

This Present Kingdom
Week 9 – Kingdom Dwellers
Matthew 7:1-12

Jesus continues with the theme of the Spirit-filled life, not governed by religious activity, not seeking the approval of men, not gathering possessions, power or prestige, but living in earnest pursuit of personal holiness and practical righteousness for the applause of One.

We live, as Kingdom dwellers, with a dual citizenship. We are earthbound citizens of Heaven “looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10). As such, we should no longer be consumed with the things of this world.

There is an “already-not yet” aspect to the Christian life. We are already saved, but we are not yet in Heaven. We are not perfected. We are not glorified. There will always be a struggle in this life. Nevertheless, Jesus’ point is that even though we will still battle these ungodly ambitions, and even fail many times, there ought to be at least a competing desire in our hearts for the glory of God and for the kingdom of righteousness (David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*).

I. Logs, Dogs, and Hogs – Matthew 7:1-6

As with all the other elements of the Sermon on the Mount, the perspective of this passage is given in contrast to that of the scribes and Pharisees. The Pharisees had elevated themselves and demeaned those who did not live up to their particular brand of holiness, created by their religious system and not necessarily based on God’s perfect and holy law.

When an individual or a group of people develop their own standards of religion and morality, they inevitably judge everyone by those self-made beliefs and standards. The scribes and Pharisees had done just that. Over the previous several centuries, they had gradually modified God’s revealed Word to suit their own thinking, inclinations, and abilities. By Jesus time their tradition had taken such a hold on Judaism that it had actually replaced the authority of Scripture in the minds of many Jews.

Along with the many other sins spawned by their self-righteousness, the scribes and Pharisees had become oppressively judgmental. They proudly looked down on everyone who was not a part of their elite system. They were unmerciful, unforgiving, unkind, censorious, and totally lacking in compassion and grace (John MacArthur, *Matthew*, p. 430).

A judgmental attitude exposes the condition of our hearts. It reveals that we are sitting on the throne of our lives, acting as judge and jury, a position and a privilege reserved for God alone. James 4:11-12 says, “Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and destroy; but who are you to judge your neighbor?” If we foster a critical, condemning spirit, we can expect to be judged and condemned in the same way and to the same extent that we judge others.

Jesus warns His Kingdom dwellers to beware of fostering a critical, judgement spirit towards others. Paul addresses this issue in Romans 14 and provides excellent guidelines. “Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions” (Romans 14:1) “Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls, and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand” (Romans 14:4). “But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgement seat of God” (Romans 14:10).

There is a fine line between a critical spirit and a discerning spirit. This admonition does not condemn discernment based on wisdom, a necessary action which is to be guided by the Holy Spirit and guarded by God’s revealed Word.

If this greatest sermon by our Lord teaches anything, it teaches that His followers are to be discerning and perceptive in what they believe and in what they do, that they must make every effort to judge between truth and falsehood, between the internal and the external, between reality and sham, between true righteousness and false righteousness—in short, between God’s way and all other ways (John MacArthur, Matthew, p. 431).

A. Logs – Matthew 7:3-5

Jesus uses a comical word picture to make His point. Making a judgment against another is like trying to take a speck out of their eye while you have a log in your own. The word “log” refers to a massive beam to hold up the roof in the construction of a house. Our Lord ridicules the absurdity of pointing to a small splinter in someone’s eye while having an enormous piece of structural timber in your own. How preposterous!

Jesus declares the one who judges another to be a hypocrite. This term is in keeping with His caution of giving, praying, and fasting to “be seen by men” (Matthew 6:5). Jesus condemns the practice of doing the right thing (like giving, praying, or fasting) for the wrong reason. The hypocrite pretends to be more spiritual than he/she is in order to gain approval and attention.

Jesus says, “First take the log out of your own eye”. Before we even attempt to point out sin in another, we should examine our own heart and reflect on the ways that sin is lurking in our own life. That is, confess your own sin—possibly an attitude of self-righteousness and condemnation toward your brother or sister in the faith. Then you are cleansed and are able to properly help the brother/sister overtaken in a fault. A word of caution—should God instruct you to be His vessel to correct another, you should move cautiously and prayerfully. You should be prepared to instruct and admonish with love, grace, and humility for ultimate goal of restoration for God’s glory.

God’s heart is always towards reconciliation. The cross demonstrates His desire to reconcile guilty sinners to Himself. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” The ministry of reconciliation is the Kingdom principle Jesus is expounding. It springs forth from Christlike love that desires to be used to restore one who has been overtaken rather than sit in judgment of their failures.

B. Dogs and Hogs – Matthew 7:6

Jesus cautions us against being hypercritical and judgmental, but He then goes on to teach us to be discerning. Our Lord used an illustration of dogs and hogs to make His point.

In Bible times dogs were not typically regarded as pets. Dogs were mongrel scavengers who often ran in packs. They usually carried disease and were considered dangerous. It would have been unthinkable for a Jew to throw a piece of holy meat that had been consecrated as a sacrifice at the Temple to those wild dogs. Such an act would be considered blasphemous.

Jews regarded swine to be the epitome of uncleanness. Most swine they encountered were wild animals who foraged through garbage dumps on the edge of town. They were greedy and vicious. If you tossed your pearls at them as they foraged for food, they would “trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces” (Matthew 7:6).

Jesus was making the point that we are not to entrust spiritual things, valuable things, holy things to those who are antagonistic towards the things of God. We are to be discerning, not gullible and naive, able to recognize those who “take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed” (Psalm 2:2). “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God,’ they are corrupt, and have committed abominable injustice; there is no one who does good.” We are called to be “shrewd as servants and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16). This is the balancing truth when it comes to judging others. God is the supreme Judge. He is the only One worthy of judging as He knows the heart motivation behind the action. We are not to be judgmental, but we are to be wise and discerning. Failure to do so is unproductive and can cause us to be duped or deluded by those who, because of their great perversity and ungodliness, refuse the holy and precious things of God. These who reject Christ will be eternally damned and barred from entering the gates of the holy city. Revelation 22:15 says, “Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.”

II. Hide and Seek – Matthew 7:7-11

Jesus brings His hearers back to the precious gift of prayer. Our text follows the section of the sermon which includes six references to the secret place, the place where our Father resides. When you go into the inner room, close the door and pray, “your Father who is in secret” (Matthew 6:6) meets you there. To avoid being judgmental, to avoid being hypocritical, to avoid wordiness and anxiety, to avoid casting pearls before swine, go to the Father. Hide yourself away in the secret place and seek Him. “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7).

Through prayer, we acknowledge our reliance on God and move into the supernatural realm of faith. Faith has been described as dependence upon the Spirit of God, obedience to the Word of God, and confidence in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Jesus urges His followers to be unrelenting in prayer. John Phillips, in his book *Exploring the Gospel of Matthew*, says, “We must knock. That is, we must be importunate and besiege the battlements of Heaven and strike with determination at God’s door. The Lord urged us to be

importunate not because God is hard of hearing or slow to respond, but because we are sluggish and prone to give up” (John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Matthew*).

Jesus relates the spiritual discipline of prayer to a child asking his earthly father for food. If a father responds in love to his child, “how much more will your Father in Heaven give what is good to those who ask Him” (Matthew 7:11). God is a good, good Father who responds to the cry of His children. James 1:17 says, “Every good thing given, and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.” He answers with a “yes,” a “no,” or a “wait,” but He does respond to the cries of His children.

III. The Golden Rule – Matthew 7:12

Jesus declares, “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12). This great truth, commonly known as “the Golden Rule” is a principle that should govern our attitudes toward others. In every relationship, with believers or non-believers, we should seek their highest good to the glory of the Lord. Paul wrote, “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor” (Romans 12:10).

Choosing to operate in the flow of the Spirit-filled life is costly and often painful. It requires death to self, yielding ourselves on the altar of God as a living sacrifice. It requires that we defer to others as we chose to humble ourselves and quiet our own demanding self that loves to be coddled and indulged. It requires a surrendered life to Christ, exalting Him to His rightful position as Lord of all in our lives. Beloved, this is the disruptive message of the Kingdom of God! This lifestyle sets God on display in our lives and declares the joyous reality of This Present Kingdom!

Spiritual Discipline: Submission

The life that Jesus led on earth exemplified absolute submission to God the Father. As we pursue personal holiness and practical righteousness, we are called to submit to the will and way of the Lord. This is Kingdom living. Right here. Right now.

“I need to be so utterly God’s that He can use me or hide me, as He chooses, as an arrow in his hand or in His quiver. I will ask no questions: I relinquish all rights to Him who desires my supreme good. He knows best” (Helen Roseveare, Missionary Doctor, Belgian Congo, Mid 1900s from *This Present Kingdom*).