



## HG211: The Sermon On The Mount **Honouring The King**

Matthew 7:13-29

Home Group Study Notes

6 December 2020 - Revd Prof Stephen Dray



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN  
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION  
**BEFORE THE MEETING!**

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group  
with you, along with any previous notes and other  
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



### **Welcome** (10 mins) *Ice Breaker*

Now that 'Lockdown #2' is over, and Tier restrictions will be in place over Christmas, how will this affect your Christmas plans and celebrations? Is this for better or worse?



### **Looking Upwards** (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



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Home Group Sermon

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### **Setting the Scene**

In recent months we have been studying Jesus' greatest-ever recorded address; his Sermon on the Mount. Today, we bring these talks to an end as we look at Matthew 7:13-29. But before we do so, let us undertake a brief recap. Jesus has been describing to us the sort of attitudes and lifestyle that are to characterize his disciples. Put another way, he has been describing for us what we might call 'life in the Spirit'. Simply, he has been showing us the sort of people we will increasingly be as his Spirit takes up his home within us. And, of course, if his Spirit does not dwell within us we know nothing of Jesus.

With this in mind, we can look at today's passage. And what is striking about it is that Jesus does not give any new instructions as to how we are expected to live. In fact, the Sermon is essentially over. All Jesus does now is give us guidance as to how put his teaching into practice and live faithfully before him right to the end of our lives.

### **Starting the Christian Journey... and keeping going**

The first point he makes is that we will not simply drift into becoming a Christian or more and more spiritual. Two steps are required. First of all, we need to start out properly. So Jesus says, we must 'enter through the narrow gate.' If we were to update the image, I suppose we might refer to a turnstile. Many turnstiles (especially at railway stations) are so narrow that it is virtually impossible to take any baggage through with us. To do so requires we find the wide aisle or what Jesus describes as the 'broad road'. Thus, Jesus is saying that we are to start with a single goal. That goal is to enjoy the blessed life he outlines at the beginning of his sermon and at the end of which we will see God and enjoy the benefits of being citizens of his heavenly kingdom. Jesus' point, then, is that everything that does not help us to attain that goal must be left behind. It will only hinder our journey.

The second point Jesus stresses is that the pilgrim pathway is one on which we are never free from very real dangers. It is, he says, a 'narrow road' and it is very easy to wander from the path; so extreme vigilance is required. What, then, we might ask, are those dangers? I would suggest that Jesus supplies us with an answer in the main part of our text, verses 15-27, where he supplies three illustrations.

## **False Guides**

The first warning concerns false guides. Jesus knew that there are always spiritual charlatans that live off and seek to devour those who are wholehearted for him. Today they may be tele-evangelists who amass vast, obscene fortunes by preying on the vulnerable with promises of special access to Jesus and his power. They can be witnessed in church leaders who convey a veneer of sanctity but only with a view to enticing us into their power-crazed clutches. They may appear as lovely people but their agenda is to undermine the Gospel of Jesus. But Jesus himself knew that though such people present themselves as fellow-members of his flock they bring death with them: they are ferocious wolves.

This naturally prompts us to ask the question, ‘how can we spot them?’ Jesus provides one, apparently, simple answer by asking a counter-question: do these teachers reveal the fruits of a life walked in fellowship with him? The spiritual life that Jesus has described in his sermon describes something that is completely impossible without his indwelling Spirit. So Charlatans cannot match the demands of Jesus’ teaching. Thus, to return to the Beatitudes (in chapter 5:3-11), we should ask whether those who claim to represent and speak for Jesus demonstrate a genuine not feigned humility, are they tender-hearted and compassionate, are they self-effacing, do they pursue a purity of life that is more than skin deep, are they merciful, peaceable... and how do they cope with people who oppose them?

In his sermon Jesus has also discussed some of the false teaching that so often characterizes the deceiver. Essentially such teaching is self-promoting rather than God-honouring. It draws attention to self rather than Jesus- however well it is clothed. Superficially, it may seem right, even biblical, but it undermines the witness to God’s undeserved grace to sinners, putting self back on the throne. This was the fundamental error of the Pharisees, criticism of who lies behind most of chapter 5. Fundamental to their elitist message was a call to copy *them* in their belief that sufficient self-effort would assist their entry into the heavenly kingdom. There are many today who offer an apparently attractive Jesus plus message only to lead the follower into bondage to a system of belief that never quite delivers what it promises. Oh, faith in Jesus is great, they say. But if you want to go on with him, here are some additional secrets that will make you soar spiritually. However, such demands take us away from simply clinging to Jesus and to him alone.

## **False Companions**

We have to watch out for false guides; but we also need to be careful of the companions we associate with on our pilgrim journey. This is the point of verses 21 to 23. Jesus especially warns us of the danger of assuming demonstrations of apparently spiritual power are evidence of genuine discipleship. His point is that it is not spiritual pyrotechnics that reveal the genuine disciple. Rather it is humble submission and obedience to Jesus himself that demonstrates the true disciple’s DNA. So-called spirit-inspired preaching, a ministry of exorcism and miracles can be the cloak of the false disciple. These things, Jesus teaches, can characterize those who are not his. What we are to look for, then, is day-by-day evidence of a life that always seeks to put Jesus first and to follow the path he leads; however difficult that road might prove to be. We are not to be ‘wowed’ by powerful rhetoric and claims of and apparent evidence of phenomenal spiritual success. We are to be ‘wowed’ by those who, like Jesus, walk humbly in obedience to his Father and ours. It is such people (who are often to be found in obscure places and walks of life) that we are to embrace as our fellow pilgrims and guides.

## **Self-deception**

So far in our passage, then, Jesus has warned against false teachers and false companions. He ends by warning us that as pilgrims we need to watch out for self-deception. We can, he says in verses 24-27, trip ourselves up. The illustration of the two builders, their building projects and their very different fates in the face of life's storms are well-known. The challenge to build on Jesus has often been made; for some of us since the earliest Sunday School days. But if the message has been often repeated, it needs to be. Jesus' point is absolutely vital. We can build our lives (even our spiritual lives) in such a way that we seem to be doing very well.

The superstructure of the spiritual life is growing up around us and we may appear to be advancing beyond that of our companions and friends. But then disaster strikes. It may be occasioned by a dent to our ambitions, the breakdown of a relationship we cherished, the loss of a job or career, a downturn in our health, bereavement... the list can be almost endlessly extended. We are stripped of everything we had built our hopes upon. All might appear in ruins around us. And, for some, that is the reality. But for others, as the dust settles, the building is still seen to be there! However, painful the present and forbidding the future, our spiritual life sustains us and sprouts new growth- indeed growth that would have been impossible without the night through which we are passing.

Jesus' point is that disaster, however it comes, can destroy a spiritual life that lacks foundations. But for others, it is merely (!) the occasion and the setting for new, vigorous and abundant growth. Just consider those, especially older, Christians you know. Some have been to Hell and back (if they are yet back!). But look at the growth and spiritual fruit they produce; even if they are unaware of it themselves.

How is this possible? Actually Jesus repeats himself. When warning of false companions he called us to submission and obedience to his Father. He does the same here, except with a subtle change. There he referred to his Father, here he appeals to his own teaching. To submit to his words, Jesus says, is to submit to the Father. We are, then, to *really* listen to him and allow his teaching to shape our hearts, our wills and our conduct. When we have embraced his will for us as he embraced that of his Father, we will discover resources, Jesus teaches, that will enable us to find victory in the darkest hour and to discover that darkness nurtures previously unheralded and impossible spiritual growth. If we have ears to hear, hearts that are open and wills ready to obey, he will bring us through our trials to the heavenly kingdom and to that One who was the end of our journey when we set out.

## **The Final Word**

But our passage does not finish there. Briefly (in verses 28 and 29) Matthew describes the reaction of Jesus' hearers. It was amazement; but an astonishment that arose among them because of the authority with which he spoke. In the light of Jesus' teaching that Matthew has just recorded, 'authority' cannot refer to the fact that Jesus was the best preacher that had ever lived on our planet (though he was!). It seems that Matthew's point was that Jesus' words 'rang true' as those of someone who knew what he was speaking about and that his words were consistent with the sort of person he was.

In our world of spin, emphasis is placed on image and appearance. That was true of the religious leaders in Jesus' day. They presented well. But instinct revealed to the crowd who attended Jesus that it was just that: it was show. They recognized as we do, that behind the appearance is often a huge and gaping void. But that was not true about Jesus. He taught about the kingdom of God. He spoke about knowing God and people realized he had experienced what he was talking about. He walked the walk.

So we come to our conclusion. Life is a pilgrimage. For those of us who are Christians it is a journey which will end in unclouded intimacy with our Father God in his enduring heavenly kingdom. However, the journey is one that requires we set out fully equipped and one in which we go forward with our eyes wide open to the snares and dangers we will inevitably face. Jesus warns us about false guides, false companions and of self-deception. All are very real and ever present every step of our way. But he does not leave us alone. In fact, he is the supreme guide, our most cherished companion, the one in whose company self-deception is exposed for what it is. His final call is, therefore, that you and I keep close to him: dependent on his grace alone, attentive to his words, following in his footsteps and, as our intimacy deepens, revealing more and more every day the presence of his Spirit within us- a Spirit that can bring life from the darkest places – even the valley of the shadow of death.

## **Emmanuel Church Text for 2020**

*“The Lord Your God is with you. He is mighty to save.  
He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with  
His love. He will rejoice over you with singing.”*

**Zephaniah 3:17**



## **Looking Upwards** (40 mins)

### *Bible Study*

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

**1.** When I seek to reassure myself before God, what do I appeal to?

**2.** Where do you see the danger of (?sincere) false teaching in the churches today?

**3.** What does this passage teach us about the ‘cult of the Christian personality’ in today’s media? What is the value of hearing a well-known speaker? What are the dangers involved?

**4.** How does our church assess the genuineness of those who claim to be Christians? What, in practice, corresponds to ‘sand’ and ‘rock’ in our situation?

**5.** ‘Jesus was a great moral teacher.’ How would you answer a person who says this from the Sermon on the Mount?

**6.** What, out of all that we have studied during this series on *The Sermon On The Mount*. really sticks in your mind?

What has strengthened your faith the most?

What has challenged your faith the most?

What has inspired your faith the most?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## Looking Inwards (15 mins) Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



## Looking Outwards (15 mins) Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

**Emmanuel Church, Laindon Road, Billericay, Essex. CM12 9LD**

**P** 01277 632120 **E** [emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org](mailto:emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org)

**T** @EmmanuelCM12 **W** [emmanuel-church.info](http://emmanuel-church.info) **FB** [EmmanuelChurchBillericay](https://www.facebook.com/EmmanuelChurchBillericay)

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