

MATTHEW 7

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, PART 3

The Savior's words in this chapter bring a conclusion to His Sermon on the Mount. The first topic that is here dealt with is that of passing judgment upon our brothers and sisters in Christ.

In several instances, the Gospel contains precepts which, at first sight, appear inconsistent with each other; but after careful comparison, they only serve so much the better to enforce the one uniform system of Christian truth. For each passage serves as a counterweight in the interpretation of the other, to prevent us from applying the words of Scripture in any other sense than that which they were designed to bear. Thus, this command that we "judge not" seems to be at variance with our Lord's instructions to the Apostles: "If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault" (chapter 18:15). It also seems to be opposed to the directions which are given afterwards in this chapter, in verse 20: "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." In fact, it even seems inconsistent with the very words which follow: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine." For before we obey this precept, we must judge some to be swine and dogs. This very opposition and seeming variance, however, is well-calculated to make plain our line of Christian duty. For the necessity of our judging in some cases serves to show us the cases in which we are to "judge not." We cannot fail to be ignorant of the fact that some men notoriously transgress, and commit sins which others avoid, and violate obligations which others observe. Nor can we help sometimes noticing gross instances of misconduct in certain individuals, which exceed the common measure of human iniquity. Our Savior does not bid us to shut our eyes to the scandal of persons such as these. He would rather have us note their conduct, so that we may renounce their principles and avoid their society. And while they continue obstinate in such sinful courses, He forbids us to waste upon them the precious pearl of spiritual instruction. That is, we are not to give it to them except with caution, lest they become like dogs and swine, who will either hurt their instructors or profane holy things by their scorn and abuse.

Yet even to such persons as these, we must nevertheless – in another sense – observe the precept, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." We ought not judge concerning the future and eternal condition of anyone among the children of men, by a mere observation of their present spiritual state. Each of us has enough to do in the examining and judging of ourselves. To cast out the beam of timber

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Christ teaches His disciples how they may and may not judge – verses 1-6
- ❖ He exhorts them to prayer and speaks of the efficacy of it – verses 7-12
- ❖ His followers must enter the narrow gate and bear good fruit – verses 13-23
- ❖ He speaks of the necessity to be doers of the Word, and not merely hearers – verses 24-29

that is in our own eye is ample employment to occupy our time, without our looking after the splinter that is in our brother's eye. If we consider how many things we do which we know we ought not, and how many things we leave undone which we know we ought to do; and when we remember how many good resolutions we daily break, and the great number of ways of becoming holier and more heavenly-minded which we heedlessly or even willfully neglect – if we lay these things to heart, then we shall become so deeply occupied with our own repentance and amendment, that we shall have no time to speculate unprofitably upon the salvation or condemnation of our brothers and sisters.

Yes, we cannot help beholding the present outward conduct of those around us. But we would do well to observe it in such a way that we are watching for the right opportunity when we may offer them religious exhortation, with hopes that it may do them good. But it is not in our power to decide concerning their final sentence that shall proceed from the Righteous Judge, Who knows the heart. Rather, let us hope – even in the cases of the worst persons we know of – that the Holy Spirit would work within them in such a way that they would find pardon in the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus. O Lord, teach us to judge – in cases where we must – with mercy; and where we do not need to judge, teach us to “judge not” at all.

Some of the precepts which we have considered in this study of the Sermon on the Mount make us feel like exclaiming with the disciples, “Who then can be saved?” (chapter 19:25). Our righteousness, we are told (chapter 5:20), must not only “exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees”; but it must also have perfection as its aim and rule, so that we may be perfect – even as our “Father which is in heaven is perfect” (chapter 5:48). Our conduct must never be done to satisfy the views of those who behold our outward actions; but rather, we must do them to please our Father “which seeth in secret” (chapter 6:4). Our treasure must be laid up where “neither moth nor rust doth corrupt” (chapter 6:20). Our thoughts must not be engaged by the vain tomorrow of this world (see chapter 6:34), but by the distant glories of eternity.

Many are likely tempted to say in their hearts, “This burden is too heavy for us, and this piety is impossible to flesh and blood.” Here, therefore, the Divine Teacher encourages us by promising, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (verse 7). There is One to Whom all things are possible! And here we find how we may obtain His help. Let us pray to the Lord for grace so that our sinful heart may bring forth the fruit of holiness, so that our flesh may be subdued to the Spirit, and so that our corrupt affections may be purified by Jesus' love. “Every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (verse 8).

Let us never, then, shrink from the high standard of Christian duty, on the plea that it is above our reach. Let us not grow lazy in the prescribed course

toward perfection, out of a faint-hearted distrust of the possibility of attaining it. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). If we may have help from Him, what is there that we cannot undertake? Has He not given us His own Son? And "will he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32) Shall He not give us all things that are necessary for the fulfillment of that duty which He has enjoined, for the attainment of that heaven which He has promised? Shall an earthly parent be found willing to indulge his children in each reasonable request, and can we doubt that our Father in heaven will "give good things to them that ask Him? No indeed! (verses 9-11) Surely, with His aid, we may prevail! We may fulfill the law of love to both God and our neighbor. We may so behave to all the rest of mankind, that whatsoever we would wish them to do to us, "even so" we shall do unto them (verse 12). But let us remember that we cannot do these things in our own strength! If we desire to have Divine assistance, we must ask, seek, and knock. We must pray to the Lord for grace and strength; and He has assured us in another passage that "all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive!"

The rule of the Gospel is pure and practical; but the mind of man, being corrupt, is often inclined to explain away its application and force. Therefore, our Savior concludes this plain account of Christian conduct by warning us how greatly we are in danger of modifying and mitigating its solemn obligations. The wide gate and the broad way which He speaks of (verse 13) are those various methods of false religion which men have adopted throughout the ages, instead of the true one. They deceive themselves by the hope that heaven may be attained by some easier service than devotion of heart and holiness of life. The false prophets (verse 15) are those who promise "peace, when there is no peace" (Jer. 8:11); they teach men to seek for salvation by means other than that simple faith in Christ which produces the fruit of good works. These are the corrupt trees that bring forth evil fruit (verse 17). These persons cry unto Jesus, "Lord, Lord!" But they refuse to do the will of the Father in heaven (verse 21). Alas! So many people love darkness rather than light, because their works are evil (see John 8:19).

All men, doubtless, wish to go to heaven. All wish to be happy when they die. Nevertheless, many resolve to first enjoy, as long as they can, the pleasures of sin here on this earth. Many desire to avoid, as far as possible, the work of righteousness and the humiliation of faith. Therefore, they eagerly follow any false form of religion which allows them to indulge themselves in the ways of iniquity, and yet promises to make all right at the end. Nor is this error confined to the profession of a false religion. In some shape



or fashion, it besets us all – even those of us who hold to the true faith, and belong to the pure Church. Many times, and in many ways, we are tempted to go aside into some wide and easy track that is outside of the narrow and uphill path of Christian perfection. But when the difficulties of the Gospel thus frighten us, we would do well to consider the difficulties, on the other hand, of rejecting the Gospel. At an unknown hour, we shall be summoned before the judgment-seat of Christ. The great points which will then be inquired into shall be our faith and obedience – not in a religion of our own devising, but in that which is set forth in His Gospel. Let us never dare to offer any outward service or sacrifice of man’s invention to Him Who sees the heart. Narrow is the way wherein we must walk, and narrow is the gate through which we must enter. Let us be aware that such is the nature of our Christian pilgrimage! May we find the true way that leads unto life; and may we be counted, through the merits and mercy of our Savior, to have done the will of our Father in heaven.

To hear and also to do these sayings of Christ is the only way to build upon a foundation that will never fail (verses 24-27). That foundation is the promise of God, and that Rock is Christ Himself. We must build all our hopes upon Him and His atoning death for our sin, and His covenant which He has sealed for our redemption. And the method by which we build is faith; for it is by faith that we lay hold of the promises, it is by faith that we are justified, and it is by faith that we are admitted into the covenant of grace. The house that is to be raised is holiness of life; it is a heart that is devout, pure, and charitable. It is a spirit that is purposing to be conformed to the will of God in all things. Against that strong house which is thus built up in the soul, and thus firmly founded upon the sufferings of Christ – in vain does the rainstorm of temptation pour! In vain do the floods come, and the winds blow – whether they blow from the snares of the world outside of us, or from the violence of the passion of our hearts within us. That house does not fall, for it is founded upon that Rock – namely, Christ. How foolish, therefore, are those who build a Babel-tower of wealth, indolence, pleasure, or worldly gain upon the sands of this world! They labor in vain to set up a work that is sure to be their own destruction.

Thus we see that it is entirely our wisdom to do according to the sayings of our Lord, so that our work may endure forever! Let us be careful to build upon Christ, to build with faith, and to build holiness of life; and then we may be sure that what we build shall never fall, and that an everlasting mansion in the heavens awaits our joyful arrival! A house that is not built with hands, and a happiness and glory that no work of our own could earn for us, is ensured to us by the love of God Who “so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life!” (John 3:16)

Thank You, Jesus, that we do not need to shrink from the high standard of Christian duty; for with Your strength, there is nothing that we cannot undertake! Amen.