minutes later the rising flood waters swept him away to his death. Upon arriving in Heaven he confronted God and said "I have faith. Why didn't you rescue me?" God said; "I tried: I sent you a truck, a boat, and a helicopter and you refused them all".

Ask. Seek. Knock. Christ has given us the means of rescue. Will we take advantage of it? We are not told to pray to God for our needs and then sit passively and wait for Him to supernaturally deliver them in a nice neat package that we have envisioned. On the other hand, it is not that if we work at it hard enough, we will cause what we want from God to come about. Yeshua says that if we ask, it will be given; if we seek, we will find; and if we knock, the door will be opened. He is not giving a terribly deep riddle or a difficult principle to the people. The meaning is: you have to do something to be a member of God's Kingdom. So one way to help grasp the point is to see it in the negative instead of the positive sense. If you want something and don't ask for it, then of course the person who has what you want has no idea about it, and so you won't receive it. If you don't begin to search for something you want (you won't actively seek it)

then of course you'll never find it. It is like the old sports expression that you'll never hit a home run unless you get the bat off your shoulder and swing at the ball. And if you want to go in to a place that has a door between you and your destination, then naturally you must knock on the door to let the owner know you are there, otherwise you'll remain standing on the outside looking in. That is: these principles aren't so much theologically driven as they are common sense. So coming to God and becoming a member of His Kingdom is a dual venture; both God and the worshipper must do their parts. And because God will never fail at His part, all the onus lies upon us. We **MUST** be active by asking, seeking, and knocking.

So we have another case in the Jewish Matthew's presentation of the Jewish Jesus's words that reveal a truth on two levels. On the **P'shat** level it is simply common sense that to gain access to the Kingdom we must ask, seek, and knock as we would for most anything else we wanted. But on the **Remez** level it is deeper spiritual truth that says we are not to be discouraged by the target of moral perfection that Yeshua says we must pursue. Rather, even as is common among all things in life, if we ask, God will give. If we seek, God will show us the way. If we knock, the door to the Kingdom of Heaven will be opened to us. What an optimistic expression not only of a great eternal joy that indeed can be ours, but also of the loving character of God! And to support this truth Yeshua gives us another illustration.

In verse 9 He asks the great crowd a rhetorical question; if a son asked his father for bread, would the father give him a stone instead? Next in verse 10 another rhetorical question is asked; if that same son asked for a fish, would his father give him a snake? I say rhetorical because there is only one answer to both of these questions..... an emphatic 'of course not!' A father would never respond to his son in such a way. Please notice the son/father relationship. While Yeshua is speaking in terms of the natural world and His illustration thus invokes a human father and his human son, at the same time it includes the Kingdom relationship between God the Father and His Son, Yeshua. Yeshua, as the Father's agent, would not come to Him with a request and then His father would give him something wholly inappropriate or even dangerous.

So, says Yeshua in verse 11, since there is virtually no possibility that an earthly father who, in relation to God and because of his fallen state is full of evil, would ever do something so contemptuous as to give his own son a stone in place of bread or a snake in place of a fish, how much more a totally loving and just God

is willing to keep on responding to His worshippers requests with good things. Is Messiah revealing a new side to God heretofore unknown to the Jewish people? The Prophet Isaiah used a similar illustration.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Isaiah 49:15** <sup>15</sup> *Can a woman forget her child at the breast, not show pity on the child from her womb? Even if these were to forget, I (God) would not forget you.*

What reassurance is being offered! Love God, worship Him, seek the Kingdom with all your heart and you will not be denied entry. Believers are afforded privileges and benefits that no others on the face of the planet are. Next we move to verse 12 and what has come to be known as The Golden Rule.

### **RE-READ MATTHEW 7:12 - 20**

This verse essentially forms the molten core of the Sermon on the Mount. It is a generalization to sum up not just this sermon but the Torah as well. I want to emphasize this point: the Golden Rule is a generalization and not a simple bumper sticker statement that so succinctly encompasses the entire Torah that to study it becomes a rather redundant effort.

Notice how Yeshua says that the Golden Rule is a summation of the Law (or Torah) and the Prophets. This takes us back to chapter 5 verses 17 - 19 where He uses the same expression "the Law and the Prophets". Recall at that time we learned this term meant the **Tanakh**, the entire Hebrew Bible, and not only The Law of Moses or even just the Torah. So I'll say this differently. If you were a Jew hearing Yeshua's words, you would properly take His statement to mean: "this is a summation of the Bible".

Doing unto others as you would have them do unto you is a way of bringing the rather abstract "love your neighbor as yourself" law of Leviticus 19:18 into a focused and doable reality. I might not be sure how to love my neighbor as I love my self; but when dealing with my fellow man I can more easily think of whether what I'm about to do in my dealings with that person is something I'd want for myself if the roles were reversed. Who doesn't want to be dealt with in compassion, mercy, kindness, generosity, justice, fairness and love? So the exact situation and even case examples are not needed; our actions that ought to spring from the Golden Rule are self-evident. In fact, to me this is an exhortation by Yeshua to a people who already practiced such a principle in theory if not

quite as well in practice. It is certainly not a new or novel notion invented by Christ. In fact it could well lend itself to common wisdom in almost all ages and cultural settings. Paul says essentially the same but in his own unique way.

**CJB Romans. 13:8-10 <sup>8</sup> *Don't owe anyone anything- except to love one another; for whoever loves his fellow human being has fulfilled Torah.* <sup>9</sup> *For the commandments, "Don't commit adultery," "Don't murder," "Don't steal," "Don't covet," and any others are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself."* <sup>10</sup> *Love does not do harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fullness of Torah.***

No doubt Jesus would have fully agreed with Paul's version of "Love your neighbor as yourself" and what it looks like in action. As an interesting aside: notice how Yeshua spoke of the Golden Rule principle as a summation of the Law and the Prophets. Paul summed it up by quoting from among the 10 Commandments that concern human to human relationships as contained in the Law the Moses. Yeshua was speaking in the Holy Land to a majority crowd of Holy Land Jews. Paul was speaking in a foreign land to a mixed group of Diaspora Jews and gentiles who weren't so familiar with the Torah, the Law and the Prophets. So the differences in words, illustrations used, and nuances between what we find Christ saying in the Gospels versus what Paul says in his Epistles is not a difference in theology, but rather reflects a difference in audience. Let's move on to verse 13.

We now enter a part of Jesus's speech that we might broadly describe as a selection of wisdom sayings. Verses 13 and 14 that speak of the narrow and the broad gates are, again, nothing new within the Hebrew religion but it is a bit different way of saying a principle that we can trace at least as far back as the exodus from Egypt. Deuteronomy 11:26 - 28 says this:

**CJB Deuteronomy 11:26-28 <sup>26</sup> *"See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse-* <sup>27</sup> *the blessing, if you listen to the mitzvot of ADONAI your God that I am giving you today;* <sup>28</sup> *and the curse, if you don't listen to the mitzvot of ADONAI your God, but turn aside from the way I am ordering you today and follow other gods that you have not known.***

This states the God-principle of the Two Ways that I think it would not be an exaggeration to say that it is a governing dynamic of the Universe. I want to give you a couple of other Scripture examples to make the point.



**CJB Deuteronomy 30:15 <sup>15</sup> "Look! I am presenting you today with, on the one hand, life and good; and on the other, death and evil-**

**CJB Jeremiah 21:8 <sup>8</sup> "And here is what you are to tell this people: 'ADONAI says: "Look! I am presenting you with the way of life and the way of death.**

The Apocryphal book of 2nd Enoch in chapter 30 (written around 300 years before Christ) speaks of the two ways, lightness and darkness, good and bad. I could give you more examples from well before the birth of Jesus but the point is this: the idea of the Two Ways is ancient and thoroughly Hebrew although there are probably examples of other historic cultures that held a similar religious philosophy. But always the good way, the way of light, the way of life, and the way of righteousness are the more difficult ways. Therefore a journey that is hard and inconvenient is the underlying understanding in Yeshua's "narrow gate". He will use the same mental picture of a small gate or a little portal and the difficulty of passing through it later on in Matthew chapter 19.

**CJB Matthew 19:24 <sup>24</sup> Furthermore, I tell you that it is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God."**

In another sense, the matter of God's worshippers necessarily having to pass through the narrow gate is a warning about God's coming judgment on the world. The bottom line is that only a few will escape it because only a few will find, and use, that narrow gate. In opposition to the narrow gate, the constricted gate, is the wide gate and the wide road that leads to it. The Greek word used for wide is **euruchos**; the meaning and mental picture is of something roomy and spacious. One could almost say it means "inviting". As with the abstract idea of "loving you neighbor as yourself", so it is with entering through the narrow gate. What does that look like in real life? Proverbs gives us a real-world example.

**CJB Proverbs 28:6 Better to be poor and live an honest life than be crooked in one's ways, though rich.**

So the issue of the narrow versus the broad gate and road involves moral choice. We are not predestined to enter, or to be blocked from, the narrow gate any more than we're predestined to enter, or be blocked from, the wide gate. One may be poor and dishonest or poor and honest. One may be rich and dishonest or rich and honest. Poor or rich are not Godly virtues; but honesty is. The narrow gate is

the gate of honesty in the case of Proverbs 28 and honesty is a moral choice.

Tertullian, a gentile Christian from the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries said this about this passage in Matthew.

***"The way of evil is broad and well supplied with travelers; would not all men take its easy course if there were nothing to fear?"***

Truer words were never spoken. If it were not for the fear of God's judgment, why wouldn't a human take the easier, more inviting way that the majority follows instead of struggling to stay on a straight but very narrow pathway, along with so few who set foot upon it, only to end up at an even narrower gateway?

It is an interesting, though horrific, fact that the Bible tells us frankly that prior to Noah and the Great Flood, all the way up to Abraham, and then to Jacob taking his clan to Egypt and Moses leading them out; and then from the Judges who ruled over God's rebellious people, each seeking to do what was right in their own eyes, through the era of the Kings and Prophets and all of God's warnings spoken through them; and then the warnings ignored Israel being sent into exile; it is always the majority of humanity that chooses to take the evil way. So while the love of God is usually the reason we choose to remain on the narrow path, the fear of God is usually the reason we choose that path in the first place. Without that fear, no one would choose the more difficult of The Two Ways. This is the reason that I and some other Pastors and Bible teachers rail at the modern brand of a cheapened Christianity that chooses to diminish any healthy fear of God and instead speak only of His love. Could it be that this is the dynamic at play that has seen a steady, and accelerating, decline in Christianity in the West for the past 75 years? That is, because the fear of God has been shoved to the background or removed altogether, fewer Seekers see reason to step foot onto that narrow road, and those who do often soon step off of it at the first sign of difficulty?

Verses 15 through 23 have as their subject false prophets. Oh my; I could speak for weeks on this matter but shall resist the urge in order to stay on track. So after Yeshua offered a number of words of encouragement, He now immerses Himself into addressing what was no doubt was an enormous problem in His day, not unlike the enormous problem it is in our day. Let's understand something: Yeshua is not talking about false prophets of the pagan world. He is talking about false prophets of the Jewish religious world. But even more, since His entire goal

is to prepare the people to accept Him as their Messiah (something He has yet to publicly declare), then in a more pointed sense He is speaking to Believers. He is speaking to you and me. He is speaking to Christians, Messianics, the Church and the Believing Synagogues. Because it is out of these that come the false prophets.

First let's understand what the term "prophet" means to Yeshua. It was a broadly used term in His day. It was generally agreed in 1st century Judaism that the era of the Old Testament Prophets was over, and that holy men making God-given predictions of the future and bringing oracles from God was (for the most part) no longer operational. Thus we don't find any New Testament Prophets, except of course for Yeshua Himself. Not even John in his Apocalypse was seen among the Jewish Believers and earliest Christians so much as Prophet as He was one who **taught** on the Prophets of old and what their writings portended now that the Kingdom of Heaven had arrived, Christ had come and gone, and for later times.

A prophet in Christ's day was one who taught and provided exegesis and commentary on the written Word of God. Paul would have been seen as a prophet. They were also Jewish religious people who advocated for their particular brand of worship, tradition and belief over and against others. That is not to say that there weren't those who claimed to have information about the future that God revealed to them. But most of this variety weren't taken very seriously, and when they were it was usually by some small group of Jews. Clearly among the Essenes, for example (the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls), there were those who were considered as true Prophets. So while it is difficult to have a simple definition of what a prophet was to Yeshua, the best mental picture we can get in the 21st century of what He was speaking about would be a Pastor, Priest, Rabbi, or Bible teacher. Thus a false prophet was one who taught falsely about God's Word, or taught against God's biblical principles and laws, or made up new ones.

A False Prophet is not one who makes an innocent error in their teaching. All teachers of God's Word are human, and so we are prone to mistakes, or we make speculations and give opinions as though they are fact. Rather, a False Prophet is one who knows the truth.... or perhaps ignores the truth.... or picks and chooses which biblical facts that uphold their beliefs and dismisses all others.... and so consciously chooses to spin the Holy Scriptures and pervert it to his or her own purposes. This is evil that comes disguised as good. Yeshua uses the metaphor of a wolf that comes camouflaged in sheep's clothing. A wolf knows

it's a wolf; it doesn't in any way think it's a sheep. So, it dons the outward appearance of a sheep in hopes that others won't know the truth about their identity. Might a wolf be deluded into actually believing that it is a sheep? I suppose it is not impossible.

Is Christ issuing a new warning because it's a new problem? Obviously not. Listen to some Old Testament wisdom concerning False Prophets.

**CJB Jeremiah 23:16 *ADONAI-Tzva'ot says: "Don't listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are making you act foolishly, telling you visions from their own minds and not from the mouth of ADONAI.***

**CJB Ezekiel 13:2 *"Human being, prophesy against the prophets of Isra'el who prophesy. Tell those prophesying out of their own thoughts, 'Listen to what ADONAI says!***

**CJB Isaiah 9:14 *The old and the honored are the head, while prophets teaching lies are the tail.***

So the image that is conjured up is of the meek being deceived and devoured by predators. Paul once taught:

**CJB Acts 20:28-29 <sup>28</sup> *"Watch out for yourselves, and for all the flock in which the Ruach HaKodesh has placed you as leaders, to shepherd God's Messianic community, which he won for himself at the cost of his own Son's blood. <sup>29</sup> I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you; and they won't spare the flock.***

I want to end this week's lesson by telling you that it is a slanderous accusation by the Church that these ravenous wolves in sheep's clothing were Jews who came to dissuade Believers from their faith. This makes Jews an enemy of Christians. Rather it is certainly at first Jews who professed belief.... whether they actually believed or not is another matter.... that are the wolves in sheep's clothing because all of the first many thousands of Believers in Christ were Jews! But as gentiles began to adopt the faith and joined the flock, many also joined the wolf pack until within a few decades the False Prophets consisted almost exclusively of gentiles. A theological debate that has never been settled is whether in the New Testament a person who professes the faith and teaches

falsely is actually a Believer or faked it in order to attack actual Believers. We won't be settling that matter today. However what we can know is that they existed, and continue to exist, within and among congregations of Believers and make themselves to appear as Believers. Since these False Prophets are not clearly labeled, Christ next gives us a truth detection method if we will but use it. We'll discuss that in our next lesson on the Book of Matthew.