

Matthew

Sermon on the Mount

September 01, 2024

I. Introduction

A. We have come to the conclusion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and in His conclusion He reinforces the importance of living according to everything He said – beginning with His first Beatitude (*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*), to His last statement before this conclusion (*In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*). As I read **Matthew 7:13-23**, listen carefully and see if you can agree that the essence of Jesus' message is that how we live in this life affects where we will live in the next. If this is true, then what it means is the purpose of God's gracious work and gift of salvation has as much to do with how we live in this life as were we live in the next.

B. **Matthew 7:13-23**, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are **many** who enter through it. [14] For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it. [15] Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. [16] You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? [17] So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. [18] A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. [19] Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. [20] So then, you will know them by their fruits. [21] Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. [22] **Many** will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' [23] And then I will declare to them, 'I **never** knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.' [24] Therefore **everyone who hears** these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. [25] And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. [26] **Everyone who hears** these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. [27] The rain fell, and the floods came, and

the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

C. Pray

II. God’s purpose in saving us is both temporal and eternal

A. God’s purpose in saving us is both temporal and eternal – and Jesus makes this clear in His concluding remarks by stating in five different ways that how we live in this life directly affects where we live in the next.

1. I don’t know if you have a well-defined theology of soteriology (*soteriology is the theology of the ways and means of salvation*).
 - a. But it is probable that given the influence of Martin Luther and the current popular theology within evangelicalism, you at least have a sense that salvation requires believing on the Lord Jesus Christ and trusting in His death and resurrection as the payment for your sin. And it is probable you believe salvation guarantees eternal life with God after you die.
 - b. It is also possible that you have at least a vague idea that adding any conditions to saving faith, like how you live in this life, turns the gift of salvation into that which is earned through good works rather than given as a gift in response to faith.
2. What Jesus presents in His conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount is not in conflict with salvation by faith, rather it confirms God’s purpose for saving us – for as I have said numerous times in your hearing, God saves us from the power of sin, the practice of sin, and the penalty of sin.
 - a. Saving us from the power and practice of sin is directly aimed at how we live today, in this life – which is what the entire Sermon on the Mount deals with so extensively.
 - b. Saving us from the penalty of sin is what frees us from the debt sin’s penalty holds over us – so we can live with God for eternity.
3. However, according to Jesus’ teaching from the beginning to the end of the Sermon on the Mount, how we live in this life is just as important as putting our faith in Jesus’ saving work on our behalf.
 - a. Paul affirms this in **Romans 2:13**, “For it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.”
 - b. And in **James 1:22-24** we read, “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. [23] For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; [24] for once he has

looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.”

4. According to Jesus here in **vs 13-27**, living in this life as if it is vital to be saved from the penalty of sin, but only somewhat important to be saved from the power and practice of sin results in –
 - a. Many people, including those who go to church, taking the broad road to destruction (**vs 13-14**),
 - b. It makes it possible for false prophets and false teachers to gain a foothold in the church (**vs 15-20**),
 - c. It results in rejection-shock among many in the church who have devoted their time and energy to the obviously spiritual activities of the church (**vs 21-23**),
 - d. And it causes the foolish to build their eternal security on the sand – by not living according to the teachings of Jesus (**vs 24-27**).
5. As has been said already, this theme – the uniting of how we live in this life with where we will spend eternity – is found throughout the Sermon on the Mount. For example:
 - a. The first words that Jesus speaks are “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” Obviously, the poor in spirit are those who humble themselves before God and man in this life. And because they are poor in spirit, that is humble in this life, Jesus says they have the Kingdom of Heaven.
 - b. Jesus also says “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God, and Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” The point is, these spiritual and eternal realities are given to and experienced by those who are living according to Jesus’ teaching in this life.
 - c. However, Jesus does not stop there, He goes on to say that our righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees if we are to be allowed into the Kingdom of Heaven.
6. Do you see the repeated connection Jesus is making between how we live in this life and where we spend eternity? But why is Jesus doing this?
 - a. I believe one reason Jesus emphasizes this inter-connectedness is because He saves us so we can live with God forever **AND** so we can join Him in living **like** Him and **for** Him in this world – for the purpose of putting such things as love, righteousness, compassion, kindness, meekness, and peace into our world.
 - b. Paul put it this way in **2 Corinthians 5:15**, “[Jesus] died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for

Him who died and rose again on their behalf.” The living referred to here is the life we live here and now.

- c. Jesus said it like this in **Matthew 5:13-16**, “You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Therefore, let your light shine before those around you in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”
 - d. And how are we to shine? According to Jesus’ teaching, we are to shine by (1) promoting and protecting relationships, (2) remaining faithful in marriage, (3) remaining married even if divorce seems appealing, (4) keeping our word, (5) responding with practical and realistic expressions of kindness and love toward those who forcefully mistreat us (*turning the other cheek*), (6) loving/seeking the good of both those we hold dear, and our enemies, (7) making God the focus in our religious activities rather than self, (8) being single-minded as opposed to double-minded and mixed-motivated, (9) remaining anxiety-free by trusting God to be our provider and protector, (10) judging ourselves first and foremost before judging others, and (11) treating others in the same way we want them to treat us.
 - e. In all these examples, the focus is on living godly in this life, which in my opinion makes reinforces the truth that **how** we live in the here and now affects **where** we live in eternity.
7. Finally, Jesus confirms this truth by saying, “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets,” and follows that directive with this warning, “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

B. In the Gospels, there are several stories about Jesus interacting with individuals in relation to eternal salvation. Interestingly, He did not have a “one-size fits all” response, but rather tailored His response to the person and the situation surrounding the person. Yet in spite of the differences in His response, Jesus regularly tied **how** we live now with **where** we will live in eternity. For example:

1. **John 3:1-8**: Nicodemus was born a Jew, raised in Israel, and became a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, and a teacher of Israel. What this indicates is that he had been steeped in the culture and religious beliefs and practices of Judaism. His religious mindset was that of

- a serious-minded, devout Jew. Therefore, Jesus told him that in order to have eternal life, he had to be born again. In other words, Nicodemus needed to set aside his religious education, theology, and beliefs and start again (*i.e., be born again*) in learning the truth about God and godly living.
2. **Luke 19:1-10**: Zaccheus was a tax-collector, and apparently a rich one at that. Upon encountering Jesus, he said that he would give half his possessions to the poor, and if he had defrauded anyone of anything, he would give back four-times what he had taken. In response to Zaccheus' repentance and change of life in the here and now, Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house."
 3. **Matthew 19:16-22**: Someone we know as the "Rich Young Ruler" asked Jesus what he had to do to obtain eternal life. Jesus said, "Keep the commandments." When he said he was doing this, Jesus said, "If you wish to be complete/perfect, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; than come follow me."
 4. **Luke 10:25-28**: A lawyer (trained in how to keep the OT Law) asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus responded with a question, "What is written in the Law?" The lawyer quoted the two great commandments. Jesus responded with, "Do this and you will live."
 5. My last example comes from **Matthew 25:31-46**, where Jesus tells a parable about separating the sheep from the goats. The sheep showed love and compassion to those in need, but the goats didn't. The sheep were sent into eternal life, but the goats were sent into eternal punishment.

C. In each of these examples, Jesus connects **how** we live now with **where** we will live in eternity. Does this do away with salvation by faith? No! Was this Jesus talking pre-cross and resurrection – not knowing what saving-faith would look like post-cross and resurrection? In my opinion, no!

1. Let me point out one more thing about Jesus' teaching that may help you see why He connects **how** we live now with **where** we live in eternity.
2. Four times in **John 14**, Jesus connects loving Him with obeying Him and keeping His word. The first three times, Jesus says it in the positive form, (1) He who loves me will keep my commandments, and (2) He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me, and (3) If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. The fourth

- time, Jesus says it this way, “He who does not love Me does not keep My words” (**John 14:24**).
3. The point here is that Jesus inseparably connects love for Him with living according to what He says. Could it be the same with faith?
 4. In other words, can we believe in Him, put our faith in Him, and trust in Him for eternal salvation without obeying what He says?
 - a. In my opinion, the answer is no. If we can put our faith in Him for eternal salvation without having to obey Him, it means He cares about **where** we live in eternity but not about **how** we live here and now. And we know from the OT Law, the Sermon on the Mount, and the rest of the NT that this is not true.
 - b. He cares so much about **how** we live now as **where** we live after leaving this world that He inseparably connects them in relation to eternal salvation – which is why He says, “Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.”
 5. Consider, a love that is proven by obedience is no less love, and a faith that is proven by how we live is not less faith, and a salvation that connects how we live now with where we live in eternity is no less an unearned, graciously given gift of salvation from God.

III. Conclusion

- A. We will conclude today with a few words about what is commonly called works-based salvation. The reality is, there is no such thing as works-based salvation. Anyone who thinks they can earn eternal life by doing good deeds and living a better life here on Earth has not yet come to terms with the penalty for sin – which is eternal separation from God.
 1. No amount of good works can pay that penalty. The only way to pay it is to be eternally separated from God – which is why we need a savior – someone to pay the penalty on our behalf.
 2. Therefore, the pursuit of godliness and good works in the believer’s life has nothing to do with earning salvation, but everything to do with fulfilling God’s intention in saving us now, while we are still living here on this earth. Why? Because God’s gracious work and gift of salvation has as much to do with how we live in this life as were we live in the next.