

Monday, September 28, 2020

Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit

Good Morning,

Over the next several days I want to focus our devotionals on the teachings of Jesus as found in the ***Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5-7***. The Apostle Matthew's recording of this event is rich in meaning. I hope you will take time to read through all three chapters in one session in order to get the flow of Jesus' teaching. We will try to break the sermon down into smaller sections to help us understand better what Jesus was trying to teach his followers. Thanks for reading along!

Matthew 5:1-12 - *Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said:*

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

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.*

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Sermon on the Mount is the first of five major teaching sections in the gospel of Matthew. It is both similar to and different from Luke's "*Sermon on the Plain*," in **Luke 6:17-49**. Matthew's account begins with large crowds around Jesus and his going up on a mountainside to sit down and teach them.

The first thing you begin to notice in Jesus' sermon is the word "blessed." There are nine occurrences of the word "makarios" which can mean, "O the happiness of" or "congratulations to." Here in Matthew, the condition of blessedness is described (i.e.) "Blessed are the poor in spirit," and the consequence of being this way is listed – "for theirs is the kingdom of God."

In our first beatitude, the state of being blessed by God is the call for followers of Jesus to be "poor in spirit." These are individuals who recognize their spiritual condition and their own spiritual need. It is a stark contrast to those filled with pride and self-sufficiency. Those who are humble and contrite in spirit, those who recognize both their spiritual poverty and their need for Jesus will be blessed. Theirs is the kingdom of God. "*Humble yourselves under God's mighty hand that he may lift you up in due time.*" (**1 Peter 5:6**)

With love,
Larry

Heavenly Father – Please help us to see our spiritual poverty apart from Jesus. Remind us that we are blessed when we trust in you and not ourselves. Help us to always acknowledge our need for you and to humble ourselves before you regularly, knowing you will lift us up. In Jesus' name –Amen.

Tuesday, September 29, 2020

Blessed Are Those Who Mourn

Good Morning,

Thank you for reading the Sermon on the Mount with us. We are continuing our study of the “Beatitudes” by considering Jesus’ second beatitude, *“Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.”* I have to admit that this one had me confused for a long time! How can people who mourn be “happy?” Remember, that the word blessed can be translated “O the happiness of” or “Congratulations to.” This did not make sense to me until I read a book on the sermon by Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones. In it, he contends that each of these beatitudes builds on the other. Since Jesus begins all this with *“Blessed are the poor in spirit,”* Jones says that those who recognize their own spiritual poverty and their desperate need for God are then able to “weep” over their sinful behavior and turn to God who promises comfort. The mourners are blessed because they experience God’s deliverance from sin and his consolation. **Psalm 126:5** reminds us that *“Those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.”* God has always been willing to accept those who confess their sins and turn to him!

1 John 1:9 - *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

Jesus wanted us to see our own spiritual poverty apart from God and to confess that sin and to mourn over it. He promised comfort, peace and forgiveness to those who would do this!

With love,
Larry

Heavenly Father – Help us to see our own sinful ways as you do. May we be willing to bring this before you in brokenness and confession. Thank you for your promise of forgiveness and comfort as we trust in the forgiving blood of your son, Jesus.
Amen

Wednesday, September 30, 2020

Blessed Are the Meek

Good Morning,

Matthew 5:1-5 - *Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.*

He said:

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

*Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.*

As we continue to look at the Sermon on the Mount and especially the “Beatitudes” of Jesus, we focus today on “*Blessed are the meek.*” It is an interesting word for “meek” in the New Testament. It refers to those who have been “tamed” by God as contrasted with those who are arrogant. Moses was described as the “meekest of men” (**Numbers 12:13**). Jesus was described as meek and humble in heart (**Matthew 11:28-30**). Whatever “meek” means, I think we all would want to be this way. In classic Greek literature the word refers to a “horse that has been broken.” Meekness is a fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:23**). God dwells with those who are humble and contrite in Spirit (**Isaiah 57:15**).

The meek are blessed because their ultimate vindication comes from God. They will inherit the earth. When we think of meekness, I hope we will consider it as “strength under control.” Jesus is the best example of meekness. Let’s strive to imitate him.

The person who is meek derives their strength from God and depends upon him completely. Lord, help us to be meek!

With love,
Larry

Heavenly Father – Once again we come before you to say that we are completely dependent upon you. Help us that we might find strength in meekness. May we completely trust you with our lives and our hopes. Let us be more like Jesus everyday who found his strength in you.

Through Jesus we pray – Amen.

Thursday, October 01, 2020

Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

Matthew 5:1-5 - *Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.*

He said:

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

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.”*

Here in the Beatitudes, especially in verse six there is a reminder from Jesus of the joy and happiness that comes to those who are poor in spirit, recognizing their own sin, as well as to those who learn to mourn over that sin and who choose to find strength (meekness) in serving God. Jesus promises that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. “Righteousness” describes a state of being in a right or good relationship with the God who created us. Jesus urges his followers to seek that in ways that we would seek food when we are hungry or water when we are thirsty. Jesus promises that these people will be filled.

If these beatitudes build upon one another as some scholars believe, then this would be the “high point” of the mountain! The poverty of spirit, mourning over sin and learning strength from Jesus through meekness, pushes us to hunger and thirst for God in way we never have.

Isaiah 61:10-11 - *I delight greatly in the Lord;
my soul rejoices in my God.*

*For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
For as the soil makes the sprout come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness
and praise spring up before all nations.*

Psalms 42:1-2 - *As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.*

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When can I go and meet with God?

The fundamental human needs such as hunger and thirst remind us that as children of God we long to be close to him, to know him better and to walk with him daily. Jesus promises that these people will be filled!

Heavenly Father – Help us to hunger and thirst to be close to you. There are many things happening around us now, things that need our attention, things that sadden and trouble us. Help us to have clear minds and pure hearts as we seek your face and as we strive to follow Jesus each day. Our souls yearn for you – the only true God. In the name of Jesus – Amen.

Friday, October 2, 2020

Blessed Are the Merciful

Matthew 5:7- *Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*

I find it fascinating that Matthew, the tax collector known as Levi speaks about the idea of mercy so many times in his gospel. (**Matthew 9:13, 12:7, 22:23** and **25:31-46**) Could it be that Matthew personally experienced the mercy of God when Jesus called him from his tax collecting work to follow him? (**Matthew 9:9ff**) Jesus expected that those who had received mercy would learn to extend it to others. He had strong words for Jewish leaders who emphasized certain things that were not at the heart of God's plan, while neglecting those things that were.

Matthew 23:23 - *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.*

Jesus called his followers to be like God. **Luke 6:36** - *Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*

When his disciples asked about the number of times they should extend mercy and forgiveness to others, Jesus told them a story about a man who had been forgiven of a very large debt, then proceeded to threaten and incarcerate a man owed him a few dollars. This story of the “unmerciful servant” found in **Matthew**

18:21-35, reminds us about how God will treat those who fail to extend mercy to others! The parable is worth a quick read for all of us!

When the Old Testament prophet Micah addressed the people of God in his day, he asked them a very personal question, *“He has showed you, o Man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To at justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”* (Micah 6:8)

With love,
Larry

Heavenly Father – You have extended such mercy to all of us – thank you! May we in turn learn to be merciful to others. May we forgive like you do and may we grow to have even greater appreciation for all you have done.

In Jesus name – Amen.

Saturday, October 3, 2020

Blessed Are the Pure in Heart

We close out another week with joy and gratitude for all that God has done.

Matthew 5:8- *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

These words of Jesus may well be rooted in **Psalms 24:3-4:**

Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?

Who may stand in his holy place?

The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,

who does not trust in an idol

or swear by a false god.

According to Dr. Larry Chouinard, "A pure heart is descriptive of one's innermost being and motivations."

None of us can be this way on our own. **Psalms 51** is thought to be a Psalm of King David pouring out his heart to God after the prophet Nathan confronted him about his sin against Bathsheba. The Psalm begins with David pleading for God to have mercy on him and to wash away all his sin. I hope you will read the entire Psalm, but I want us to focus on verse 10 – *"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit in me."*

King David realized that having a pure heart was NOT something he could do on his own. Only God is able to do this! David needed God to cleanse him from the inside and so do we. It began with confrontation about his sin, continued on to conviction of sin and led to David's brokenness and repentance in his life. David's plea for mercy was heard by God. He had been described years earlier "as a man after God's own heart." (**1 Samuel 13:14**) Yet David found himself far from God, entangled in sin. He knew that only God could create a pure heart in him. Jesus said that happy people are those whose hearts God has purified. Those people will see God.

I urge you to bring your heart before God. Allow him to see you as you are and trust that He is able to create in you something you cannot do on your own!

With love,
Larry

Father – You are creator of heaven and earth. You have made us in your image, but we have fallen because of our sin. Please create in us again a pure heart and restore to us once again the joy of our salvation!

In Jesus name – Amen.

Monday, October 5, 2020

Blessed Are the Peacemakers

Matthew 5:9- *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.*

It is difficult for me to think of this Beatitude without remembering the late Egyptian President, Anwar Sadat. You may remember that in 1979 the United States President, Jimmy Carter helped broker a deal for peace between Egypt and Israel who was led by Prime Minister Menachem Begin. President Sadat was assassinated by Muslim extremists in October, 1981, but not before he and Begin shared the Nobel Peace Prize. The treaty of peace with Israel was its first with any Arab country.

Jesus knew that it took special efforts to make peace. Conflicts seem so much easier. **Proverbs 12:20** says, *“There is deceit in the hearts of these who plot evil, but joy for those who promote peace.”* The Psalmist reminds the people of God to *“Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.”* (**Psalm 34:14**)

The apostle Paul knew that having peace among people was no easy task. He reminded the church in Rome, *“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.”* (**Romans 14:19**) The church in Rome had problems agreeing on “disputable matters.” This was a reference to some things that might not be clear from scripture – matters of opinion. The apostle urges them to accept each other’s position on these matters and to stop passing judgment on one another. He even suggested that it was good to keep some opinions to themselves! (**Romans 14:22**) Surely this is a novel idea in the age of social media.

I hope you will seek to be a peacemaker in your life, in your home, in your marriage, at work, etc. The Hebrew writer said, *“Make every effort to live in peace with all people and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”* (**Hebrews 12:14**)

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” (**Romans 12:18**)

With love,
Larry

Father in heaven, Help us to be like Jesus our Lord. He came to bring peace to people whose hearts were troubled. He reminded us that people are blessed who seek to make peace. We live in a deeply divided and often angry world. Please help your children to be different. Fill our hearts with love and a spirit of peace as we try to live for you.
In the name of Jesus – Amen.

Tuesday, October 6

Blessed Are Those Who Are Persecuted...

Matthew 5:9-12- *“Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

*“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely
say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be
glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way
they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

Jesus warned his followers about difficult days in the future.

John 15:18-20 - *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated
me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own.
As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of
the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told
you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted
me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they
will obey yours also.”*

He knew that if people persecuted him they would also persecute
his disciples. As we read through the book of Acts describing the
early days of the church, we see the fulfillment of Jesus’ words.

The Apostle Paul, who himself handed out lots of persecution prior
to his conversion (see **Acts 8,9**) reminded the church in Philippi of
this:

Philippians 1:29-30 - *For it has been granted to you on behalf of
Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you
are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now
hear that I still have.*

By the end of his life Paul seemed convinced that *“everyone who
wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...” (2
Timothy 3:12)*

Many of us have heard firsthand accounts of our brave missionaries
around the world who often deal with extreme persecution. Please
pray for all those who are serving God faithfully!

Remember that in the Beatitudes Jesus said that *“Blessed are those
who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the
kingdom of heaven.”*

With love,
Larry

Heavenly Father – We thank you for those who have persevered
through suffering and persecution for so long. Thank you for the
faith and endurance of the early church. Please bless and protect
those who are taking your word to areas of our world where they
are threatened and persecuted today. Fill them with your spirit and
with great hope as they serve.

In Jesus’ name – Amen.

Wednesday, October 7, 2020

You Are the Salt of the Earth

We have been looking at the Sermon on the Mount, a beautiful sermon that Jesus delivered to his followers. The past few days we have considered the “Beatitudes” of Jesus. These Beatitudes describe what a life of happiness looks like for a follower of Christ.

Today we move to a new section of Jesus’ sermon.

Matthew 5:13-16- *“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.”*

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Salt was known to the people of Jesus’ day for its power to preserve food. We have refrigeration today and mostly use salt for seasoning or flavor. Jesus told his followers that God was counting on them. They were part of the “preserving process” in the world. If salt is diluted it is no longer useful.

Additionally, Jesus tells his audience, “You are the light of the world.” He called them “a city on a hill that cannot be hidden.” Cities in the ancient world were often built on a hill for protection as well as to preserve valuable farm land. These cities could be seen from a long distance and nothing could hide them.

Jesus said, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12)*

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminds his disciples that they too are the light of the world and the salt of the earth! Let us remember that as we strive to represent Jesus in this world.

With love,
Larry

Heavenly Father – You have called us to be salt and light in a world that is decaying in sin and filled with darkness. Help us to remember that we belong to you. We have been called to shine for you and share the hope that is found in Jesus. We need your power to do this!
In the name of Jesus – Amen.

Thursday, October 8, 2020

Righteousness Inside Out

Good Morning,

There is a somewhat unusual section in the Sermon on the Mount. At first glance it does not seem to fit with Jesus' earlier teachings about those who are "blessed." However, a closer look reveals that God's law, known among his people throughout the ages, is now being fulfilled in Jesus! His harshest critics, the Pharisees and teachers of God's law, were to have their own righteousness exceeded by Jesus' followers.

Jesus had begun the process of transforming (changing) the hearts and minds of his followers. Becoming poor in spirit, mourning over sin and being guided by a spirit of meekness that hungers and thirsts for righteousness, is somewhat new to the children of God. While emphasizing outward things, Jesus believed the Pharisees had missed the "weightier matters" of God's law such as justice, mercy and faithfulness. (See **Matthew 23:23-24**) Jesus urged people to be transformed from the inside out. That kind of "righteousness" exceeded that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law.

In the verses that follow (**Matthew 5:21-48**) Jesus describes how this "Righteousness Inside Out" looks. It is NOT simply "law keeping" but a matter of the heart as well. It is our goal to be like our Heavenly Father – though we come up short.

With love,
Larry

Our Father – We ask you to work on our hearts and change us from the inside in a way that changes our behavior as well. Help us to want to be like your Son and to want to be the kind of people who make a difference in the world for you. In the name of Christ – Amen.

Friday, October 9, 2020

Giving, Prayer and Fasting

Good Morning,

As we continue reading the Sermon on the Mount, we turn to some areas of personal worship, including giving, prayer and fasting.

Matthew 6:1-4 - *“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Jesus issues a warning to his followers about doing things for the purpose of being noticed by others. Honestly, we all want recognition at times. This is a “cautionary warning” by Jesus. Be careful that you are not doing these things just for show, Jesus says. Giving to those in need is extremely important. There must have been some way that people who gave large gifts were recognized in the synagogues by the playing of trumpets. A friend of mine used to imitate the trumpet sound anytime a buddy would begin to brag on themselves for doing something. It was pretty funny - until he did it about you!

Concerning prayer, (please read **Matthew 6:5-16**) Jesus warned his followers about praying in order to be seen or noticed by others. Instead he encourages people to pray to God privately reminding them that God already knows their needs! The Lord’s Prayer that follows in this section is straight forward, concise and focused on the holiness of God and our need for dependence upon Him.

Matthew 6:16-18 - *“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

Jesus assumed that fasting would be part of the lives of those who followed him. Again, Jesus emphasized doing this privately, not to be noticed by others.

Giving, prayer and fasting all matter to God. All of these should be done by followers of Jesus but not in order to be recognized by others.

With love,
Larry

Our Father – We ask you to help us focus on you as we give, pray and fast. Thank you for the privilege of doing all those to honor you, draw closer to you and to help others. Keep our motives pure. We want to have hearts that seek you and that serve others.

In the name of Jesus – Amen.

Saturday, October 10, 2020

Your Treasure and Your Heart

Good Morning,

I hope you have a wonderful weekend. Please join us online or on our church parking lot Sunday at 10:30 for worship!

Matthew 6:19-21 - *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

My dad told funny stories about greedy relatives of his who loved nothing more than money. They did not trust banks and so they hid their money in jars in the attic of their wooden garage! It was apparent where their hearts were. Once, my father, whose dad had died suddenly prior to his birth, was needing to make a trip to Michigan to be with his older brothers. He had to “borrow” \$10 from this wealthy couple in order to purchase a bus ticket. (They even made him sign a promissory note which included interest!) Imagine doing that to a young boy who was part of your family. When my father arrived at his brother’s home in Michigan, money was quickly “wired” to the couple back in Missouri along with a “salty reply” from my uncle. Everyone apparently knew what these folks valued most.

Jesus was concerned that his followers have a proper perspective on what was temporary and what was eternal. Some things rust away or are easily destroyed. Some can be lost or stolen. Jesus knew that material things often mattered too much to all of us.

Matthew 6:24 - *“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.*

The warning of Jesus is powerful here. It is one we should consider carefully and I hope we will!

With love,
Larry

Heavenly Father – Teach us to value people more than things. Help us to learn to share what we have to bless others. Search our hearts and show us what we value most. Help us to treasure most our relationship with you.
In the name of Jesus – Amen

Monday, October 12, 2020

Do Not Worry About Your Life

Matthew 6:25-34 - *“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”*

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

A friend of mine used to say, “Larry, if you are going to pray then don’t worry! If you are going to worry, then don’t pray!” I knew what he was trying to say and there was certainly an element of truth in it.

I know that we mask worry by saying, “I am just concerned.” That sounds a lot better to our ears, but I think Jesus was attempting to help his audience to relinquish complete control of their lives to him.

The administrator at our church has a great quote on her bulletin board. The quote says, “It was a sad and disappointing day when I discovered that my Universal Remote Control did not, in fact, control the universe. (Not even remotely!)” We all wish for that ability at times and some work hard to make that happen in their lives in various ways.

Jesus urged people to look around and consider how God provided for his creation and in turn for all of us. He called us to a life of trust and dependence upon Him. Jesus called his followers to put their faith in the living God who loves and cares for them. I hope we will.

With love,
Larry

Heavenly Father – We confess that we worry over things for which we have very little control. Our lives are often overwhelmed by things that challenge and cause us stress. Please help us to look around and see that this world belongs to you; we are not in control, not even remotely! May we rest in your unconditional love until Jesus comes again – Amen.

Tuesday, October 13, 2020

The House on the Rock

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount closes with some words of warning regarding judgment of others, prayer and obedience to God's Word. I hope you will take time to read Matthew 7 in its entirety. We will just look at a few verses.

Matthew 7:13-14 - *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*

Jesus urges his followers to seek a narrow road that leads to life. In a culture where “majority rules” these words may seem strange to us. Why would I want to go on a road “less travelled?” Why would I want to go in a way that most do not? Jesus had very few followers when he left the earth. After three years of ministry, only about 120 people remained in Jerusalem to see the amazing work of God at Pentecost. (See **Acts 1:12-15**) But what came next would change the world. Jesus knew that following after him would never be popular and he tried to prepare his disciples for the challenges they would face.

Matthew 7:21-23 - *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’*

Here Jesus warns people that being close to God is not a matter of talk, but of obedience to God's teachings. Followers of Jesus should not simply call him “Lord” but should do what Jesus says!

Matthew 7:24-29 - *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”*

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

Jesus closes the Sermon on the Mount by telling a parable regarding two builders; one is wise and one is foolish. Wise people build their lives on Jesus, the Solid Rock. Other things simply will not withstand the storms that life brings. Let's learn from Jesus, listen to God's word and decide to do what he has called us to do!

Heavenly Father – Help us to listen to the words of Jesus and take them into our hearts. We want to honor you with our obedience to your teachings. Please help our words to match our actions. Please forgive us when we say one thing and live a different way. We love you and want to live our lives in respect and obedience to Jesus – Amen.