

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

MATTHEW 6-7

There are different types of sermons.

The rocking horse sermon... it goes back and forth, but gets you nowhere.

The mockingbird sermon... there's a lot of repetition, but nothing new.

The casserole sermon... a little bit of everything, but nothing solid.

The Jericho sermon... you march around the subject seven times.

The Duracell sermon... it keeps going and going and going.

The Nyquil sermon... you are asleep in no-time.

Finally, **the Christmas tree sermon**... you set it up, you decorate it, you enjoy it, and then you throw it away - with it providing very little lasting benefit.

The Sermon on the Mount was none of the above! It was a sermon supreme.

Clear and concise - probing and powerful - simple yet sublime. For those who set on the grassy slope above the shore of the Sea of Galilee, this was a sermon they would never, ever forget! Jesus unveils the nature of His kingdom.

In chapter 5 Jesus contrast the righteousness of the Pharisees with true righteousness. *Now in chapter 6* He contrasts the worship of the Pharisees with true worship. He teaches us *how to give - how to pray - how to fast.*

Verse 1 is the guiding principle in all our acts of worship. Jesus says, **“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them.**

Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.” Rather than glorify God, the underlying goal of the Pharisees was *to be seen by men*.

The Greek phrase translated **“to be seen”** is our word for **“theatre”**.

It’s been said, **“We’re all just actors on a stage.”** And that may be true, but the real question is **“Who is your audience?”** Is it man or God? Jesus says our sole motive in giving and praying and fasting is to be pleasing to God.

In sports, a *“hot dog”* is more than a tube of meat served at the concession stand. A *“hot dog”* is a player who performs to be seen - a showboat. He doesn’t walk He struts. He plays to draw the spotlight - more so, than win the game.

The Pharisees were guilty of **“hot dog holiness.”** They were *spiritual show-offs*.

The Pharisees had turned the worship of God into a circus – *a 3 ring circus...*

*In verses 2-4 was **the game of giving**, verses 5-8 **the performance of prayer**, verses 16-18 **the farce of fasting**.* Every circus has its clowns, and the Pharisees were the clowns of Judaism. There’s was **a strut-your-stuff** kind of spirituality

Verse 2 **“Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not**

sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.”

In Herod's Temple there was a courtyard known as "the chamber of the secret." A large container shaped like a trumpet sat in the courtyard. Folks slipped in quietly and anonymously to drop their offering in the box. The proceeds went to the poor.

The Pharisees felt it was unnecessary to go to the Temple to give to the poor.

They wore little trumpets on their belts, and would stand on the street corner, blow their trumpets, and pass out money. People would gather around the pompous Pharisee and praise him for his righteousness and generosity.

We laugh at such blatant attention-grabbing, but how often have we tooted our own horn? We're all guilty. We like to hear the oohs and aahs. Nothing strokes the ego like spiritual stardom. There's a little bit of hot dog in everybody's bun.

But here's Jesus' warning... do a deed to be seen by men – and the moment you are seen, you've got the only reward you'll ever get. Enjoy the accolades, and pats on the back, and the esteem of men – you'll get no *reward* from the *Lord*.

We're told the way to give, verse 3, “**But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.**”

Since our tendency is to hot dog – we can't even trust our

own motives. This is why we should always choose to give in a private, low key, confidential manner.

G. Campbell Morgan once said, "Motive is everything in the Kingdom."

When acts of worship are staged to impress man they cease to impress God.

"And when you pray..." Notice, verse 5, it's not "if" you pray, but "when" ...

The same was said of giving in verse 2 - and of fasting in verse 16.

Obviously, Jesus intended for His followers to do what the Pharisees were doing - give, pray, and fast - these are not optional spiritual practices.

But we're to do them from a *different motive* and in a *different manner*.

"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men.

Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward." First, Jesus tells us **how not to pray** - then in verse 9 He's going to teach us **how to pray**.

A devout Jew prayed 3 times a day - 9 AM, noon, and 3 PM - wherever he was at the time he stopped to pray. But the Pharisees scheduled their day so they'd be in conspicuous spots at prayer time - on a street corner or in a crowded bazaar.

The objective was to be *admired by men*, more so than be *heard by God*.

It reminds me of the little guy praying for a bicycle. He shouted, "Lord please, I want a new bike." His mom said, "*Honey, hold it down, God isn't hard of hearing.*"

The little boy replied, "I know mom, but grandma is, and she's in the next room." When you pray, remember you're praying to God – not men.

"But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." There is a place for public prayers - but prayer is primarily a private act between you and God. We need to protect it from corruption.

And the by-product of privacy is it blocks out distractions. Go to your room, shut the door, and you can focus your thoughts and concentration. Spending time with God is a Christian's most important activity – it happens best in a private place.

Once I officiated a wedding, and I meant to say, "God has given the wife to *complement* the husband." Sadly, that's not what came out. Instead I said, "God has given the wife to *complicate* the husband." *It may be true*, but it didn't fit the occasion. But it does fit what the Pharisees did to prayer – they complicated it.

In response Jesus simplifies prayer. Verse 7, **"And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them."** The model prayer Jesus will give us in

verse 9 contains just 65 words. It takes less than 30 seconds to recite.

It's complete, but concise. And this is the way our praying needs to be.

But the Pharisees had the opposite idea. They were verbose. They emphasized *duration* instead of *devotion*. One famous prayer prayed by the Pharisees began, "Blessed, praised, and glorified, exalted, extolled, and honored, magnified, and lauded be the name of the Holy One." And that was just the beginning.

It reminds me of a prayer meeting where a man was praying much too long.

Finally, he said, "And now Lord, what more can we say to Thee?" A man in the back blurted out, "How about Amen!"... I've discovered that the people who pray long prayers in public are usually those who pray very little in private.

When you're caring on a continuous conversation with God you don't have to rehearse every detail every time you pray. You can get right to the point.

It's been said, "A short prayer will reach God if you don't live far away!" It's not the *length of our prayers* but *the strength of our prayers* that matter.

Jesus forbids "vain repetitions" - the Greek word is "battalogo." It means "idle, thoughtless chatter." You hear it at Little League games. The fielders chatter, "hey, hey, hey". Its meaningless verbiage designed to keep their minds from wandering.

When we go to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem we see modern day Pharisees chanting their prayers while looking around nodding to their friends. Obviously, their praying is rote and routine – far more mechanical than meaningful.

In prayer God cares about heart, not articulation – sincerity, not eloquence. It's said, "In prayer it is better to have heart without words than words without heart."

And here's why heart is more important than words. "For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him." Prayer is not informing God. He already knows our needs. Prayer is expressing our dependence on God.

Verse 9, "In this manner, therefore, pray..."

Verses 9-13 are often called "The Lord's Prayer," but this is not a prayer Jesus would've prayed. Jesus would've never prayed, "Forgive us our debts." Jesus had no need of forgiveness. He never sinned. This is "The Disciple's Prayer."

The words "In this manner" can be translated, "Along these lines" or "After this pattern." Jesus is giving His disciples a model prayer – a prototype for prayer.

The Disciple's Prayer teaches us the flow of prayer... It begins and ends with **praise**. The middle is **petition**. And throughout it's laced with **intercession**.

Notice the plural pronouns that appear in the prayer, "**our Father**", "**give us**", "**lead us**". Implied is that we should pray this for each other, not just ourselves.

"Our Father in heaven..." The word translated "Father" is the

Aramaic word “Abba” or “Daddy.” Jesus puts us on intimate terms with God.

“Hallowed be Your name...” Once a little boy told his mom he knew God's name. It was "Howard." *"In Sunday School we read, "Howard by Your name".*

The word "hallowed" is a derivative of “holy.” It means “to set apart.” To hallow God's name is to acknowledge His preeminence and honor His greatness.

“Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.” Notice, Jesus doesn't say "our daily steak and lobster," or "our daily chocolate mousse." It's "give us this day our daily bread."

Bread is not a luxury, it's a staple. Understand, God never promises to give us all we want. But He does promise to provide us what we truly need.

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”

CS Lewis was once asked, "What is found in Christianity which is not found in any other religion?" He replied, "That's simple - the forgiveness of sin."

Be thankful we serve a God who is rich in mercy and forgiveness.

“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

We've prayed for **provision** and **pardon** – now **protection**. We should ask God to protect us from ourselves – “steer us clear of the tempting situation.”

Keep me from making a mistake, or biting off more than I can chew, or strolling unknowingly into the teeth of a temptation. Protect me from the wiles of the devil.

“For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

Notice in this prayer Jesus frees us from the guilt of the past - and the fear of the future. He wants us to live in the present.

"Give us this day our daily bread".

Today's joys are often stifled by past failure or future fears. The key to staying in the present is prayer. Enjoy God's blessing, and turn your cares into prayers.

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Here's the prayer's postscript. An unforgiving spirit is proof you don't know God's forgiveness. *Receive forgiveness and you'll show forgiveness.*

Verse 16, **"Moreover, when you fast..."** Notice again, it's not **"if"** but **"when."**

Of these 3 practices... **Giving** improves my relationship with others. **Praying** improves my relationship with God. **Fasting** improves my relationship with me.

Let me get something off my chest... There's a person here tonight that gives me constant problems. I have a more trouble with this person than any person in the church. He lacks self-control - he shies away from sacrifice - he's

nowhere near as disciplined as he needs to be. His name is Sandy Adams.

And nowhere are my problems more apparent than when it comes to fasting.

I've been trying to lose a little weight lately, and it's proven to me that food is far more important to me than it should be. Obviously, you have to eat to live – but you don't have to eat as much as I do. Fasting is a good reminder of what's important.

Fasting is a means to build into my life traits that I need – like discipline, self-control, sacrifice. It's an exercise in delayed gratification. It puts off the flesh, and puts the focus on the spirit. It's been said, "Fasting is a way to fatten up the soul."

Fasting is good, but Jesus warns, "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward."

In the hands of a spiritual hot dog fasting can quickly turn into a sham.

The Jews fasted twice a week - on Mondays and Thursdays. So on those days the Pharisees would be in the market and bazaars. They'd muse their hair, tear their clothes, dress in sackcloth, and wear a white paste on their face to make them look pale and anemic. In short, they looked like an unmade bed.

And it was all done to attract public attention - to let people know they were fasting. Jesus is warning us, "Don't wear your spirituality on your sleeve."

He says in verse 17, "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."

In other words, when you're being most spiritual try to look normal.

G Campbell Morgan said, "Let it be perpetual Lent within the secret chamber of your being, and everlasting Easter on your face." The best witness is a smile, not a frown. The world needs to see that the point of repentance is the joy of the Lord.

I've heard it said, "You can be a fundamentalist, but you don't have to look like one." You can exercise your spirit – be a spiritual person – and still wear a smile.

Verse 19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal." In ancient times there were no banks. You kept money in one of three places... Some people invested in expensive clothes. They'd weave threads of gold into their linen garments. This was a way of showing off your wealth.

Others planted wheat and barley, harvested it, and sold it in the markets.

Still others hid their wealth in the walls of their houses, or buried it in their fields.

All three forms of saving carried some risk. Moths could eat a golden garment. Grain could rot in the silo. And a hidden

treasure was vulnerable to thieves.

A good investor has two concerns - **minimum risk** and **maximum reward**.

Jesus tells us earthly investments fail in both criteria. The best place to invest your money, and time, and energy, and talents is in heavenly, spiritual pursuits.

Investments in God's kingdom are **risk free** and reap **eternal dividends**.

Here's a good rule of thumb, **"If it's not going to be around 100 years from now don't sweat it."** It's not worth the investment- far better to focus on spiritual things.

It's been said, **"If you don't want a broken heart, don't focus on breakables."**

A rich lady died and arrived in heaven to find that she'd been assigned to a one room thatched hut. It was right across the street from a marvelous mansion.

She was steamed - outraged. She deserved a mansion. When she complained, the charge angel told her, **"Mam, the houses in heaven are built with materials you send us in advance. You choose them; by your faithfulness, or lack of it, on earth."**

Jesus says **"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."**

Notice, your heart follows your treasure. What you deem most important determines the preoccupation of your heart and the direction of your life.

If your heart has grown cold toward God... *then track your treasure.*

You'll discover that the things of this world have become too important and have crowded out your love for God. Your heart always follows your values.

"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

My heart follows my values - but my **values** are determined by my **viewpoint**.

"Your eye" or *your perspective* is either good or bad. It's either colored by God or it's colored by the world. In a sense we're all wearing a pair of tinted-glasses.

You're either wearing **God-colored glasses** or **world-colored glasses**.

If your eye is good – if you see life from God's viewpoint - you see clearly.

God's light guides your choices. But if your eye is bad - if your perspective is tainted with doubt, and worry, and fear, and selfishness, and pride then you'll have a warped view of life and end up making bad choices. *What glasses do you wear?*

This is why you need to wear God-colored glasses.

Here's how life works... your heart follows your treasure, but your treasure is determined by your viewpoint. And your viewpoint is determined by your God.

Verse 24, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and mammon." Here's the bottom line. Who do you serve? Every heart has a throne – all men have a master. To whom do you bow?

Jesus says, "**no one can serve two masters**". You can have several hobbies, or two jobs - but you can't have two Gods! **Your heart's throne is a one-seater.**

People try to serve multiple-masters. They end up with one foot in the world and one foot with Jesus - but it never works for long... a decision is required.

It's been said, "**If Jesus is not Lord of all – He's not Lord at all.**"

You can't take Jesus as your Savior and not take Him as Lord. I've heard it put, "**Jesus never saves who He can't command.**" John Ruskin use to say, "**Christ will put up with a great many things in the human heart, but there is one thing He will not put up with... and that's second place.**" You cannot serve two masters!

Verse 25 contains the most disobeyed command in all the Scripture. "**Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on.**" Worry is not a weakness, it's a sin.

Jesus helps us overcome worry, by pointing out three truths about it – in *verse 25* He says it's **irresponsible** – *verse 27* it's **irrelevant** – *verse 28* it's **irreverent**.

First, worry is **irresponsible**. It's a waste of limited time and energy.

Jesus asks, **"Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?"** 90% of the stuff we worry about is unimportant – it's temporal rather than eternal.

I like how one author described worry... **"Worry is like a rocking chair; it will give you something to do, but it won't get you anywhere."** Worry is a complete waste.

"Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

"Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?" Here's the second point, worry is **irrelevant**. So you're short. You bump your head on people's belt buckle. So start worrying... Worry hard... Take a week off from work just to worry... It won't add 1 inch to your stature – let alone a cubit, 18 inches.

And third, worry is **irreverent**. It's a slap in God's face for you to worry.

Jesus says in *verse 28*, **"So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."**

Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is,

and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

God clothes the lilies and feeds the birds – and when they die they disappear into oblivion. You're His child. How much more willing is God to care for you!

If you believe in God, and the love of God, you shouldn't worry.

Verse 31 “Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.” Worry is a poor witness. When we worry we're acting like unbelievers – *people without God.*

Unbelievers worry about lots of stuff, but the Christian should worry about just one thing... Verse 33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” Here is God's promise. If you make pleasing God your top priority - He'll see to it that everything else is provided.

It's surprising, but the key to overcoming worry is to worry... not about yourself, or your needs - but about His kingdom and His righteousness and His concerns.

If you want to worry why not worry about the billions of people going to hell, or the folks without a Bible, or the kid who lacks a dad, or the teenager in our church who needs a role model, or the health of our church and its lack of willing workers.

Perhaps you should start worrying about the sin in your own life, or the grudge you're holding, or the habit you can't break, or your lack of Bible knowledge and prayer life. Worrying about *God's issues* and He'll worry about *your concerns*.

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” "Worry doesn't empty tomorrow of its sorrow – as much as it does today of its strength." Worry paralyzes the present.

I'm sure you heard of the worried cow. "The worried cow would've lived 'til now, if she had saved her breath. But she feared her hay, wouldn't last all day. And she mooed herself to death." Most of what we worry about is stuff that never happens.

Chapter 7, **"Judge not, that you be not judged."**

I have no doubt that Matthew 7:1 is the most abused verse in the Bible. It's constantly being *made to say* what it was never *meant to say*.

Talk to someone who's shacking up with his girlfriend – or he drinks too much – or smokes weed – or cheats on his income tax... he snarl and say, "You think you are so good, don't you know the Bible says, *“Judge not that you be not judged.”*"

Here's a verse everyone likes to hide behind... But any judgment based on Scripture – isn't me judging – it's God's Word. Matthew 7:1 doesn't mean we have to be vague about sin. There are situations where it's proper to judge...

Notice verse 15, “Beware of false prophets...” Verse 20 “By their fruits you will know them...” In this same chapter there are verses that require a judgment.

In verse 1 the word translated “judge” is “*to judge with the intent to condemn*”.

When condemnation is our motive we shouldn't judge. Verse 1 covers issues not spelled out in the Bible – not the black and white issues, but the gray areas.

Too often we pigeon-hole and stereotype - generalizations need to be avoided.

Never judge based on appearance, or your assumption of a person's motive. I don't care how good your eye-sight might be, you can't see into a person's heart.

If you make assumptions and draw ill-informed conclusions about other people, don't be surprised when other people make those same assumptions about you.

Here's a great poem, “I dreamed death came the other night, and heaven's gates swung open wide. An angel came to meet me, and usher me inside.

There to my astonishment – stood folks I'd known on earth. Some I'd judged and labeled – unfit, of little worth. Angry words rose to my lips, but never were set free. For every face showed stunned surprise. No one expected me!” Don't judge!

“For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”

Make negative, critical assumptions about other people - and don't be surprised when they return the favor.

“And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye?” Jesus uses a little comedy. A guy with a plank protruding from his eye-socket is trying to get the toothpick out of his friend's eye. Take care of your own problems first.

I always hate playing golf with a guy who wants to give me lessons - straighten out my swing – all the while he can stay out of the woods. I've heard it said, “Faults are like headlights – the other car's lights always seem more glaring than your own.” Work on your own life before you try to straighten out someone else.

Jesus says it best, “Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye.”

“Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.

In first century Jerusalem dogs were not pets. They were vicious. They lived in the garbage dumps. Try petting one of the wild beasts and you'd lose a finger.

You'd never take a Temple sacrifice, a holy offering, and give it to a dog.

The same with swine - these were no little piglets. The swine were ferocious and wild. You'd never string a pearl

necklace around the neck of a swine.

Jesus is saying some members of the human race are spiritual *dogs* and *hogs*.

They have no taste for truth. They live in the world's garbage dump and feed on spiritual trash. And you're wasting your time trying to feed them holy things.

God has to *prepare* their heart before you *share* the Word. There's a world out there that needs Jesus. Satan would prefer us *slopping hogs*, than *feeding sheep*.

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened..." In the original verse 8 reads, "For everyone who keeps on asking receives, and he who keeps on seeking finds, and to him who keeps on knocking it will be opened." The idea is that God rewards a long obedience in the same direction. He fills a hunger that's sustained over time.

Verse 9 "Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent?"

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"

A wealthy woman made a generous endowment of \$1,000,000 to the University of Chicago. The President of Northwestern, also in Chicago, knew this lady. In fact, they were personal friends. He immediately drove to her house

and asked why his university hadn't been considered for the grant. She replied, "You never asked."

God is a dad who loves to bless His kids. All He wants is for us to ask.

Verse 12 is called **The Golden Rule**. "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." If everyone in the world lived by this rule, the world would certainly be a better place to live.

Jesus was not the first person to utter this ideal for human relationships...

The Jewish Talmud stated, "What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow man."

Buddha said, "Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful."

Confucius put it, "What you do not want done to yourself do not do to others."

Socrates said, "What stirs your anger when done to you, that do not to others."

Yet here's the difference – Jesus gave new life to an old saying by giving it a twist. Everyone else phrased it in the negative, but Jesus put it in the positive.

It's not enough to avoid doing harm – God wants us to look for ways to do good. True morality goes on the offensive. It doesn't just dodge sin – it shows love.

"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go

in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

People today like options. We live in an either/or world. There was a time when all Americans drove either a Ford or a Chevy. Remember when bread was white? Checks were green? Telephones were black? No more. We like multiple options.

And this is true spiritually. People like to pick and choose from different faiths, and put together their own belief system. Individual freedom is the ticket.

There’s only one problem – this multiple-option orientation flies in the face of the words of Jesus. In verse 13 Jesus cuts down our choices - it’s just two gates, two ways, two crowds, two destinations... It’s *heaven or hell*.

Here's a scary thought: "It does not require a decision to go to hell."

“Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction.” Every human being is born on the road to hell. You have to find the way that leads to life.

The Greek word translated, "narrow" is "stenos" which means "to compress or constrict." "Stenography" is "shorthand" - a compressed form of penmanship.

The way to heaven is also compressed. It’s so narrow you can’t enter carrying a lot of baggage. You come just as you are – humble, naked, alone, and honest.

There’s tons of fun on the Broadway. But on the road to heaven the friends are few, the demands are great, and the terrain is tough – *but the views are awesome*.

There is still only one way to God and that's through Jesus Christ!

Verse 15, "**Beware of false prophets...**" Again, this requires a judgment. A false prophet doesn't walk into the church wearing a sign, "**Beware! I'm a false prophet.**"

Proper judging is for 3 reasons... **identification, preservation, restoration.**

"Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves." In other words, beauty is only *fleece deep*.

Don't be deceived by a pleasant, even pious appearance.

"You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit."

In a sense, we're not to judge – in another sense, we are to be fruit inspectors.

Fruits are the by-products of the life of the tree. Apple trees produce apples. Pecan trees produce pecans. A life rooted in God will produce godly fruit.

When I inspect for spiritual fruit, I look for the nature of Jesus – the heart of a servant. A lot of so-called Christian ministries are like Christmas trees. They're decorated - but ornaments aren't fruit. Ornaments are works, deeds, image...

Fruit is heart, life, attitude... Ornaments just hang on – fruit springs from...

“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.” Learn to be a fruit inspector!

Here’s a good rule: “Don’t follow anyone until you find out who they follow.”

Jesus warns us in verse 21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'

"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' Remember the beatitudes. What matters to God is not *what we do* as much as it is *what we be*. Attitude always trumps actions.

Even spiritual gifts are not necessarily a sign that I’m right with God.

Remember God spoke through a donkey. He used a sorcerer named Balaam to bless Israel. Just because God uses a money-hungry televangelist to work a miracle at times doesn’t mean God approves of what’s in the man’s heart.

Often God uses a person more *in spite of him* than *because of him*.

A bogus dollar bill does a lot of good while it’s in circulation. It puts shoes on a child's feet, feeds a hungry family, funds missionary endeavors - but when it reaches the bank it’s

deemed a counterfeit – and it's permanently destroyed.

Apparently, this will be the plight of many so-called Christian ministries.

"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. Now everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall." Palestine has a rainy season and a dry season.

You can build a house in the dry season and there be no problem. But when the rains come, if you've built on the wrong foundation your house will wash away. The storm and rain reveal the quality of the foundation. And the same is true with us.

A wise man builds His life on the rock of God's Word – the truths of Scripture.

A foolish man builds on the shifting, shaky sands of human opinion. And all is well until the storms come. When the tough times hit the foundation is tested.

What's built on the rock lasts. Build on the sand and "great" will be your fall.

If you want to storm-proof your life - don't take your cues from the talk shows, or inspiration from Oprah – build your life on the timeless Word and wisdom of God.

Verse 28 “And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” The rabbis lacked authority – this is why they always quoted each other to validate themselves. In contrast, Jesus’ words were weighty.

He spoke with an authority no one had heard before. “You have heard that it was said to those of old... But I say to you...” Jesus’ words were new and fresh and powerful and heavenly. It was obvious that He spoke the words of God.

Chapter 7 closes by noting that the people that day were astonished at the authority of Jesus’ teaching. I’m sure they were... 2000 years later we’re still astonished. What an incredible three chapters... it was *a sermon supreme!*