



## Session Three

# The Sermon on the Mount, Pt.3

## Matthew 7

### Questions to consider as you read Matthew Chapter 7

1) The case can be made that we are living at a time when many people are making a full-time job of judging others. But in verses 1-6 Jesus is clear that we are *not* to judge others because, frankly, most of us have our hands full dealing with our own stuff. How would your life be different if every time you caught yourself judging someone else—which usually means you want them to change something they're saying/doing/represent—you instead focused on changing yourself?

Let me put this another way: Whenever you want someone else to change, are you willing to put that energy into something you can actually control, i.e. changing yourself?

2) The questions in #1 relative to verses 1-6 lead directly to questions relative to verses 7-14. Think about these verses (7-14) in terms of a statement made by Leo Tolstoy: *Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.*

- a) When Jesus talks of the necessity of entering through the narrow gate, what does he mean? Does entering through the narrow gate require us to change? Change how?
- b) In verses 7-12, Jesus seems to be advocating persistence in prayer—that if you pray long enough and hard enough, you'll get what you want. But God is not a vending machine, dispensing candy once we put enough quarters in the slot. Is it possible that Jesus is promising we'll receive that for which we ask *if* we pray for what God wants rather than what we want?
- c) How do we know what God wants? Read something you're probably familiar with: Micah 6:8. If we were to pray for justice, what, ultimately, would that mean for the world and for each of us? What if, in addition to *praying* for justice we *lived* justly?

3) Verses 15-23 can be seen as speaking to the issue of integrity—the extent to which what we profess to believe is actually reflected in how we live.

- a) It can be argued that, essentially, what Jesus is saying in these verses is that if we are to be his followers, we must honestly answer this question: *Will Jesus be Lord of my life or will I?* Think about how you answer that question, then consider this: can Jesus be Lord of only certain parts of my life and still be Lord of my life?
- b) If Jesus is Lord of only parts of your life, why?
- c) Read verses 21-23 then reflect on this statement: While we may receive salvation by faith, we will be judged on our works.
- d) Respond to this statement: As much as salvation is about eternal life it is about justice; we are saved not just for the life to come but for life now.

4) Read verses 24-27, the closing words of the *Sermon on the Mount*.

- a) What do you hear Jesus saying about the importance of the teachings included in the Sermon?
- b) Throughout Matthew 5-7, a constant question is *How? How can I live this way?* Read Philippians 2: 5-11. What do these words—probably the text of an ancient Christian hymn or creed—suggest about how we can live Jesus’ teachings?
- c) Read Luke 18:18-25. This story can be seen as a reminder that, throughout human history, most of what we know as “civilization” has been built on a foundation of money and power and that, throughout time (including the present day), most conflicts have been fights, one way or another, over money and/or power. Which means that this story is a reckoning: will the Rich Young Ruler choose a life rooted in the values of money and power or a life rooted in the values of Jesus and the Kingdom?

Here, at the end of your reading of the Sermon on the Mount is your own Rich Young Ruler moment, your own reckoning. Jesus has said you cannot root your life in both money/power and the Kingdom. You must choose. It is clear the choice Jesus calls us to make. What is your choice? Why or Why not? Are you willing to do whatever work of change your choice requires?