

BaptistWay Bible Series for Jan. 2: Jesus offers nuggets of wisdom to his disciples_122004

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Jesus offers nuggets of wisdom to his disciples

Matthew 7:1-27

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Matthew 7 is comprised of seven sections of instruction (vv. 1-5; v. 6; vv. 7-11; v. 12; vv. 13-14; vv. 15-23; vv. 24-27) plus a conclusion (vv. 28-29). In this lesson, we will overview the contents of this third and final chapter of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

On judging

Chapter 7 commences with the command, "Do not judge in order that you might not be judged" (v. 1). This verse has become rather popular in contemporary American culture where it typically is construed to mean: "You have no right whatsoever to call my actions or convictions into question."

The verses following this admonition cast aspersions upon this common, if mistaken, understanding. Jesus does not call his disciples to jettison moral and theological discernment; rather, he prohibits hypocritical judgment among his followers and enjoins his disciples to exercise mercy and demonstrate humility when judging fellow believers (v. 2).



Disciples not only are to recall “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (5:7), but also are called to examine themselves before dispensing correction or discipline (7:3-4). For some reason, it always is easier to sweep off the doorstep of another. It is far more prudent, however, to correct our own spiritual vision before seeking to assist others with theirs. Beware Christians who think they possess perfect spiritual vision and perception. It is possible they are being hypocritical (v. 5).

Dangerous dogs and pearl-less pigs

Although enigmatic, Jesus' injunctions not to give what is holy to dogs lest they turn and maul you and not to throw pearls to pigs lest they trample upon them seem to serve as a warning to not pollute or profane what is sacred. This verse also may suggest that believers should be discerning and deliberate in their relations with outsiders. “Airing the church's dirty laundry” in the public square or button-holing unbelievers on street corners may sully the community, engender hostility or be an exercise in futility. It is wise to realize that pigs eat pods not pearls, and rabid dogs want meat not bones.

On prayer

Jesus further underscores the importance of prayer in the lives of his

followers in 7:7-11. Disciples are instructed to ask, to seek and to knock and are informed they will receive, find and gain entry (vv. 7-8). Although sinful, most earthly fathers provide for their children's needs (vv. 9-10). God, who is not tainted by evil, is both willing and able to give good things to those who ask him (v. 11).

This passage should not be construed to mean that believers have been granted heavenly carte blanche. Disciples should pray with the model prayer in mind (6:9-13). Nonetheless, Christians should be fully aware they pray to a gracious God, not a divine despot.

The Golden Rule

The person who aspires to live by the so-called Golden Rule does well. Not unlike other rabbis of his day, Jesus taught his followers to treat others with the treatment they desire from others. In essence, Jesus is instructing his disciples to love their neighbors even as they love themselves. This is never easy, especially when one's neighbor is an enemy (5:44). This simple principle lay at the very heart of the law and the prophets, not to mention the gospel.

On gates, trees and foundations

As the Sermon of the Mount nears its end, Jesus calls his disciples to enter by the narrow gate and walk the hard road. To be sure, a wider gate leads to a primrose path, and it is far and away more popular. Despite its alluring beginning, the wide way leads to spiritual disaster, whereas the arduous road leads to spiritual life. Although following Jesus leads to Golgotha, death will give way to life (vv. 13-14).

From its inception, the church has had to cope with counterfeits. Jesus warns his followers not to be eaten alive by ravenous wolves who pose as

innocent sheep (v. 15). The way to differentiate between “real McCoys” and “fine decoys,” Jesus instructs, is by their fruits (vv. 16, 20). Even as a tree is known by the fruit it bears or fails to bear (vv. 17-18), prophets may be discerned as true or false by the fruit they produce. Orthodox confessions and miraculous manifestations must be supported by loving obedience to the heavenly Father (vv. 21-23).

Jesus concludes his message from the mountain by comparing those who hear and heed his words to a wise man who built his house upon the rock. Although this location did not preclude storms from coming, it did prevent the house from falling. Those who fail to embrace Jesus' instruction are likened to a foolish man with his house on the sand. When the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew against this house, it could not withstand such a storm (vv. 24-27).

In 7:28-29, Matthew reports the crowds were amazed at Jesus' teaching. They particularly were impressed that Jesus taught with authority and not as a scribe—that is, he did not think it necessary to rehearse rabbinical opinion on each and every issue he addressed. Furthermore, 8:1 informs that the crowds (not merely his disciples) followed Jesus as he descended the mountain. Whether they (and we) will follow him as he ascends Mount Calvary is another question that awaits an answer.

Discussion question

- ◆ What wisdom in this lesson did you need to hear?

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