

Dr. Bill Mounce, Sermon on the Mount, Lecture 15, Matthew 7:7ff, Persistence in Prayer and Series of Twos

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This is Dr. Bill Mounce in his teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. This is session 15, Matthew 7:7 and following, Persistence in Prayer and Series of Twos.

Okay, we are in Matthew 7, verses 7 and 11, and this is the end of the first half, and this is kind of like the earlier passage where we talked about the dogs and the pearls is I tend to see it in context and flow.

It might be an independent teaching. I don't know if there's any way to really know the answer to that. But I'm going to kind of interpret it a bit in context.

And what I wanted to say is that when you look at 7, 1 to 6, it's simply not possible. That's true of all the sermons, right? In and of itself, not judging, not being censorial, whatever it is, the discernment of dogs and pigs, you know, relating to one another in love, speck and log, this stuff is hard. And so it might be that what's happening in verse 7 is that Jesus is recognizing that.

And he wants to talk about how we get the strength to persevere. So, these verses on prayer may be tied up into the demands of the previous, or maybe because it's the kind of what's going to happen in verse 13 is that Jesus is concluding the entire sermon. And so it may be that this business about prayer applies to all of the sermon.

Do you think the Beatitudes are hard? Then pray. You have to figure out the scope of it. But anyway, yeah, as I wrote here, you can't stop judging people.

Well, let me read it, ask, and it will be given. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be open for everyone who asks, receives.

The one who seeks, finds. And to the one who knocks, the door will be open. The verbal form of all these verbs emphasizes this: the ongoing process, continuing to knock, continuing to seek, continuing to ask.

So, it's all very much a process. So, one way to read this is, can't stop judging people? Well, don't give up. Continue to ask God for strength and courage.

Can't see the log in your own eye? Seek day and night for clarity to see your own sins. Don't know when to deal with the speck of sin? Knock on God's door and ask for wisdom. But whatever you do, in the words of Winston Churchill, never give up.

Do you know that story about Churchill? He was asked to go to a grade school, that I guess he had been at earlier, I think is the way the story goes. The principal got up and gave this flowering introduction about Winston, this is after the war, about Winston Churchill, and on and on. It is supposedly that Churchill's quotes are really hard to find out whether they really are true or not. A lot of stuff gets attributed to him, like Wayne Gretzky.

According to the story, Churchill got up and said, "Never, never," and he said it like 20 times, "Never, never give up." Then he turned around and sat down. The principal was embarrassed, and the kids never forgot his message of perseverance.

So, whether it's a true story or not, it's a good illustration. That's what's going on here. Keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking.

For the person who is persistent in their prayer, they will get what they're asking. You know, I think one of the questions that often comes up in the whole thing of prayers is, do I really need to keep telling God what I want? He knows, do I need to henpeck him to death and keep doing it? And the answer is, apparently, yeah. And I think this is where that often-stated principle really is true.

As you and I continue to ask, it shapes us. And as you and I continue to ask, it shapes what we request. While I still believe that prayer moves God to do what he might not otherwise do, persistent prayer also involves a lot of other things.

I think the parable in Luke 18 that Jesus taught his disciples to teach them to be persistent, if you kind of try to visualize it, it's a fascinating story. Because, remember, this is a culture of shame. If you brought shame on your family, that was the worst thing.

If you were shamed in public, if you lost face in public, that's the worst thing. So, I've heard different explanations of it. Basically, here's a judge sitting in a room, and the widow has a just cause, and he's just ignoring it because she's a widow, and he's a jerk.

In fact, I remember reading one commentary that said that probably because she was a woman, she couldn't go into the court. So, you keep having this picture of her head popping in and out of the back window, trying to get the judge's attention, yelling at him, Give me justice! Give me justice! What she was doing was shaming him. And finally, he says, I don't fear God or anyone else, but to get this old bitty off my back, I'll finally give her what she needs, what she deserves.

It's a great story. It's one I go to when people want to put too many details in parables. I say, well, if every detail must have meaning in a parable, then God's an unjust judge, and he looks at us as a nag.

And, of course, that's not the case. But the point is, just as she was persistent and moved the judge to do what was right, so also there's something about our persistence in prayer that moves God to do what he might not otherwise do. So, we keep knocking, we keep seeking, and we, I'm sorry, we keep asking, we keep seeking, and we keep knocking, and we will be answered.

I think one of them, just totally on the side, I think one of the fascinating questions is, when do you stop? I've asked quite a few people, people that I respect enough to want to learn from their prayer life, and I say, when do you get a burden and you start praying for something, when do you stop? And the answer I've uniformly got is when God removes the desire from your heart. It doesn't matter how long it takes, it doesn't matter whether you can see the prayer getting answered or not, but God will, on some of these prayers, that's part of how he changes us in the midst of prayer, is that he will remove the deep conviction that originally led you to pray. Obviously, the prayer was for another purpose, probably to change who you are and who I am.

But anyway, so there's the first message about persistence, and then the second half is about praying with confidence. Verse 9, which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? In other words, he's asking for bread, and the idea, when you think about what their loaves of bread look like, it wasn't Wonder Bread, and there's not that much difference in appearance between some bread and a stone. So the idea is, we'll give him a stone, something that looks like bread, but it'll break his teeth.

Or if he asks for a fish, we'll give him a snake. And some people talk about fish that look more like eels. I mean, what is the Greek word there? It's a standard word for fish.

But because of the comparison with a snake, some people said, if your son asks you for a fish, maybe even a fish that looks something like an eel, would you really give him a snake instead? Something that would hurt him. If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, and we understand how much more your Father in Heaven will give good gifts to those who ask Him? So the confidence that we have in our prayer life is that, just as we know how to give good gifts to our children, our Heavenly Father also knows how to give good gifts to His children. Now, the interesting twist on this is, what does Luke's parallel say? What does God give in Luke? He gives the Holy Spirit.

So again, this is one of those passages where you would want to decide whether these are the same sermon or whether they're different. Is the good gift the gift of the Holy Spirit? But the point, certainly just in Matthew, is that we can have confidence in our prayer because God is a Father, and He knows how to give good gifts to His children. I just said that if God does not hear and respond in His way and His time, He is a liar of monstrous proportions.

I know we struggle with unanswered prayers and all those kinds of things, but one of the things I keep going back to is that no matter what I ask, God hears. And no matter what I ask, God will respond in the way that He lovingly and omnisciently knows is best. In fact, some people say you raise the topic of unanswered prayer.

I say there is no such thing. Every prayer is answered. It's just answered in God's way and in God's time.

I'll tell you a crazy story. We were going to get a dock up at our cabin, and I was trying to decide where to get the right dock. And I was talking to one of the dock makers, and he was just Gabby, so we talked for a while.

He had been a Top Gun instructor in the Air Force. He said an amazing thing happened when he was still flying combat. When I was 12, I really believed that God would give me a wagon.

And I prayed and prayed and prayed for a wagon. And I was sure, I was confident, I was praying in faith that Christmas would come and there would be my wagon. Well, Christmas came, and there was no wagon.

He goes, hmm, okay. So, the next year, Christmas rolls around, and he starts praying for his wagon again. He prays, sure he's going to come.

Second Christmas comes, goes, no wagon. So, he said, okay God, you lost your chance. You lost your chance to keep your word, and I'm not going to pray to you anymore.

He said when he was about 30, he was flying an F-20 something, whatever we were using at that time. Strapped in, and doing Mach 2 and just having a hoot. Flying this \$8 million jet or whatever they cost now.

He said, "I didn't hear a voice, but it was very clear. How do you like your wagon?" He said if I hadn't been strapped in, if I hadn't been flying at Mach 2, I would have fallen on my face in thankfulness. You never know how God's going to answer your prayers.

You never know when he's going to answer his prayers or why he chooses to do what he did. But he said for me, flying a Phantom jet was the answer for my wagon. He said, you never know, right? You never know.

Any comment? There's lots of stuff on prayer, but is there anything you want to comment on or say about this passage? I did not remember that. So, he sees 9 and the following as being disconnected from the context? He sees this passage not as a teaching on persistence in prayer but as continuing to hunger the earth's kingdom, continuing to sin the demons; he uses the word beg, and humbly pleads with God to give us the undeserved privilege of entry into his kingdom. Then he goes on, two paragraphs later, and talks about how the parallel in the 11th and 13th, which refers to the Holy Spirit, also supports this interpretation that what we're seeing is the end of the eye, the end of the kingdom, as opposed to the prayer of the Lord.

So, he's actually, it's not just 9 and following, it's 7 and following, isn't it? 7 through 11. Well, it's the culmination of the sermon. The sermon started on this note, so it'd be a powerful way to end it.

He's going to move into a discussion of choosing one or the other, a house with a foundation or a house without a foundation, so this is a call to action that pertains to the sermon as a whole. It's just not a natural reading for me because it doesn't specify the object of what we're asking.

We're told to ask persistently and to ask with confidence. I'm trying to figure out how verse 12 will figure into his argument, how the golden rule fits. And I could see that as well.

When the language is so generic, and there are no textual indicators that we're not talking about asking just in general but asking specifically about the kingdom, that would be the argument against it. By the way, you see what I just did? This is the process I go through when I see something that is not what I think. If I'm being honest, I try to say, okay, what are the arguments that would propel him to that position? And I think it's just kind of a help rather than just kind of blowing something off, which is my personality, just to blow it off.

Yeah, I have to look at that discussion in Quorals. I, yeah. Right.

Yeah. By the way, whenever an author says something clearly, the reason they say it clearly is not clear. Very, very fundamental.

When you see an author saying clearly, there's an issue here. If his conclusion were as clear as he thinks it is, he wouldn't say clearly. So yes, there's a so, so clearly, the so means something.

But it's not clear what it means. But again, the strength of his argument would be, how does the golden rule in verse 12 support prayer? It doesn't. And so in verse 12, what you've got is Jesus concluding the sermon in a totally different way.

Right. I mean, there's nothing in anywhere in chapter seven. Maybe the plank.

Yeah, you could see the golden rule going back to verses one to five. You could also see the golden rule being the summation of the entire sermon because that's the point. The golden rule sums up the law and the prophets.

Jesus starts by saying, "Not a jot or tittle, what the law and prophets say is going to pass away." So, I could see a, "I'll noodle on this." I won't be here when I noodle on it, but that's interesting.

Well, yeah. And the power of the argument is in verse 12. I wouldn't say there's anything in verses 7 and 11 that they refer to asking about entering the kingdom.

But 12 changes it. I don't know. I don't know.

One of the great things about studying under George Ladd is that you become comfortable saying, I don't know. He was the first world-class scholar I ever studied under who very easily, quickly said, I don't know. I would ask him a question about the Old Testament, and he'd go, you know, I'm New Testament theology.

I don't know. He was very comfortable saying, "Here's where my focus has been." There are a lot of things I don't know.

That's okay. I don't know. I'm going to mull that one over.

Okay, we get to verse 12, then. You get to the golden rule, which is in everything.

Actually, you know what? There really should be a paragraph break at 12, shouldn't it? Does your Bible have a paragraph break at 12? Who said yes? What translation? ESV. Okay, good. I think I'm going to go argue for a paragraph break at 12 because whatever it applies to, it doesn't apply to verses 9 to 11 only.

Right? Okay, alright. This is going to be an easier thing for me to do is to get a break if all those other ones are doing the same thing. I'm sorry, just a second.

Alright. I got a text from my wife, and I'm kind of watching her closely because of everything that happened with Kirsten. It's okay. Okay.

So, I would say a new paragraph. In light of everything I've said, all this discussion of the exceeding righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, the acts of piety, the call to

undivided loyalty when it comes to money, not worrying but trusting in me, of not taking over my role as judge but not judging. Let me sum all this up.

What have I been saying? Do to others what you want them to do to you. If you simply do that, you've summed up you have fulfilled all of the law and the prophets. Now again, some people, by the way, hook 12 into 7 and 1 to 6. I don't want people to be judgmental of me, so I'm not going to be judgmental of them.

The problem is there's been too much discussion between those verses to draw too tight of a connection, I think. So, what are... Let me say some things about the Golden Rule. Law and prophets are a standard Jewish way of referring not just to the Torah and the Nevi'im but to the entire Old Testament.

It bookends well, beautifully, as I've said, with the statements positive about the law and the prophets back in 5.17-20 and Jesus fulfilling it and showing us how we can fulfill it in our way as well. This is what deep obedience looks like. Deep obedience is a deep conviction that however I want to be treated, that's how I should be treating others.

It's interesting that the Golden Rule is found all over the place, right? It's not a peculiarly Christian statement, although, as far as I know, it's always stated in the negative everywhere else. So, Hillel, the rabbi, was asked to summarize the law, and he said, what is hateful to you, do not do to anyone else. That's the formulation of the Golden Rule. Everywhere else, you get it.

And when you state it negatively, it reduces Christianity to what you don't do. And I think Christianity is much more about what you do. Jesus' formulation of it causes positive actions, not just doing, not just, there are too many negatives here, not just not doing bad things but doing good things.

So, the positive formulation of this is very important. I read somewhere, maybe in Quarrels, about a potential overlap between the greatest commandment and the Golden Rule. The greatest commandment is to love God and love others.

So loving God enables you to love your neighbor. You can't truly love your neighbor if you don't love God. But as you love God, you will love your neighbor.

What does that love of your neighbor look like? It means you treat them the way you want them to treat you. So, it's kind of an interesting commandment, a way to think through how I would join the greatest commandment and the Golden Rule. Actually, I remember seeing that at Saddleback, Rick Warren's church, they have a big glass part of what the person, you go through, and you go into their foyer. He would call it a foyer.

And as I'm recalling, it's etched in the glass, the Golden Rule and the greatest commandment, and putting them together. It's pretty powerful. But I think it's our love for God that enables us to love others, right? It's our love for God that enables us to treat other people as we want to be treated.

We love because God first loved us, right? So, there's something about connecting the greatest commandment and the Golden Rule. One of the most important things I've learned from John Piper is you cannot impart what you don't possess. You cannot love in this way, apart from experiencing the love of God.

For Christians, let me just paraphrase it that way. We are able to keep the Golden Rule. We have experienced God's love in our life.

God's love in our life is transformative. And so, we learn, and we love. Okay? I've been trying to learn not to say okay every other sentence.

That's all I've been doing. Okay? I knew you were going to say that. Okay, we get to... I don't have another word for um.

And I'm not allowed to say um. Have you ever been to Toastmasters? You know what Toastmasters is? I really encourage every pastor to go to Toastmasters. When we moved to Washougal, we were intent on making sure that no more than half of our friends were Christians.

We really wanted to cultivate a large group of friends that aren't Christians. And Robin was wanting to speak more, so that's what Toastmasters is all about, learning how to speak. And she has a wonderful chapter of Toastmasters where she goes, they are loving, they are kind, they want the other person to succeed, they will point out issues, not being sensorial, in another person's speech, never in a critical way.

And I realized that she was getting used, at least to her chapter of Toastmasters, it was, this is the best church I've ever seen. It was everything the church is supposed to be. Everything the church is supposed to be, except for Christ, because you can't talk about him, was at Toastmasters.

It was really amazing. But Robin has really cultivated her ability to speak. So when you give your speeches, there are grammarians who are ticking off every grammatical error you make.

There's one person who does nothing but count how many times you say um. Now I don't. I don't think I say um, but they would be ticking off, so okay. That's my kind of verbal pause.

But I've watched Robin grow as a public speaker, and I just really, really urge you all, as a way to have non-Christian friends and as a way to hone your ability to put a talk together; Toastmasters is great. And I hope that you get as good a chapter as Robin has, and it'll be a model for what maybe church will be someday. Anyway, that's my other verbal pause.

Anyway. We come to the final section of the Sermon on the Mount, starting at 7:13. And the point in this is Jesus wants to drive one fundamental point home. The kingdom has to be entered.

It's not enough to hear it, but a decision has to be made, an action has to be taken, you have to do something. And so what Jesus does is close with a series of twos. There's a story of the two paths.

There's a story of the two kinds of trees. The story of the two houses on different foundations. And there are two destinations or two consequences.

So, it's a whole series of twos, and each one of these makes a slightly different point, but they're all making the same basic point, which is that it's not enough to hear the sermon; you have to make a decision and act. So, he begins with the metaphor of the two gates and the roads, and as I'm sure I've mentioned to you, this is a powerful, powerful image. The book I'm writing right now is extrapolating what it means to have a gate and a path.

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, here's a horrible, horrible mistranslation on the NIV. It says, but small is the gate. It's the same word.

The NIV understands that English tends not to repeat itself. English tends to use synonymous terms to keep variety, and that's what they're doing. But it makes you wonder, well, at first, the gate is narrow, and then the gate is small.

Is that different? And I'll bet you someday it won't say small. I just bet. But narrow is the gate, and difficult, which is what it should be, difficult the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Actually, when I preach on this, I usually have to switch to the ESV because the ESV has all these words right. Anyway. Anyway.

The picture, this is what I talked about. Weren't any of you in commencement? Okay, so I want to make sure I wasn't repeating myself. This is such a powerful image, and what Jesus wants you to do, in essence, is close your eyes and get two images.

Well, get an image in your head. And in that image in your head, there's a great, big, huge gate. Maybe these ticket booths we go through at full speed because we have sensors in our bumpers.

Just these wide-open gates. On the other side of it is a six-lane freeway. And it's an easy road, it's easy to travel on, because in the language of Beatitudes, you don't have to admit your spiritual depravity, you don't have to mourn over your sin, you don't have to be submissive to God, you don't have to worry about purity of heart.

It's an easy road to travel, right? These people, and the bulk of the people, choose to go in that direction, and they have a lot of friends on the road. And what I like to say is, what's the theme song of the people on this broad road to perdition? That's not the King James, but it's a metaphor that's in my head. The road to perdition.

I'm not talking about the movie, either. But that's what this road used to be called in older English, I think. Well, you know what the theme song is? I'm obviously extrapolating out.

I think the theme song on this road is Invictus. Out of the night that covers me, black as the pit from pole to pole, I thank whatever gods may be for my unconquerable soul. Do you know this poem? In the fell clutch of circumstance, I have not winced nor cried aloud.

Under the bludgeoning's a chance, my head is bloodied but unbowed. I forget how the next one starts. In the... Anyway, the final line is, It matters not how straight the gate is, It matters not how punished... If I get into a role, I'll say it.

How charged with punishments it scrolls, I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul. That's Invictus. When I quote it, and usually I get through it, it's a powerful song because the world's going, Yeah, I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.

I don't care about the fell clutches. I used to keep it with me. Anyway, you go through Invictus, and you go, the world says, yeah, that's exactly right. So that's the theme song going down that road.

I really blew that illustration, sorry. Anyway, off to the other side, I kind of, in my mind, envision it really kind of off the beaten path, just a little gate, a very narrow gate. One that's easy to miss, but you can still see it.

And you look past it, and it's not just a narrow road. It's a difficult road. They haven't leveled the highway, and they haven't leveled the mountains. It's up and down and around and through.

It's a difficult path, and every once in a while, you can see a few bands of travelers on it. But it's going to life, not destruction. And so the theme song is, Nothing in my hand I bring, but to thy cross, I cling.

It's a totally different song. Jesus is painting that picture, and it's saying, "Choose."

I read about an older preacher, and the preacher wasn't identified, so I don't know who it is. But he referred to the two signposts as the first of the two beatitudes. It's kind of an interesting picture.

One post is about the poverty of spirit, and the other post is about mourning. And the gate is Jesus, right? I am the door, Jesus says. And the path to life is going through this very narrow gate.

And I like to, again, as I extrapolate out, I tend to think of this gate as a turnstile. You can only go one person at a time, and you can't take any baggage through it. You've got to leave your self-sufficiency.

You've got to leave your pride behind. You've got to shed all of that because otherwise, you can't go through the gate, right? Because the gate is an admission to spiritual depravity and mourning over our sin. But you must go through the gate, one person at a time.

Did you ever see the movie, For Pete's Sake? It was going around when I was a little kid. And they had movies back then. Of course, you probably didn't go to the movies.

But this was actually shown in a church. So, somehow that was okay. Huh, never thought about that.

Anyway, Pete was a non-Christian, but his wife had become a Christian. He has this great line in the movie.

He goes, well, it's kind of like the family plan. Mom and Dad were Christians. My wife is a Christian.

I'm going to get in on the family plan. And the answer is, no, the gate's narrow. One person at a time.

There's no family plan involved. The path, on the other side, is the path of discipleship. I just think it is a very, very powerful image.

One of the things I would like to point out is where life is. Life's not on the other side of the gate. Life's at the end of the path. And I want to be careful of pushing Jesus' imagery too far.

But the church is full of people. Not everyone. But the church is full of people who think that the gate is necessary and the path is optional.

I think that is the essence of the problem of the American church. They think that the gate is necessary, but the path is optional. My Uncle George used to say to my dad, Bobby, I'm going to take a front seat on earth and a back seat in heaven.

And the answer is, Uncle George, there are no back seats in heaven. You can't do that. You can't get through the gate, get your get-out-of-hell-free card, think that you can live any kind of life you want, and somehow you're going to make it into heaven.

I do not believe in once saved, always saved. I think it is a horrible state. But I am only here to accept once used as an excuse to sin.

I can live any way I want because once saved, I will always be saved. I've heard of preachers preaching that if you just sign the rule book of this church, the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, you can live any kind of life you want. It doesn't matter, you're going to go to heaven.

And I believe in the perseverance of faith, is how I say it. I don't even really like to doctrine the perseverance of God. God does persevere, but the way God perseveres, 1 Peter 1, is that he continues to enable us to respond in faith.

And so, because faith is persistent because the Holy Spirit is a down payment, the absolute guarantee of the salvation we are going to receive, I don't believe you can lose your salvation. That's why I'll never ultimately be a good Wesleyan. I just don't think the Holy Spirit's going to fail at one of his primary tasks, Ephesians 1. But I do believe that the path is absolutely necessary.

In the relationship of justification and sanctification, we dare not keep them too far apart. I understand that in view of Jewish legalism, in view of Roman Catholicism, there have been historical times in which we had to firmly distinguish justification, how we become right with God, from sanctification, and how we experientially become right. But when those two things, I believe, are separated too far, we get nothing but sin.

Nothing but sin. So, I just love the imagery. There are so many things.

And what I encourage your fellow students to do at commencement, and what I do whenever I share this. We all have images that control our thinking. And it's the subconscious images that are the real problems. Because we think that we're making just, okay, here are three reasons why I'm going to do it, so this is the way I'm going to do it.

And that's never the case. We always have things pushing and pulling on us, don't we? So, I tend to see, do not judge, as interpretation number three because of my experience. But we always have stuff pulling and pushing on us.

But the main example is if you had a sexually abusive father if your wives had a sexually abusive father, or deacon, or elder, or uncle, it's usually one of those. They have a terrible image of what a father is. And it's almost impossible for them to process our Father who is in heaven.

I mean, they can't process it. They may not know why, but it's the image that controls how they think. Whereas if you've had a great dad, a loving father, then when you come to read about the love of our Father God and the Lord's Prayer, you go, yeah, that's easy.

The challenge is that images are so strong that I believe the image for every pastor should be the gate and the path. The Great Commission is evangelism and discipleship. Anyone who says the Great Commission is evangelism needs to read their Bible.

There's only one command in the Great Commission. It is to make disciples. It's the only command there is.

And you make disciples baptizing and teaching. Baptism is election. Election.

You like that? Baptism is conversion, and teaching is discipleship. And a Great Commission church is both a mile wide and a mile deep. There is no biblical mandate for a mile wide and inch deep church.

It's not the Great Commission. So, I just, there's a gate, and there's a path, and life is at the end of the path. Change people; live change lives. However, you want to say it.

I encourage that to be your motivating image of what your ministry is. We've got to get people, well, we're going to play our role in the Spirit moving people through the gate and we're going to play our role with the Spirit in helping people move down the path. Both are essential, and both are necessary.

If you don't walk the path, I'm not the judge. I'm not going to be either sensorial or judgmental. But I do know that that person has no assurance of salvation at all.

Of the three tests of assurance, and it's the combination of all three together, the assurance that comes from a changed life is pivotal. In fact, I think we're going to talk about that in just a bit. Anyway, it's a powerful image, one that I'm deeply invested in.

Hopefully, in about a year, you'll be able to pick up a book and see the details behind it. I can finish the Greek book I'm working on and then get to this thing. Ten of the 13 chapters are written.

And I just got to a point spiritually where I couldn't write about God. And so I just set the book aside and I'm back ready to finish it now. Anyway, okay, so this is the image, the gate, and the path.

And then what Jesus follows up with are two dangers along the path. I think they're connected. It makes sense.

The first one is false prophets. He says, "Watch out for false prophets." I think the idea is to watch out for false prophets as you're walking along the path.

They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly, they are ferocious wolves. By the way, you know the expression sheep in wolf's clothing. Do you know where it ultimately comes from? It's an Aesop's fable. It's a very, very old image.

And do you know what happens at the end of Aesop's fable, of the wolf in sheep's clothing? The shepherd kills the wolf. So, when you think about Acts 20, about men arising from our midst, wolves in sheep's clothing, who will take away, if possible, that of the elect, the shepherd's role is to kill the wolf. Just throw that out.

So, they come into you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly, they are ferocious wolves. And then he extrapolates. By their fruit, you recognize them.

Not by what they appear to be but by what they actually produce their fruit. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Of course not. Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, and a bad tree bears bad fruit.

Again, don't push the analogy, right? Don't push it. We had a couple of really good orange trees in southern Cal. Maybe there are some bad oranges on it, but you don't push the analogy.

As a general rule, good trees give good fruit, bad trees bear bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. And then he adds a warning.

Every tree that does not bear good fruit, these would be people not walking the path; every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire, and thus, by their fruit, you will recognize them. In other words, as you're walking along the path, you're going to come across false teachers. You're going to come across false prophets.

And their fruit is that, and again, you've got to read between the lines or whatever you want to call it. These are people who are going to say that the gate's not narrow. Like maybe everyone ends up in heaven.

There is some response, please. Right? That would be a false teacher. People who say the path is not optional.

No, I wouldn't say it's optional. I would say it strongly. The path is optional for all prophets.

I know there's theological debate, blah, blah, blah. I just think it's optional. These are people who come into our church wearing the clothing, saying all the right things, and doing all the right things, but they appear to be the natural enemy of the sheep.

It's interesting. In describing the same thing in 2 Peter 2, 1 talks about cowards secretly coming in. In Jude 4, it's they.

These are people who come into our church wearing the clothing, but they appear to be the natural enemy of the sheep. It's interesting. In describing the same thing in 2 Peter 2:1 talks about cowards secretly coming in.

The Christians are your people. All you have to do is really look carefully at their fruits. You have to look at their lives.

What is it producing? What are they teaching? Please, do not be tricked by these people. Paul tells Timothy that Timothy was surprised by the strength of the opposition in Ephesus when he went there. And Paul basically says in 1 Timothy, what's the problem? ...about this is going to happen.

In the end, things are going to get difficult. So, the first of two dangers is false prophets that we meet along the road. The second one is verses 21 to 23.

These may be the scariest words in all the Scripture. Right? I mean, these are terrifying words. I remember when my daughter first read them, she came home from youth group or something, and she was just flat-out scared.

Because she thought, well, Daddy, what if this is me? Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, in other words, not anyone who claims to be on the path towards life. 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.

And this goes back beautifully to 5:20, doesn't it? To deep obedience. Your righteousness has to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. The only ones who are going to get into heaven are those who truly do the will of my Father.

Now, the Pharisees obviously aren't doing the will of God. Otherwise, they wouldn't have set up the sermon the way that he did. But what also does not necessarily indicate that a person is doing the will of God? Well, many will say to me on that day, which is the day of judgment, right? Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not, in your name, drive out demons? Did we not, in your name, perform many miracles? Okay, these are people, and there's no indication that these things weren't true.

That's what's scary. So, these are people who claim to be prophets, claim to be experts, claim to be miracle workers, and Jesus never refutes that. He simply says, then I will tell them plainly, let me say it so even you can understand: I never knew you.

Away from me, you evildoers. So, whatever the will of God is, just because we're prophesying and miracle-working and exercising, that's not necessarily the deep obedience that Jesus requires. Deep obedience means loving your neighbor as you love yourself.

The deep obedience is spiritual depravity, mourning, and all these things that we've been talking about. Have you all read *Pilgrim's Progress*? *Pilgrim's Progress*? If you haven't, you're really short. It's been, I've heard it's the second most published book in the history of publishing behind the Bible.

Spurgeon read it 104 times. Okay, maybe he figured it out by that time, yeah. There are modernizations of it, but the modernizations usually don't have all the verses that Bunyan put into it.

And some of the modernizations skip pretty big chunks of it, so I think it's worth it to get an older one. The English is really hard to follow, but it's really worth digging your way through. And there's a character in here, and I think his name is Hope.

Is that the last character we read about? Is that Hope? No, that's too positive a name. Anyway, it's an allegory of the Christian life. The man leaves his home, goes through a gate, and is on the narrow road to the celestial city.

It's a great story. Partway through the journey, he meets a character who asks him, "Where's your certificate?" The certificate is something that a Christian gets when he goes through the gate. The character says, "Well, I don't have one."

Well, you have to have one if you're going to get into the celestial city. No, no, no, I'll travel the path. I'll be able to get in just fine. And Christian says, no, you're going to have to have the certificate that you get at the gate.

They part company because Christian is uncomfortable with this person. You get to the end of Christian's life, and again, I shouldn't remember the names, but he's with a friend. He's getting ready to cross the river, which is allegorical for death.

There's a great scene. He just gets terrified. He's absolutely terrified to die.

It's a crisis of faith, and his friend walks with him. Finally, Christian gets through the river, and he gets on the other side, and there is a party waiting for him.

And they take him up to the celestial city, and I often think of it like the Wizard of Oz. They knock on the gate, and this little door opens, and the gatekeeper goes, where's your certificate? And Christian hands it to him, and they go in, and the party continues in the celestial city. It's a wonderful story of dying and meeting Christ.

Well, that's not the end of the story. At the end of the story is this other character that Christian met earlier crosses the river. There's no one to meet him on the other side.

And he goes to the gates of the celestial city, and he beats on the door, and finally, the door opens, and the grumpy old gatekeeper, at least that's how I hear it, says, where's your certificate? And he says I don't have one. And the gatekeeper slams the door, and there's another gate that opens up, and it's right close to the celestial city, and it's the gate to hell. And it opens up, and you hear the demons coming up and grabbing this character and dragging him, screaming and kicking to hell.

And Bunyan, I've seen different endings of Bunyan, but this is the version that I read. The very end is the gates to hell are right next to the gates to heaven. It's a powerful story.

Ignorance. Thank you, that makes better sense than hope, yeah. That's a powerful story that there is a gate we have to go through.

We have to have the confession. We have to have the conversion experience, the mountaintop kind of experience. And those are good things, but there's also the path.

We have to have both of them together. And the way Bunyan extends the metaphor, if you go around the gate and try to travel the path, or if you travel the path and you fall off the path, because you never went through the gate, sorry, reformed, you're not going to make it. You're not going to make it.

So, it's this combination of going through the gate, being changed to the gate, so that if you are a prophet or an exorcist or a miracle worker, it's not fake; it's part of what it is to walk the narrow, difficult path. By the way, the path's narrow; more importantly, it's difficult, and the Greek word carries the nuance of persecutions, which is why it's difficult. It's a difficult, narrow path because Christian discipleship is the path of persecution.

There are many pits of despair along the way. There are many pits of despair. The first one, is the first one that he falls into called the pit of despair? Yeah, it's really, you know, he gets through it, and then what so often happens to a new Christian? They get discouraged.

By the way, did you hear me switch to they when I said that? Yeah, I didn't think so. The person goes through and they often get discouraged, and, see, you didn't pick it up either, and what happens? They fall into the pit of despair. They fall into a swamp.

The word he uses is more of a swamp word. And God sends along a character into our life to encourage us to pick us up and to help us get back on the path and to get going. It's a great, great story.

But this is a scary passage. But what it means is that the deep obedience that God requires is not necessarily these spectacular feats that will get you on cable television, right? Get you great followings. But it's not necessarily, and those are not necessarily the will of God.

The will of God is all the other things that he has specified in the sermon. Again, Jesus is not speaking to the person who is sincerely and humbly, periodically is examining himself or herself, who is alarmed when there's sin. I mean, it's, I'm sorry, I'm reading the wrong notes.

I didn't think that was right. Sorry, my notes are not making any sense to me. Just a second.

I was waiting for that. This passage is not to strike fear in the hearts of people who are cognizant of walking the path, who periodically may fail, who stumble, who fall, who get off the path and come back. We call it backsliding.

These people are so confident in what they're doing that they're not really aware of what God requires of us, starting with the depravity of spirit. So, if you have friends who are afraid that they're going to be these people, the fact that they're afraid tells you that they're not—final judgment.

One, there are those who may have appeared to walk along the narrow path of the kingdom, and as they walk, they've done many spectacular things. On the other hand, there are those who may have walked along the narrow path of the kingdom. On the other hand, there are those who may have walked along the narrow path of the kingdom, and they've walked along the narrow path of the kingdom, and they've walked along the narrow path of the kingdom, and are understanding more than they want to be treated. These are those who have done everything else in the sermon, not just these spectacular feats.

Okay? Okay? Alright. Then we get to the final point, which is this famous metaphor for the two houses. Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice... Okay, that's the point, right? You can't just hear it. You've got to do it.

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. That's the person who hears the words of the sermon and does the will of God by putting them into practice.

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish... Is that Raka 27? Oh, it's Moray. He's using that third word, Moray. He's 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. It doesn't actually say it, but I heard a preacher preach on this a couple years ago, and it's embellishing the story a bit, but his point was both the houses look the same. It doesn't say it, but let's pretend.

These two houses look the same, don't they? You can't see the foundation. That's the part you can't see. They've got these two houses.

It sounds like they were the same, but it's not until the challenges of life come that you find out what it's built on. Whether it's the foundation of hearing and doing the Word of God or just listening and not doing, it all depends upon the foundation.

And that is the person who will withstand the storms of life. There's a very, very powerful... I wish I knew where it was. It's a YouTube, I think.

It's a story that John Piper tells. It's an interview with the man, actually, whose daughter was killed by a driver at an intersection. It didn't stop.

When the girl was killed, the father ran over and cried out with the words of Job. The Lord gives, the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

And the point that John's making in the YouTube is that you don't just one day cry that out. This is something that you have to prepare for. You have to learn.

You have to build a house, right? You have to hear the words of God. You have to do them. So that when the storms of life do come, you'll be ready for them.

It's really powerful to hear the dad tell the story. But the only way to be able to tell that story is to get ready. So, we build our houses; we walk our paths, we love our neighbors as ourselves, we treat others as we want to be treated, and we push toward undivided loyalty to God.

In all the teachings of the sermon, we take His words and we put them into practice so that when the storms of life do come, the house will stand. If we do not do the hard work before, the house won't stand. The house won't stand.

.....
They will come, and we have to walk the path. It's a path of joy, but it's a difficult path. And it is a path that prepares us for the storms.

It's hearing the Word of God and doing it. So, when the storms come, we don't lose our faith, and we're able to encourage others as well. Earthquake in Haiti, houses side-by-side, some stood, some fell.

It's all about the foundation. We could probably come up with a lot of parallels to emphasize this, but this is what's so wrong with churches that only preach salvation. They never get anyone past the gate.

Storms of life are going to come. There's a reason that 93% of the people, according to Barna, who go through a church conversion experience walk away from their faith. 93%.

And that was 10 years ago. When I was pastoring, I lived in Barna. I loved the numbers.

It helped give... Whoa, really? 93%. 93% of people who go through a conversion experience are not saying they were or were not really Christians, but they went through the experience, walked away from their faith, walk away from the church. Because they're not ready for the storms.

They're not ready for the storms. You can only hear John 3:16 so many times preached. Someone's got to give meat to our people.

That would be you. Verse 28, I'm not... I'm in the process of changing my opinion on the actual Jesus of this. Normally, people point out, well, the scribes and the Pharisees, they just quoted one another, and well, you know, Rabbi so-and-so said this, and Rabbi so-and-so said that, and Jesus spoke with clarity.

And, you know, in a very relatively simple style, straightforward, except for those parables. But I think the primary difference between Jesus and the scribes is that Jesus spoke with the authority of God. And that He simply said, this is the way it is.

He didn't wave His hands, switch into a preacher's voice, use powerful illustrations, or begin His stories with jokes. You can tell what I think about preaching styles. It's all about Him.

Stott says, it would be hard to exaggerate the staggering egocentricity of Jesus' claims. Right? Just staggering egocentricity. And I think that what people understood was that this isn't an issue of style.

That this is an issue of Jesus speaking with authority, and He's saying, you have to accept me. That I am my own authority. Nothing else gives me authority.

I am my authority. You have heard it said, but I tell you. Jesus is claiming the right to pronounce God's blessing in a beatitude.

The right to condemn the religious leaders. The right to reinterpret, or to properly interpret the Old Testament. That's the authority that Jesus had.

And people saw that there was a difference. Because there was a difference in Him. So let me just conclude with this.

That my challenge to you all is, what kind of pastor are you going to be? And what kind of church do you want your church to be? If you're going to be a beatitude church, you'll probably be a smaller church. It's going to be a challenging church. You're going to understand more clearly that you're at war.

You're going to have to adopt a wartime mentality approach to things. It's a hard road to go. Or, you cannot be a Sermon on the Mount kind of church.

You cannot be a beatitude kind of person. And you cannot be at war with Satan. And not be at war with the evil around you.

Why, you could even be a friendly church. And just invite people in. And lull people into complacency and into hell.

I think the Bible doesn't say this, but I think that every preacher should have to stand at the judgment seat as God passes judgment on every person in your church. Because I can't imagine anything worse than watching one of your parishioners come up to the throne and Jesus says, Depart from me, you worker of iniquity. I never knew you.

And as that person is being taken to hell, have him turn and look at you and say, But I did everything you told me to do. I think that is a motivating image that should give you passion to preach the truth, to preach the whole gospel, and to not give in to the whims of so much of the junk that's around us. You will be put up on a pedestal so they can get a better shot at you.

It will not be an easy, pleasant, and at one-level parish experience. But if we could just get in our mind that the eternal fate of souls sits before us, it gives us strength to preach the full gospel. So, I'd really encourage you to decide what kind of church do you want. What kind of preacher do you want to be? Are you the kind of preacher that can preach, tell your, if you say Raka to your brother, you're liable to the judgment of hell and have him come back the next week and say, I've forgiven you because I question my faith.

Say, well, good. Do you call your brother Rocca much? I mean, I just think these are the challenges we all have to make. I'd encourage each and every one of you to be a Sermon on the Mount kind of pastor and to cultivate a community where we truly love one another and care for one another as we're called to.

All right. So, thanks. Appreciate it.

This is Dr. Bill Mounce in his teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. This is session 15, Matthew 7:7 and following, Persistence in Prayer and Series of Twos.