

Sermon: Matthew 7:24-27 Hearing and doing

Over the past week there has been an idea that has come, again and again, to my mind. I'm sure that it would come as no surprise to you that this thought is on my mind because of recent world events facing us today and over the past several weeks. Indeed, these are unprecedented times for my generation and those born after me. Even for you baby boomers there has not been such a global crisis in your lifetime. Indeed, we must recall back to the "Greatest Generation" to see disruption to the global norm on such a large scale.

The idea that has been at the front of my mind is that of collapse or fall. The idea is not unique to a viral pandemic. Rise and fall, beginning and ending, growth and collapse, life and death are part of our everyday experience. We see the tide come in and go out revealing an ever changing shore. In the barnyard hens rise and fall in the ranks of the pecking order. In the wild wolves become alpha males and females only to be succeeded by their own offspring. In history class we study the rise and fall of Alexander the Great, the Ming Dynasty, the Middle Kingdom, or the Holy Roman Empire. In agriculture we see crops spring to life in April only to shrivel and die in October to make way for the explosion of life that will come again next spring.

And even though we are familiar with this idea, even though we love to investigate the how of a "rise" and the why of a "fall," we like it a whole lot more when it is the "rise" and "fall" of someone or something else.

As I meditated on this concept this week there was a song I learned in Sunday School which I also could not get out of my head. It is a song about two builders, who apparently began construction about the same time but who employed very different building practices. One carefully selected a homesite that would provide a rock solid foundation while the other was more interested in "location, location, location" and decided that beachfront was not enough and so determined to build on the beach -the sand of the beach- itself.

Remembering this song forced me to go to my Bible and read the story which is at the end of Matthew 7. Upon reading it again I realized something that I probably should have realized long ago and that is that this analogy that Jesus uses about these two builders is tied to, as He puts it, "these words of mine." "These words of mine" according to Matthew are the longest single monologue or uninterrupted teaching we have from Jesus in the New Testament. We call this teaching the Sermon on the Mount.

The more I thought about collapse the more I was forced to recognize not only how little control I have over world events, but how much control I have over the structural integrity of my spiritual house. Here a caveat must be made: When I say that "I have control over the structural integrity of my spiritual house," it is with the understanding that there was a work begun in my life by the Holy Spirit whereby I was given spiritual heart-transplant. The instruction by Jesus to put his words into practice is not a command to keep a spiritual checklist of tasks accomplished. Rather it is endeavoring by His strength to live a life that reflects the new nature

given to us at conversion. We do not endeavor to “hear” and “do” Jesus words so that he will save us. We endeavor to follow His teachings because he saved us.

Today we are going to read “these words” of Jesus without pause or commentary and I have anticipated a few questions or objections to this that I would like to address:

- Objection 1: There are a lot of things in the Sermon on the Mount that are hard to understand. Are you really going to just read over them without explaining them.
 - Response: Context is often the best illuminator of scripture. It is important to carefully examine words and sentences and phrases, but reading things in their context allows the hearer to understand the overarching flow and thus guard against taking scripture out of context.
- Objection 2: Why do I need to hear you read it when I could read it on my own?
 - Response 1: “Have you or would you?” Have you ever read or would you read the Sermon on the Mount in its entirety and as Matthew reports that it was heard?
 - Response 2: It is important to hear scripture read aloud with others because it eliminates questions about what it says. Why does a lawyer read a will with all the beneficiaries of the will present? Because it ensures they all hear the same thing. What I want you to know after our time together is that Jesus has told you and I how we can prevent a collapse in our lives- by hearing his words and doing them.

Mathew 5-7

The Sermon on the Mount

¹Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

The Beatitudes

²And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

8“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons^a of God.

10“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Salt and Light

13“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.

14“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that^b they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Christ Came to Fulfill the Law

17“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Anger

21“^cYou have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 22But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother^c will be liable to judgment; whoever insults^d his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell^e of fire. 23So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 25Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over

to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. 26Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.^f

Lust

27“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ 28But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. 30And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

Divorce

31“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ 32But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Oaths

33“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ 34But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.^g

Retaliation

38“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ 39But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic,^h let him have your cloak as well. 41And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 42Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

Love Your Enemies

43“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46For if you love

those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers,⁷ what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Giving to the Needy

¹“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

²“Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

The Lord's Prayer

⁵“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁷“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name.^a

¹⁰Your kingdom come,

your will be done,^b

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹Give us this day our daily bread,^c

¹²and forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.^d

14For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Fasting

16“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 17But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Lay Up Treasures in Heaven

19“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust^e destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, 23but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

24“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.^f

Do Not Be Anxious

25“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?^g 28And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we

drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

34"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Judging Others

1"Judge not, that you be not judged. 2For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. 3Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? 5You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

6"Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.

Ask, and It Will Be Given

7"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. 9Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? 10Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? 11If you then, who are 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!

The Golden Rule

12"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

13"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy^a that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. 14For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

A Tree and Its Fruit

15"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased

tree bear good fruit. 19Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

I Never Knew You

21“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22On 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 mighty works in your name?’ 23And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

Build Your House on the Rock

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

The Authority of Jesus

28And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, 29for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.