

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 9,

Matthew 7-8

6-min. Video Overview

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You know, when we think about Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, it's easy to see it as just a new, tougher set of rules to follow. But what if it's something way more radical than that? With a little help from Dr. Craig Keener's analysis, we're going to dive into a key part of that sermon, Matthew chapter 6, and see it not as a checklist, but as this profound challenge to the very foundation of our inner lives. It's really a call for a complete revolution of the heart.

Jesus kicks things off with this single, powerful warning, and wow, does it set the stage for everything else. Right here, in this one sentence, he lays out the central conflict of the whole teaching, that battle between performing for an audience and living a life of quiet, real authenticity before God. It all boils down to one question.

Who are we really trying to please? So here's the game plan for our journey. First, we're going to tackle this idea of the performance trap in our public lives. Then we'll go deeper, looking at our private prayer life, our complicated relationship with money, our deepest worries, and finally, we'll land on the one foundation that can actually hold it all together.

Alright, so first up, the performance trap. Jesus goes right after what you could call performative righteousness. He takes these three core religious acts- giving to charity, praying, and fasting- and shows how easily they can just become a show.

Something we do not do for God, but for the applause we get from the crowd. You could almost call it the original virtue signaling. And this is the key, right? It's not about what you're doing, it's all about why you're doing it.

This is that fundamental, inward turn that really defines these teachings. It's this radical shift away from worrying about how things look on the outside, to really cultivating what's true on the inside. Are we living for an audience of many, or an audience of one? Okay, so this whole idea of authenticity, it doesn't just stop with our public actions.

It carries right on over into our prayer life. Jesus gives us this model prayer, what we call the Lord's Prayer, but he's not giving us a rigid script to just memorize and repeat. He's showing us a totally revolutionary way to relate to God.

One that's based on intimate dependence, not on religious performance. And this is where it gets really, really interesting. Look at that word, Abba.

In Aramaic, that's not some formal, stuffy title. It's warm, it's affectionate, it's how a child would talk to their dad. And as Dr. Keener points out, using this word for God in prayer was almost unheard of.

It completely reframes prayer. It's not a transaction anymore; it's a conversation built on pure trust and reliance. And you can see this shift in priorities so clearly in the way the prayer is even structured.

Just look at it. Jesus starts with the you petitions. Everything is focused on God's agenda.

His name, his kingdom, his will. It's only after that foundation is laid that we get to the we petitions, our needs. The prayer itself is teaching us to put his kingdom first.

So once you start reordering your priorities like that, it's naturally going to lead to the next big question. What's our relationship with money? That same inward turn that changes our prayers also completely flips the script on what we treasure and what we value. Jesus really doesn't pull any punches here.

He lays it out there, plain and simple. This isn't about trying to balance two different priorities. It's a stark, non-negotiable choice about your ultimate allegiance.

He's setting up this epic conflict between two competing lords, and they are both fighting for control of your heart. So let's break that choice down. As Dr. Keener explains, mammon isn't just cash; it's the personification of wealth as this rival God that demands our worship.

If you serve God, it leads to what Jesus calls a single, or generous eye, one that's focused on heavenly treasure and on people. But if you serve mammon, it leads to a diseased or stingy eye that can only see earthly stuff and possessions. And you know what the direct result of serving mammon is? Worry.

A life just consumed by it. Jesus masterfully connects our allegiance to wealth with the anxiety it creates. And then, he offers a powerful antidote.

Jesus just cuts right through all the noise with this one simple, piercing question. He just completely exposes how useless worry is. I mean, think about it.

It has a 0% return on investment. It doesn't add a single thing to our lives; it just takes and takes. It's a fire that just burns up our energy and accomplishes absolutely nothing.

So if worry is out, what's in? Active trust. And Jesus points to the world around us. His logic is so simple and beautiful.

If your heavenly father meticulously cares for the birds and the flowers and they don't stress or plan at all, how much more can you, who are so much more valuable to him, trust that he's going to provide for your basic needs? And this right here, this is the mic drop moment. This is the ultimate solution that ties it all together. The antidote to worry isn't just thinking positive thoughts; it's a radical reordering of what we chase after in life.

When we stop seeking things and start seeking him and his kingdom first, we can actually trust that our material needs will get taken care of along the way. So how does Jesus wrap all of this up? He tells a story, a simple, powerful parable that drives the entire point home. It's the grand finale, comparing his words to the only foundation that can possibly survive the storms of life.

Okay, so you've got these two builders, right? And here's what's so fascinating. They both hear the exact same words from Jesus. The critical difference, the one thing that determines whether they survive or completely collapse, isn't about hearing the words.

It's about doing them. The foundation isn't just agreeing with the ideas; it's putting them into practice. Now you have to understand, this is an absolutely mind-blowing claim for his audience.

Dr. Keener points out that in similar stories they would have heard, the unshakeable rock was always the Torah, the sacred law of God. By swapping out the Torah and putting his own words in its place as the foundation, Jesus is making a radical claim about his own authority. He's basically saying, his teaching is the word of God that you have to build your life on.

So let's recap this whole revolution of the heart. It all starts with authentic practice. Doing things for God, not for a crowd.

That leads to dependent prayer, where we talk to him like a trusting child. And that trust totally reshapes our values, so we serve God instead of money. And finally, that whole inward posture becomes the antidote to our anxiety, swapping worry for active trust in him.

And so it all comes down to this. The final, unavoidable question that Jesus just leaves hanging in the air. A question that echoes down through 2,000 years straight to you and me today.

Storms will come, that's a guarantee. The only question that really matters is this. What are you building on?