

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 9,

Matthew 7-8

Podcast Audio Overview

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Welcome to our deep dive into Matthew chapters seven and eight. We're going through some of these excerpts from Dr. Craig Keener's lectures. It's a lot to cover.

There is, there is. So much good stuff. And I was immediately fascinated when he dives right into the Lord's Prayer.

And this idea that it was actually rooted in a common Jewish prayer called the Kaddish. Right. That kind of blew my mind, I have to admit.

I always kind of thought of the Lord's Prayer as uniquely Christian. Yeah. And to learn that it's, you know, adapted from an existing Jewish prayer.

I mean, is that unusual? It's not unusual. No, it was a very common practice to adapt existing prayers or liturgy for new purposes or to sort of fit them in a new situation. And of course, this prayer is situated within the Sermon on the Mount.

So it's fascinating to think about the context there and what Jesus is really emphasizing. Yeah. And I like that he brings that in, you know, the idea that, okay, maybe he's adapting this.

He's using something that would have been familiar to his listeners. But then he's adding this new layer of meaning. And that's what I find so fascinating about, you know, Keener's approach to this material.

He's always looking at that historical context to shed new light on these familiar passages. Absolutely. Yeah.

That really resonates with me too. Well, and one of the things that I was really intrigued by was the phrase, our Father, that idea of seeing God as a provider. And I'm curious, does that diminish the personal aspect of our relationship with him? I mean, is it just about, you know, seeing him as this distant figure who's sort of taking care of our needs? Or is there more to it than that? That's a good question.

And it really speaks to, I think, how our understanding of God has deepened over time. You know, in the ancient Jewish context, our Father really signified a loving provider, someone who cared for his people. And this doesn't negate a personal relationship, but it really emphasizes God's faithfulness and dependability.

And, you know, we have to remember the concept of God as a loving Father was revolutionary at the time. That's true. It was a radical idea.

And so this, you know, understanding of God as a provider, I think it's central throughout the Old Testament as well. Yeah. And I like how Keener points out that you petitions in the Lord's Prayer.

He says they're super emphatic in the original Greek. Yes. And, you know, I'm not a Greek scholar, so I have to take his word for it.

But, you know, he's highlighting, you know, this focus beyond just our own personal needs. Right. And it's repeated, you know, several times throughout the prayer.

It's almost like a drumbeat to remind us that we should be praying, not just for ourselves, but for God's will to be done, for his kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. You know, and that's a big that's a big prayer, right? It's a big ask. It is.

It is. And it makes you realize that, you know, this prayer is not just about me and my little tiny problems. You know, it's about aligning ourselves with something much bigger.

And, you know, speaking of bigger, did you catch that little tidbit where he mentions that the familiar ending for yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory that was likely added later? It's not in the earliest manuscripts. I know. Yeah.

A later edition. It is. And, you know, it makes you wonder, you know, what other subtle changes have occurred over the centuries as, you know, scribes were copying and recopying these texts.

But let's maybe shift gears a bit. You know, one of the things that really resonated with me from Keener's lectures was his challenge to reconsider our relationship with possessions. And, you know, this is something that's always been a, you know, a point of tension for me.

Right. You know, we live in a culture that's so driven by consumerism. And, you know, it's easy to get caught up in that.

But, you know, what did you take away from his discussion on that topic? Well, I think it's interesting because he points out that, you know, within Judaism, wealth was actually viewed as a positive thing. You know, you could use it to help others to support the community. But there was also this cautionary side to it.

Right. You know, this idea that wealth could become a stumbling block spiritually. It could distract you from what's truly important.

And he goes even further with that when he talks about the Essenes. You know, this group who abandoned all private property. Right.

It's kind of an extreme example. I'm not sure I'm ready to give up all my stuff. But it does make you think.

Yeah, it makes you think about, you know, what would it look like to truly prioritize people over possessions? Yeah. Yeah. I mean, how much of our time and energy and resources are we pouring into things that ultimately don't really matter? And I think that's a question that Keener really wants us to wrestle with.

And I think it connects to, you know, this idea of seeking first God's kingdom and his righteousness, which Jesus talks about. You know, it's not about neglecting our responsibilities or, you know, not working, not providing for our families, or not managing our resources wisely. Right.

But it's about doing all of that with a different perspective, with our hearts focused on God and his purposes rather than just accumulating stuff. Yeah. And this is this is where I think, you know, rubber meets the road.

Right. Yeah. It's like, how do we actually live that out in a practical way? And I think it's going to look different for every person.

Yeah. You know, but it starts with that internal shift, you know, of aligning our desires with God's desires. And that's a lifelong process, isn't it? Yeah, it is.

Absolutely. Yeah. OK, well, we're going to have to pick this up in the next segment.

There's so much more. There's so much there's so much more to talk about. And I know we also want to get into, you know, this whole idea of judging others, which is something that, you know, we all struggle with.

But for now, let's pause here. Welcome back to our deep dive into Matthew chapters seven and eight with Dr. Craig Keener. Before we paused, we were talking about material possessions.

And, you know, I think it's a good reminder that we all have room for growth. In that area. Oh, absolutely.

But, you know, Jesus doesn't stop there. He also talks about the two ways. Right.

And that was a familiar image in ancient times, you know, representing the path of righteousness versus the path of destruction. But what I find interesting is how Keener points out that many people in Jesus's time who thought they were on the right path, you know, even those who were devoutly religious. Right.

Were actually missing the mark. And this makes you wonder, you know, what does it truly mean to be on that path of righteousness? It's a good question. And I think, you know, it goes beyond just outward appearances or, you know, following the rules.

There has to be a genuine transformation of the heart, a surrender to God's will. OK. You know, and I think that's where Keener's point about seeking God's kingdom and his righteousness comes in.

You know, it's not just a vague spiritual concept. It has practical implications for how we live our lives. Yeah.

And it seems to tie back to what we were talking about earlier, you know, about prioritizing people over possessions, choosing empathy over judgment. Is that what seeking God's kingdom looks like in action? I think so. Yeah.

You know, it's about aligning our priorities with God's values. You know, justice, compassion, generosity, love. You know, this doesn't mean neglecting our responsibilities.

You know, we still work. We still provide for our families. We still manage our resources wisely.

But it's about doing all of this with a different perspective. OK. With our hearts focused on God and his purposes.

And you mentioned, you know, managing resources wisely. Yeah. And that brings us to the passage where Jesus tells his followers not to worry about what they will eat or drink or about their clothes.

And Keener highlights how for most people in the ancient world, that daily bread was a matter of survival. Right. It wasn't just a metaphor, you know.

And I love that he shares that personal story. Oh, yeah. About a time in his own life where he didn't know where his next meal was coming from.

Yeah. You know, it just it makes that petition and the Lord's prayer hit differently, doesn't it? It really does. You know, it reminds me of a time when I was in college, and I was working part time and going to school full time.

And money was really, really tight. And I remember one week, you know, I literally ran out of food. And I was, you know, I was too embarrassed to ask anyone for help.

And I just kind of fasted for a couple of days. And it was a really humbling experience. And it made me realize, you know, how much we take for granted, you know, even just having food on the table.

Yeah. But, you know, it's not about being passive and waiting for God to do everything. Keener reminds us that worry is a choice.

Right. You know, and instead of fretting, you know, we should focus on God's faithfulness and trust that he'll take care of us. Yeah.

Which is, which is easier said than done. Easier said than done. But, you know, I think that's really the key, you know, is cultivating that trust in God rather than letting worry consume us.

But let's shift gears a bit and dive into a topic that seems to get a lot of attention. And that's the miracles in Matthew chapters eight and nine. Right.

And Keener emphasizes that these were meant to be taken as real events. Right. You know, he's not a fan of interpreting them as mere metaphors or just stories with a moral lesson.

Right. He believes that they actually happened. And he argues that they have implications for both spiritual and physical restoration, which makes sense given the context of healing and exorcism.

Right. Right. These weren't just about fixing physical problems.

They were about demonstrating God's power over illness, over suffering, even over the forces of nature. And, you know, he even shares that story about a woman that he prayed for who was healed. Oh, yeah.

You know, and it really underscores how these stories can inspire faith today. Yeah. Have you ever experienced or witnessed anything that you would consider a miracle? You know, I think, you know, the way I view miracles is that, you know, God is always working in our lives.

And sometimes it's in very subtle ways. Sometimes it's in more dramatic ways. But I think, you know, one of the most powerful miracles that I've witnessed is just, you know, seeing people's lives transformed by the power of God's love.

Yeah. You know, seeing people who were broken and hurting and lost find healing and hope and purpose. Yeah.

And I love how these miracles often had a symbolic significance as well. You know, for example, the healing of a leper. Right.

You know, that wasn't just about physical cleansing. It's also about spiritual purification. Yeah.

Being welcomed back into the community. It's a powerful image of how God's grace can transform us, you know, from the inside out. Yeah.

But it's not all sunshine and roses. Yeah. Keener also talks about, you know, this warning against judging others.

And this is something that we all struggle with. You know, it's so easy to point out the flaws in others. Right.

And, you know, to overlook our own. But Keener points out that judging others puts us in God's place, which is never a good idea. Which is never a good idea.

He uses that image of the, you know, the plank in our own eye. Oh, yeah. While we're trying to remove a speck from someone else's eye.

Right. Which is pretty absurd. Yeah.

Think about it, you know. Totally. But it's a brilliant way to illustrate how blind we can be to our own faults when we're so busy criticizing others.

Yeah. You know, and it's not just about refraining from harsh judgment. It's also about, you know, being willing to receive correction, you know, to be humble and to grow.

Yeah. That reminds me of another challenging saying that Jesus is in this passage. And it's Do not give what is sacred to dogs.

Do not throw your pearls to pigs. And that seems to contradict, you know, this idea of loving our enemies and sharing the gospel with everyone. Right.

And so how do you, how do you reconcile those two things? Yeah, that's a tough one. And I think, you know, Keener's point is that, you know, in context, it's more about discerning when to offer wisdom or correction. OK.

And when to simply move on. Right. You know, not everyone is ready or receptive to what we have to offer.

And sometimes the best approach is to simply trust that God will work in his own way and time. Yeah, that makes sense. It's about respecting people's boundaries and recognizing that we're not responsible for forcing anyone to believe or change.

But we're not we're not off the hook completely. Right. There's still a call to action.

There's still a call to action. And, you know, and that leads to this really powerful section on prayer, you know, where Jesus makes this extraordinary promise in Matthew seven point seven eleven. Oh, yeah.

You know, ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be open to you. Right.

And, you know, this doesn't mean that God is going to give us everything we ask for or that he's going to do it on our timetable. Right. But it does mean that he is listening and that he cares.

Yeah. And that he wants us to come to him with our needs. And, you know, it's not about it's not about manipulating God or, you know, trying to get him to do what we want.

Right. It's about aligning ourselves with his will and trusting in his goodness. Even when we don't understand his ways.

Yeah. Yeah. And, you know, the examples that Jesus uses are, you know, their basic needs, you know, asking for bread, seeking a lost sheep.

It's about trusting God. Yeah. To provide what's truly essential.

Yeah. That really resonates with me. And, you know, in my own life, I've learned that sometimes the things that I thought were so important.

Right. You know, they really weren't. And God has a way of providing for me in ways that I never could have imagined.

Right. So, yeah, I think that's a really important message that we can take away from this passage. And, you know, it's a message that we need to hear over and over again.

Oh, absolutely. Because it's so easy to get caught up in the worries of this world. Right.

And to forget that God is in control. Yeah. OK, well, we have so much more to cover.

So much more to cover. And I know we also want to get into this whole idea of discipleship and what it means to follow Jesus. Yeah.

So, so let's pause here for now. And we'll pick up that conversation in the next segment. Welcome back to our deep dive into Matthew chapters seven and eight.

Before we pause, we were talking about prayer and trusting in God's provision, especially, you know, when things are tough. Yeah. And this whole idea of trust just keeps coming up in these chapters, doesn't it? It really does.

It connects to everything we've been talking about, you know, from letting go of worry about material possessions to surrendering to God's will, even when it's hard, you know. And it's this surrender that I think really gets to the heart of true discipleship, which is kind of where we pick up in Matthew chapter 10 as Jesus sends out his 12 disciples. It's a powerful moment.

Yeah. You know, it's like he's saying, OK, you've seen what I've done. Now it's your turn to go and do likewise.

But was sending out the 12 disciples intentionally symbolic? I think so. You know, Keener points out that it echoes the 12 tribes of Israel. Oh, yeah.

Symbolizing a new community, a new people of God. And this suggests that, you know, following Jesus is not a solitary pursuit. OK.

It's about being part of something bigger than ourselves. Right. Working together to advance God's kingdom.

So it's not just about these individual disciples going off on their own. It's more like a team effort. Exactly.

Yeah. And Jesus doesn't just, you know, send them out with a vague pep talk. He gives them very specific instructions.

Right. On how to conduct themselves, where to go, what to say. He even gives them authority over unclean spirits to heal every disease and sickness.

Wow. That's like a that's like a crash course in ministry right there. Do you think the disciples fully grasped what Jesus was entrusting to them? It's hard to know what was going through their minds.

But I think Keener's right when he says that we shouldn't get too hung up on the mechanics of the miracles. OK. You know, the point is that Jesus was empowering his followers to participate in his mission.

OK. To be tangible representations of God's love and power in the world. That's a pretty high calling.

Yeah. But he doesn't leave them totally unprepared. No, no, he doesn't.

He gives them some guidance. He tells them to focus on the lost sheep of Israel. OK.

You know, those who are most in need of compassion and healing. And he instructs them to proclaim the kingdom of heaven has come near. Right.

And it's a message of both hope and urgency, isn't it? It is. Yeah. I like how Keener highlights that list of instructions.

You know, to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with leprosy, drive out demons. It's like a to-do list for building God's kingdom here on Earth. It is.

Yeah. And what's remarkable is that, you know, he tells them to do all this free of charge. Yeah, that's huge.

Emphasizing that God's grace is a gift. Right. Freely you have received, freely give, he says.

It's a powerful reminder that, you know, our job isn't to create a market for God's grace. You know, we simply offer what we've been given. Yeah.

But this but this call to discipleship, you know, it's not all it's not all sunshine and roses. Jesus warns them about facing persecution. Right.

You know, about being like sheep among wolves. I mean, this is serious stuff. Yeah, it is.

And this is where that call to radical discipleship comes in. OK. You know, in Matthew 10:32-33, Jesus says, whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my father in heaven.

Wow. But whoever disowns me before others, I will also disown before my father in heaven. That's pretty intense.

It is. So, I mean, what does it really mean to acknowledge Jesus before others in today's world? You know, Keener suggests that it's not just about a verbal confession of faith. It's about living in a way that reflects our commitment to Jesus.

It's about taking a stand for justice, showing compassion to the marginalized, being a voice for the voiceless, you know, putting our faith into action. So actions speak louder than words. Yeah, I think so.

You know, it's about embodying God's kingdom values in every aspect of our lives. Yeah. And that might lead to conflict.

You know, Jesus warns his disciples that following him might even alienate them from their own families. Right. Right.

You know, but he also offers this beautiful invitation in Matthew 11:28. He says, come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. It's like a promise of peace and comfort. Yeah.

You know, in the midst of all the chaos. And it makes me think about those times in my life when I've been going through a really tough time, you know, and just feeling overwhelmed

and exhausted. And, you know, I've just kind of cried out to God and said, you know, I need your help.

I need your strength. And he has always been there for me. You know, it's a reminder that that following Jesus isn't about escaping hardship.

Right. It's about finding strength and solace in his presence, even in the midst of those difficult times. Absolutely.

Yeah. So this brings us to the end of our deep dive into Matthew 7 and 8. It has been quite a journey. What stands out to you as a key takeaway from this material? I think for me, it's that discipleship is a privilege and a responsibility.

It's receiving God's grace and extending that same grace to others, you know, even when it's hard, even in the face of opposition, you know, it's not always easy, but it's incredibly rewarding. Well said. I think that's a great way to wrap things up.

It's not about perfection, but about striving to embody God's love in a world that desperately needs it. We hope you've enjoyed this deep dive as much as we have. You know, if these chapters of Matthew have sparked your curiosity, we encourage you to keep exploring, keep questioning, and keep diving deep into God's word.

And keep sending us those interesting sources. We love exploring them with you.