

**The Gospel of Matthew**  
**Week Eight**  
**Matthew 7:13-8:13**

**Day One**

13 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. 15 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?

vs. 13&14 – Jesus urged the listeners to come through the “narrow gate.” There is currently broad assumptions that there are many legitimate ways to find God. Jesus seemed to indicate that this just isn’t true. John’s gospel is even more clear and specific:

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me (John 14:6).

Either Jesus was deluded, pandering to the religious thoughts of the day, or He was speaking the truth. If He was not speaking the truth, then we cannot trust anything else He said. Of course He was speaking the truth because He *was* the truth. He could do or say nothing else. So when Jesus said there is *no* other way to the Father except through Him, then that is the way it is. God has the right to set the terms by which His creation may approach Him, and those terms are through Jesus Christ.

v. 15 – Jesus warned that false prophets would come, appearing to be gentle sheep but in actuality were ravenous wolves. In this context, it seems that these prophets will promise to help people find those broad roads to God. Jesus warned people not to listen to them, but only to those who promise life in Christ.

v. 16 – Jesus gave us one indicator to help us distinguish between true and false prophets, and that is their fruit. A prophet’s life is to be observed, which means a prophet must submit to such scrutiny. Secret prophets who appear from nowhere and declare things in the name of the Lord are not to be trusted or heeded, unless we can first observe their fruit.

There is part of the body of Christ that is enamored with prophecy and prophets. I was at a meeting once when a well-known woman with a prophetic reputation “prophesied” that the church I was attending would have a fine arts school that would have “cellists from Japan,” among others, learning there. I thought this was kind of weird when I heard it, but people applauded and everyone seemed happy.

Ten years later, there is no school with Japanese cellists! **What should we do with this “word”?** **Since there was no time limit, does the word ever expire?** **Should the word have been judged and pronounced incorrect?** This woman also made a famous

prophecy about a certain African nation that it would be blessed and prosper. Right now, that nation is going through hell and the word was given more than ten years ago. **Again, is there no limit to the relevance of this word? Should it not be judged and considered to be given with the best of intentions but erroneous? I am not sure; what do you think?**

## Day Two

17 Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

vs. 17&18 – Every good tree bears good fruit and every prophet who is sent from God also bears good fruit. I would think that part of that good fruit is that the events that the prophet talks about, or in some cases predicts, come to pass. I do believe that predictive prophecy occurs, as evidenced by these two passages from Acts:

One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world And this took place in the reign of Claudius (Acts 11:28).

As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles'" (Acts 21:11).

There are only two things that need to happen when someone makes a predictive prophecy. First, it needs to be judged by those who receive it:

Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21).

Once it is determined that the prophecy is accurate, then it needs to come to pass! Every prophet must take responsibility for their words and if they prophesied in error, which can happen even to a legitimate prophet, they must acknowledge that truth.

**Do you believe that prophecy should still operate in the Church today? If so, do you believe that there must be some boundaries around the prophetic?**

vs. 19&20 – There is another aspect of fruit that must be present in the prophet's life and that is holiness. A prophet must be known by those to whom he or she prophesies, so the people can judge the fruit of that prophet's life. The prophet could also come from those whose recommendation can be trusted.

As stated earlier, I belonged to a church that was enamored with prophesy. We had what was called a presbytery where so-called prophets would come in and “minister” in teams to any and all individuals. I became less and less in favor of such events, for there was no way that all the prophesy could be judged, and there no way that the accuracy of the prophetic words could be evaluated in the long run.

I found that some people collected prophetic words as a hobby, sort of like charms on a charm bracelet, and were proud of their prophetic-collection prowess. In some ways, collecting took the place of the collector doing anything about the words except collect them. While there can be problems with the prophetic ministry in any setting, I think Paul’s command not to despise prophecy is important. We are to work with it, not eradicate it. **Do you agree? Why or why not?**

### Day Three

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 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 perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

v. 21 – Talk is cheap, especially in church. There are many who pay lip service to the Lord. There are times when I have done it myself. I have said to God, “I surrender all, Lord,” and then refused to surrender all. It sounded so spiritual and it was easy to say, but it was only an emotional declaration, without any substance.

Jesus spoke to this human tendency, which can be deceptive to the extent that some believe they will enter God’s kingdom with talk. The kingdom of God is God’s government and only those who actually submit to God’s government in their lives will enter and enjoy that Kingdom. The Kingdom doesn’t belong to those who talk about the Lordship of the Father, but it does belong to those who submit and carry out the will of the Lord.

**Into which category do you belong? Don’t answer too quickly.**

v. 22 – **To which day is Jesus referring?** He is referring to a day when we will appear before the Lord to evaluate the quality of our relationship with Him. Jesus indicated that some would have exercised spiritual gifts, but those gifts would not be an indicator of their obedience; they would have been evidence of God’s love for His people. When I read this, I always think of the story of Saul and David:

The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice (1 Samuel 18:10-11).

While Saul was prophesying, he tried to kill David. Yes indeed, spiritual gifts are *not* always an indicator of spirituality or obedience.

v. 23 – Yet how could God say He didn't know these "evildoers"? I heard it explained that it would be like a human judge in a court of law who had to sentence one of his or her children. When that judge sat in the judgment seat, he or she would not "know" their child as such, but rather as someone who stood before them to be judged by the law that the judge had sworn to uphold. That judge could say, "I don't know you as my child. I must be impartial and judge you according to your actions, not according to our relationship."

Of course, any secular judge would excuse themselves from such a scenario so that they would not be accused of preferential treatment toward their child. God has no such problem, for He is an impartial and perfect judge. So He could say to one of His creatures, "I never knew you" as He judged their behavior and speak the truth.

#### Day Four

24 "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. 25 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. 26 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. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

vs. 24-27 – I am old enough now to have some perspective on things and I have seen the long-term effects of people who built wisely and foolishly. The wise took Jesus' words and applied them with a view toward long-term success. Others looked for a shortcut and for a time seemed like they had found one. Yet, when the pressures of life or when God tested their work, their life and work were found to be shabby and shaky.

You cannot escape the fact that your work will be tested in this life. Jesus didn't say "if the winds blow" but rather "when the winds blow." Paul alluded to the same inevitability when he wrote:

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

I am especially concerned with how many seem to offer financial shortcuts to God's people. Some promise great returns for a "seed gift" of a certain amount of money. I have heard some promise the gift of wisdom if someone donates \$951, since there are 951 verses in the book of Proverbs. This is pure nonsense and is the equivalent of a spiritual lottery. People put up so much money in the hopes of "winning" a lot more money. This is what takes place in a casino and should not take place in God's business. It's true that you give and God will bless you. But there is only one way to gain wealth:

*In all labor there is profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty (Proverbs 14:23).*

You gain wealth by hard work, wise investments and the grace of God. Those who come with promises of wealth if you give a gift to their work and ministry are frauds:

*For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God (2 Corinthians 2:17).*

**What is peddler?** The dictionary defines a peddler as "one who deals in or promotes something intangible (as a personal asset or an idea)."

Don't look for spiritual shortcuts. There aren't any. Build wisely, like a master builder, and put your hope and expectations in God for the long-term. **Have you been guilty of looking for and experimenting with shortcuts, especially where money is concerned?** If so, you need to repent and change your ways.

### Day Five

28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. 8:1 When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. 2 A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." 3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. 4 Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

vs. 28&29 – The people were amazed at what Jesus said, because He spoke with such authority, like One who knew what He was talking about. This was an indication of His divinity, for who could teach on a subject more authoritatively than God? At any rate, the people were not accustomed to having anyone teach with authority and they were shocked. **I want to teach like Jesus, don't you?** When I speak, I want to speak with the authority that comes from God without being mean or arrogant. I ran across this verse in Titus the other day, and it summarizes how I want to be when I teach:

*Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain (Titus 1:7).*

I especially want to be an “authority” on the topic of purpose, without acting like a know-it-all.

8:1 – Jesus taught the large crowd from the mountainside, without the aid of an audio system. Jesus did all that He did without the aid of technology. **What should you be able to do with the assistance of technology?** Because Jesus taught with authority, a lot of people, followed Him to hear what He had to say. Yet they were about to see that not only could Jesus teach with authority, but He could also heal with authority.

v. 2 – A leprous man approached Jesus and the crowd must have held their breath. Lepers were considered unclean and were segregated from the rest of society. **This leper had the courage to approach Jesus, but how did this man now to come to Jesus? Had he just been standing in the distance listening to Jesus’ teaching? Had Jesus healed before, but Matthew didn’t record it? Did the man have insight from God that Jesus was who He was?** I don’t know which it was or something else, but this man had the courage to approach Jesus to ask for healing.

The man made a bold statement with a strange qualification – at least it’s strange to me. The man acknowledged that Jesus had the power to heal him, but the man didn’t know if Jesus *wanted* to heal him. I think many people have the same thinking. They know God *can* do anything, so they know it’s within His potential to heal. They just aren’t sure if God truly *wants* to heal them. **Do you have this question or attitude?**

v. 3 – Without hesitation, Jesus said that He was willing. Then He did the unthinkable. He touched the man! The crowd must have gasped again as they beheld Jesus risk contamination, both physical and spiritual, to heal this outcast. What a magnificent expression of God’s compassion for His creation! What a picture of God’s love! He was and is willing to touch you and meet your need. Don’t hold back; come to Him for whatever it is that you need.

Right before their eyes, Jesus healed the man instantly. He came with flesh rotting off his bones; he left with his flesh intact and clean. Hallelujah! There is nothing God can’t do. The most repulsive human condition isn’t repulsive to Him.

v. 4 – Jesus wasn’t interested in spreading the word but fulfilling the Law, which required that the man go the priest and give testimony of his healing:

The Lord said to Moses, "These are the regulations for the diseased person at the time of his ceremonial cleansing, when he is brought to the priest: The priest is to go outside the camp and examine him. If the person has been healed of his infectious skin disease, the priest shall order that two live clean birds and some cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop be brought for the one to be cleansed. Then the priest shall order that one of the birds be killed over fresh water in a clay pot. He is then to take the live bird and dip it, together with the cedar wood, the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, into the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. Seven times he shall sprinkle the one to be cleansed of the

infectious disease and pronounce him clean. Then he is to release the live bird in the open fields (Leviticus 14:1-7).

I don't know if the man went or not, but, if he did, then the leaders of Israel had another witness of God's power that they chose to ignore. Someone once said that there is no telling what God can do with people who don't care who gets the credit, only that God gets the glory! Jesus wasn't interested in showing the people what He had done, although I am sure some did see the miracle. Instead He wanted the leaders to have more testimony about His work and mission. **Are you willing to do things, good things, that only a few along with God will know about?** It's taken me many years to arrive at the conclusion that I am!

### Day Six

5 When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. 6 "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering." 7 Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him." 8 The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

v. 5 – Now we see the second instance of Jesus healing someone, but this time it involved a Gentile asking on behalf of someone else. The man was a Roman army officer and he, like the leper, also felt free to approach Jesus. **How had he heard about Jesus? What made him believe that Jesus could fulfill his request?** I'm not sure, but he came and asked for help.

v. 6 – The centurion approached Jesus on behalf of his suffering servant, who was paralyzed and in pain. This tells us a lot about the man, who had compassion on his servant. He could have thought, "It's only a servant. If he dies, I will get another." This centurion, however, had compassion and wanted to get help. I wonder if the servant was a Jew or another Gentile? We will never know.

v. 7 – Notice the confidence and authority that Jesus had. He didn't say that He would go home with the man and see what He could do. He said, "I will come and heal him!" Jesus didn't even know what was wrong with the servant, but He knew that healing lay within His divine nature, so He said He would do it. It was another example of God's power *and* willingness to heal the sick (and another indication that Jesus was God). Yet there is another aspect of this story that makes it even more interesting.

v. 8 – The centurion requested that Jesus *not* come home with him. Jesus just said He would gladly do so, but the man told Jesus it was a bad idea! Why? It was "wrong" in the man's eyes because he wasn't worthy to have someone like Jesus come into his house! He was a Gentile and aware of his sinfulness and told Jesus to perform the healing from a distance. What humility! What faith! He knew that Jesus did not have to be physically present for the miracle to take place. **How did he know this?**

v. 9 – The soldier knew that he, as a soldier, had authority designated to his position by the Roman government and commanders over him. The man knew that Jesus had authority from heaven and thus did not personally have to carry out the task, but could speak and it would be carried out for Him. Again, we see the centurion's great faith. Jesus was impressed by what He beheld in this man.

Keep in mind also that Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience. How would they perceive this account? First, this man was a Gentile and Jesus interacted with the man without hesitation. Second, this centurion saw that Jesus had divine authority. If anyone should have had such recognition, it should have been the Jews. **Was Matthew trying to stir the Jews to jealousy, as Paul later did in his letters?** Third, this is a beautiful picture of someone interceding to God on someone else's behalf, perhaps even a Gentile. **Why weren't the Jews doing the same, using their relationship with God to do the same? Come to think of it, why aren't you and I doing it more often?**

### Day Seven

10 When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. 11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour.

v. 10 – I love this verse, for it tells me that the centurion astonished Jesus. The man astonished God! What an accomplishment! **When was the last time you astonished God doing something in faith? Why not today?** Jesus proclaimed the centurion to be the faith champion of Israel! What an honor for him, but what a disgrace for Israel! No Jew could match this man's faith. Yet Jesus was to show that the faith of this Gentile was a harbinger of things to come.

v. 11 – Jesus predicted that many more people like the centurion – Gentiles – would come and take their place with Jews in the kingdom of God. The Jews, including Jesus' disciples, heard and saw again and again that Gentiles were to be a part of the Kingdom, yet they could not bring themselves to accept it. Even in Paul's ministry, there were believing Jews who insisted that the Gentiles had to follow the Law of the Jews even after their salvation experience. Paul was adamant that they did not have to follow the Law and was faithful to this revelation that Jesus announced early in Matthew's gospel.

There is no room for bigotry in God's kingdom. God welcomes all people and we must, too. There is no one who "turns God off," so to speak. **Who turns you off?** If you can name someone or some group, then you have some work to do in your heart.

**How open are you to others coming into God's kingdom? What one group of sinners would be most difficult for you to accommodate in God's kingdom of grace?**

v. 12 – Jesus announced that some Jews who thought they would see God's kingdom would not in fact see or enter it. They would be so convinced of their “rightness” or righteousness before God that they would kill Jesus to try and preserve their special standing before God.

v. 13 – After this brief teaching to the crowd that was following Him, Jesus told the centurion to go and it would be done just as he had believed. **Could we say accurately that the centurion's faith healed the servant?** The centurion got his request and the servant was healed when Jesus said the word. **What are you believing God to do for you today? Are you afraid to ask Him? Why? If so, what can you do to press through your fear to faith?**