

OPENING PRAYER

Proper 28¹

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written
for our learning:
Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn,
and inwardly digest them,
that we may embrace and ever hold fast
the blessed hope of everlasting life,
which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ;
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

MATTHEW 7²

Judging Others

7 “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. 2 For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. 3 Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s[a] eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your neighbor,[b] ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? 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 neighbor’s[c] eye.

Profaning the Holy

6 “Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you.

Ask, Search, Knock

7 “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 9 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? 10 Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

The Golden Rule

12 “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

The Narrow Gate

13 “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy[d] that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. 14 For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

A Tree and Its Fruit

15 “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? 17 In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will know them by their fruits.

¹ Episcopal Book of Common Prayer pp.236

² All Bible quotations and footnotes are from the *New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition*. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Concerning Self-Deception

21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ 23 Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’

Hearers and Doers

24 “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. 25 The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”

28 Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, 29 for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

Footnotes

Matthew 7:3 Gk *brother's*

Matthew 7:4 Gk *brother*

Matthew 7:5 Gk *brother's*

Matthew 7:13 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) read *for the road is wide and easy*

OVERVIEW³

7:1-5 Judging Others

v.1 “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.” The Greek can be translated, “Stop judgING”⁴. Means do not judge lest you be condemned by God at the final judgement. “Measure for Measure” is a manifestly well-known Jewish concept with an eschatological connection. Unlike Luke 6:38 where the emphasis is on God’s mercy, Matthew keeps the idea of judgement as the main point.

v. 1-5 The verb “*krino*” (Gk) is used for technical legal decisions, but also for forming judgements and reaching conclusions about things and brothers/sisters of the community. The verb is not necessarily negative, but Jesus emphasizes that when criticizing other brothers/sisters’ failings one should be careful lest they not be judged harshly as well.

vv. 3-5 uses carpentry imagery to make two related points: the inappropriateness of drawing attention to brothers/sisters’ failings when your own are much greater; and the impracticality and insincerity of an offer to help until your own greater problem has been dealt with.

vv. 3-5 The abstract (v.1-2) now becomes concrete (v3-5) with a vivid parable. V.3-4 are rhetorical questions and v5 is an exhortation addressed to a hypocrite. The emphasis is on judgment and hypocrisy. God will judge the hypocrites for their harsh judgement of brothers/sisters. Just as in 2 Sam. 12:1-15, where Nathan tells David of the rich man who took the poor man’s only ewe lamb, Jesus is telling the hypocrites something they are unaware of in themselves. While pointing out the fault of brothers/sisters they have ignored their own faults and calling themselves to task.

7:6 Profaning the Holy

Within the context of Matthew, and possibly the pre-Matthew oral tradition 7:6 is assigned two possible meanings: the saying is an admonition about the necessity to limit the time and energy directed towards the hard hearted; and/or Matthew may have had in mind certain teachings that should not be made known to outsiders. Either or both could be true.

What are considered holy things and pearls and from whom are they to be withheld? The holy things and pearls could be Jesus’ teachings and revelation. The early church thought the intent was regarding eucharist and baptism, but those would be post-resurrection insights not likely from Jesus. It is not clear. Dogs and pigs could reference unclean animals and to first century Jews could be euphemisms for Gentiles.

7:7-11 Ask, Search, Knock

Two interpretations:

- Persistence -- The Greek makes this point: “keep on askING, keep on searchING, keep on knockING”.
- The good character of the Father -- The loving God the Father with a love that surpasses that of human parents, deeply cares for his own and will not turn a deaf ear to them.

These sayings linkup with the Do Not Worry instructions in Matthew 6:25-34. They reinforce one of the overriding themes in Matthew: the invitation to “seek” (7:7-8) echoes the call to “seek first” (6:33).

There is nothing inevitable or mechanical about God’s answers to his people’s requests (6:7-8). There are circumstances when the door will not be opened (25:10-12), just as there are prayers that are not answered (6:5, 7; 26:39). The childlike confidence of vv. 7-8 is the prerogative only of disciples who as vv. 9-11 illustrate have a true relationship with their Father in heaven. The invitation to prayer (vv. 7-8) as well as the confident expectation that prayers offered **in faith [where?]** however improbable will be answered.

³ Overview sources include notes from Barton and Muddiman, Biblegateway.com, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Harper Collins *Study Bible, NRSV Version*, W.D. Davies, D.C. Allison, R.T. France, and Leon Morris.

⁴ Eugene E. Lemcio (Лемцю), Ph.D. Emeritus Professor of New Testament, Seattle Pacific University

It may be that the Disciples are not being called to ask, seek, and knock, as much as they are being encouraged to take heart. V. 7-11 do not command but reassure. Matthew maybe trying to reduce anxiety among disciples.

7:12 The Golden Rule

Dale C. Allison:

In Matthew 7:12 brings to a climax the entire central core of the sermon on the mount (5:17-7:11) and the mention of the “law and the prophets” takes the reader back to 5:17 and thereby forms an inclusion within which Matthew has treated the Torah (5:17-48), given rules for the Christian cult (6:1-18), and offered instructions and encouragement for life in the world (6:19-7:11).

7:12 is a general rule which is not only the quintessence of the law and the prophets, but also of the SM. Interpreted with this gospel as a whole the Golden Rule is radicalized by the SM; everything without exception, which is demanded by love and the commandments of Jesus you should do for other people (Luz 1985: 430).

Matthew 7:12	Luke 6:31
“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you,	Do to others as you would have them do to you.
for this is the Law and the Prophets.”	

“do to others as you would have them do to you” is a general rule that is not only the quintessence of the Law and the prophets, but also the quintessence of Jesus’ teachings in general. It is Jesus’ highest expression of the “better righteousness”. “Purity of heart is to will one thing”, wrote Soren Kierkegaard and Matthew would have understood. For the evangelist this meant the love of Jesus Christ, who perfectly embodied the commandment to love.

7:13-29 The SM winds down with warnings. The first is warning of the two ways (7:13-14). 7:14 is used by some to make a pragmatic calculation that most human beings will go to hell. It probably means that one should act as only a few will get into heaven and thus strive to be one.

R.T. France:

The striking saying does not directly relate to 7:7-11. It echoes 5:17 which deals with the disciples relationships with other people under the rubric of “fulfilling the law and the prophets”.

The way we treat other people has been a prominent theme in the SM discourse:

- In the discussion of fulfilling the law and the prophets (5:17-48);
- In the Beatitudes(5:3-10)
- In the requirement to forgive (6:14-15);
- And the structures against unfair criticism (7:1-5)

Jesus’ response on what is the greatest commandment (22:34-40) will be to single out two OT laws that summarize the OT laws, but here he offers the spirit of the laws rather than the actual laws themselves. The principles are so all embracing that he can declare not so much that it is the greatest law but that it “is” the law and prophets. It draws on the principles of Jesus second command, “You are to love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18), which underlies the ethical demands of both the law and the prophets. Paul’s teaching that love for the neighbor fulfills the whole law (Gal 5:14).

Like Hillel the Elder’s “Do not do to your neighbor what is hateful to you. This is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary.” But what Jesus does that is unique is that he offers the lesson in the positive rather than the negative. Other examples exists in the Didache 1:2, Gospel of Thomas 6, and other pagan literature.

7:13-14 The Narrow Gate

The call is for the disciples who have heard the SM to acknowledge Jesus' demands. They are being called to flee complacency and to view all save the entrance into the kingdom of heaven as dangerous diversions. The pericope is eschatological from the use of the word "*life*" to refer to future life in the kingdom of heaven, and "*destruction*" that refers to judgement.

7:15-20 A Tree and Its Fruit

The contrast between the false and true prophets is a story located in the disciple community itself. It applies to both "prophets" and the regular followers with the imagery of the trees and the fruits. False prophets are a problem in the OT and the Gospels and the Book of Acts. There is no evidence of problems with prophets in the disciple group during Jesus time, but it quickly became a feature and source of abuse during the early Christian movement.

The basic test Jesus proposes is "fruits": good trees produce good fruit; and bad trees produce bad fruit. The fruit is an expression of their inner natures. The consequences of the bad tree and the bad fruit at the harvest, the eschatological future event, quotes almost verbatim what JohnBap said would happen. They are cut down and thrown into the fire.

7:21-23 Concerning Self-Deception

Now the warning is about actual members of the Christian community, followers of Jesus. People who announce their allegiance to Jesus "Lord, Lord", and have significant spiritual achievements, "prophecy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" (v.22) Unlike the false prophets in v.15, these people are more surprised than anyone to be rejected from the kingdom of heaven. But their rejection is based not on what they have done, or their allegiance stated. They are rejected because Jesus "never knew you." Jesus by saying "I never knew you" is not acknowledging those people as part of his extended family.

Even those who "do" God's will, and are better known, yet they are rejected in v.23 because they have acted "lawlessly". The key seems to be an inner relationship with Jesus Christ which is an essential element of belonging in the kingdom of heaven. A professed allegiance to Jesus is not enough. This is a profound test for church leaders and disciples. (1John seems to have been written for this reason.)

vv.21-23 are important also for this is the first time Jesus uses the term "*Lord*" or "*kyri[os]*" in Greek, for himself. Matthew uses the term *kyri[os]* when Jesus helps people, but now Jesus uses the term for himself. In addition, Jesus is referencing a relationship with himself as the guiding principle, not one with the Father. It significantly exalts Jesus status. [*Kyrie* is the form used in direct address.]

7:24-29 Hearers and Doers

The SM closes with the parable of the two builders: both men have heard Jesus. The parable contrasts the sensible and the foolish people of faith. The strong foundation directly related to hearing and doing Jesus' *words*, is necessary to survive the storms of faith and life. The weak foundation gets washed away.

Note: it is not clear how the follower will know in advance if they are sensible or foolish. They may both perceive that they have built on what they think is rock, only to discover later that the foolish have actually built on sand.

The storm that strikes the two houses can be interpreted as the calamities and crises that affect everyday life, and a traditional OT view would be that this represents God's judgement (as with Noah). The storm may also be an eschatological event, end time event.

10:28-29 28 Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, 29 for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

10:28-29 mirrors 4:23-52 so the beginning and end of the SM mirror each other; the line is similar to the closing lines of chapters 10, 13, 18 and 24-5 and helps clarify the outline of the book; and it is similar to the formula used in Deut 31:1, 24; 32:45 and may represent part of the Matthean Moses typology.

V[v] 28-29 The primary focus of the discourse has been on Jesus. Now we see that Jesus has been speaking to disciples and the crowd. The crowd has heard enough of his teaching to be greatly impressed. To set the authority of Jesus' teaching in context, the scribes are authorized teachers of the Law. They have been trained and hold office and have a right to expect the people to accept their legal interpretations and rulings. Jesus earns the people's respect because of the quality of his teaching and the character of what he is teaching. He is teaching with a new set of insights into God and the Law.

7:28-8:1 may be viewed as editorial by Matthew. It parallels the opening 4:23-5:2:

Matthew 4:23-5:2	Matthew 7:28-8:1 ⁵
great crowds followed him 4:25	great crowds followed him, 8:1
the crowds 5:1	the crowds 8:1
The mountain 5:1	The mountain 8:1
Going up 5:1	Going down 8:1
Teaching 5:2	Teaching 7:29

The crowd and the disciples have heard Jesus' teaching on the mount and "the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as their scribes." (V. 28-29) and the crowd then "follow him" down the mountain.

Note: Sermon on the Mount Postscript

There is a genuine continuity between Torah and Jesus teachings, but there is also something new about the Messiah's speech. His teaching first goes beyond the letter of the law and makes what the evangelist probably understood to be an unprecedented demand for purity of intention and harsh self-denial. The teaching is unlike that of the doctors of the law in the OT in so far as it does not depend upon the OT or Jewish tradition but solely on the authority of the speaker, who is in this regard like a true prophet.

The first six chapters of Matthew reveal an author who is deeply involved in a critical dialogue with the Jewish leaders and establishment of his day. In belonging to a Christian community, Matthew is not so far removed from the Jewish synagogue as to ignore it. Matthew may have hoped that his gospel would prove a watershed in Jewish-Christian relations, it would build up the emerging church by demonstrating the truth of the gospel vis-à-vis Judaism as well as supply Christian scribes with powerful arguments to be used with Jewish opponents of their day. Matthew may also have been trying to influence the Jewish religious authorities as they sought to finalize the canon of the Hebrew Bible in late first century.

⁵ Davies, W.D., Allison, D.C., Matthew 1-7, International Critical Commentary, Notes

REFLECTION

What foundation have you built for your faith? Experience, revelation, study, community?

How can we maintain and strengthen our faith foundations?

CLOSING PRAYER

We thank you, heavenly Father,
for the witness of your apostle and evangelist,
Matthew, to the Gospel of Beatitude and Grace
which you have given us in your Son, our Savior;
and we pray that, after his example,
we may with ready wills and hearts obey
the calling of our Lord to follow him;
through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

The Rev. Zoila Schoenbrun

GOSPEL COMPARISON⁶

Pericope ⁷	Mark	Matthew	Luke	John
On Judging	4:24-25	7:1-5	6:37-42	
Profaning the Holy		7:6		
Ask, Search, Knock		7:7-11	11:9-13	
The Golden Rule		7:12	6:31	
The Narrow Gate		7:13-14	13:23-24	
The Test of a Good Person, "By their Fruits"		7:15-20	6:43-45	
The House Built upon the Rock		7:21-27	6:46-49	
The End and the Effect of the Sermon	1:21-22	7:28-29		

⁶ Source: <http://www.gospelparallels.com/>

⁷ An extract from a text, especially a passage from the Bible, "a book of pericopes"

SLOW RELIGION: GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW



*The Inspiration of St. Matthew,
Caravaggio, 1602*

Slow Religion, The Gospel According to Matthew is a lay person-led adult education weekly series for Christians and seekers. Slow Religion uses a literary and historical approach to the ancient texts to identify and apply insights from the Gospel to today's world.

Matthew's gospel is worth studying because the author attempts to uphold Jesus' Jewish past, with Jesus ministry, death, and resurrection, in the context of the 1st Century CE Jesus movement and early church, and in a hostile Hellenistic and Jewish world.

21st Century readers recognize Matthew as the source of many of the best-known stories and sayings of Jesus as well as a social philosophy that many non-Christians believe in. Famous for its Sermon on the Mount, The Beatitudes, and other teachings, Matthew is often called the most Jewish of the Gospels, while also contributing with the Gospel of John to antisemitism.

The class is created and led by Joe Jennings and advisors include: the Rev. Zoila Schoenbrun, St. Stephens Episcopal Church, Belvedere, CA; the Rev. Br. Richard Edward Helmer, Episcopal Church of our Saviour, Mill Valley, CA; Eugene E. Lemcio, PhD, Emeritus Professor of New Testament, Seattle Pacific University; the Rev. Heather Wenrick, the Episcopal Church of the Ascension, Seattle; and the Father Vincent Pizzuto, PhD., vicar at St. Columba's Episcopal Church, Inverness CA and Full Professor at the (Jesuit) University of San Francisco, New Testament and Christian Mysticism, in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies.

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