

The Book of Matthew Study Guide

Chapters 7-8

Ch. 7 concludes the Sermon on the Mount.

7:1

“Do not judge.” Have any of you heard that verse used by someone who doesn’t like a critical statement that you have made? It’s a classic defense – “That is what the Bible says, so you need to obey it by not judging me.” But it is also a classic way of taking a verse out of context. Because I have yet to hear someone using that defensive method refer to the rest of the verses in this passage or the greater context of Scripture.

7:2

Yeshua employs a controlling principle – “For in the way you judge, you will be judged.” In other words, whatever your standard is for others will be the same for yourself. If it is based on personal integrity, you will be judged by your own personal integrity. But the problem with that standard is that we all fail miserably in terms of a standard of righteousness. Yeshua’s warning is for people who criticize others while doing the very thing that they are accusing others of doing. This is consistent with his admonition regarding hypocritical religious acts in the previous chapter. He is still dealing with hypocrisy, but in this chapter it is in regard to the hypocrisy of judgment.

7:3

He then shifts the attention away from judging others to judging yourself. He uses the metaphor of a speck in your eye to show the importance of cleaning up your extent of righteousness. And when you do that, you are entitled to judge according to v. 5. You can then “see clearly enough to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.” That’s judging.

When we consider the greater context of Scripture, we find Yeshua’s words in Jn 7:24 – “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” He directly commands us to judge in this passage, but it has to be with righteous judgment. This is a legal statement. And when you are dealing with legal matters, there has to be an objective standard, what we commonly call the law. It serves as a reference point that you can cite consistently.

So what is our source for the terms of righteousness? It is the Word of God. At the time when Yeshua was giving this teaching, that would have been the Torah. It was the record of the terms of righteousness for the people of Israel. And Yeshua had been interacting with specific aspects of the Torah throughout this Sermon on the Mount.

All this to say that He is not making a blanket prohibition against judging. He is just saying not to do it based on our own standards, but on the sure standard of the Word of God. Let it determine what is proper and righteous, not improper and unrighteous.

7:6

Yeshua then adds another comment on the misuse of God’s standard of righteousness as recorded in Scripture. There will always be people symbolized by dogs and swine who reject the authority of the Word of God – often the same people who do not want to be judged. And

Yeshua is basically saying that in such cases, you are wasting your time trying to convince them. And if you do, it will likely be an unpleasant experience in which you get trampled and torn to pieces. But that does not take away from our ability and right to make a judgment about them. That is evident later in the chapter...

To confirm that Yeshua approves of judging, as long as you do it the right way, He later warns against false prophets in v. 15. But how will you know if someone is a false prophet unless you make a judgment? You are fully capable of doing that because you have the objective standard of Scripture. If someone claims to speak in the name of the Lord and it is inconsistent with the Word of God, you have a false prophet, or what He calls a ravenous wolf (v. 15). So don't let naysayers suppress your ability to make righteous judgments. Be prepared to show the error of their use of the Bible. Know what the Bible says about a particular issue. And speak the truth with confidence, always seasoned with love.

7:7-11

Verse 11 employs the way of communicating meaning called *kal-ve-homer*, meaning "simple and complex." Literally the word *kal* means "light" and *homer* means "heavy." It gives the sense that if something is true in a simple, light situation, it will also be true in a more complex, heavy one. An indicator of this kind of reasoning is the phrase, "How much more," which is used in v. 11. In this passage the light or simple subject in these verses is an earthly father who will give bread and fish to hungry children. And the heavy or complex parallel is that our Heavenly Father will give what we need when we hunger or ask Him.

7:12

This verse begins with the word "therefore" (*oun*), which is an indicator of a concluding statement – He is going to summarize this section that He has been communicating. It's all about "doing to others what you would want others to do for you," what has been called the Golden Rule.

Notice that Yeshua connects this principle to what the Torah and the Prophets have to say. He was not the only person to make that connection. In the generation before Yeshua, the renowned Rabbi Hillel made a similar comment. We are told in the Talmud –

A heathen came to Shammai (the other leading rabbi of the era before Yeshua) and said to him, "Make me a proselyte (convert), but on the condition that you teach me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot." Shammai drove him off with the builder's measuring rod he had in his hand. When he went to Hillel, he was told, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary. Go and learn it."
(*Shabbat 31a*)

So both Yeshua and Hillel expressed the same thing. It is really a way of restating Lev 19:18 – "loving your neighbor as yourself." They both stated that all of the details found in the writings of Moses and the prophets were related to loving your neighbor as yourself and "doing to others what you would want others to do for you." It is a very different way of looking at the Torah. Remember, as He said in Mat 5:17, He did not come to abolish the Torah and the Prophets but to fulfill (overflow) them. Rather than being a restrictive, even impossible, burden to bear, it could be a guide for knowing creative ways to care for your neighbor.

What are some aspects of the Torah and the Prophets that we can follow as a way of loving our neighbor like we want to be loved? The Torah says in Deut 6:5, "You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." So we can help others to

love the Lord by telling them about the importance of doing that (witnessing). The Torah also teaches that we are not to wrong one another (Lev. 25:17), to slander others with our speech (Lev. 19:16), to harbor hatred in your heart toward someone (Lev. 19:17), to take revenge against someone (Lev. 19:18) or to bear a grudge (Lev. 19:18). So we can help others to do those things by talking about matters with your friends who have such feelings and urging them to let go of the desire to pursue them.

Wouldn't you want someone else to do this for you, if you found yourself estranged from God or another person? These are just a few practical ways that we can show care for our neighbors, just as we would like them to care for us. And that is what Yeshua is saying here about His way of applying the Torah and the Prophets in a truly godly way.

7:13-23

In v. 16 Yeshua says we can know who false prophets are “by their fruits.” And in v. 17 He doesn't give a name for people who bear good fruit, but the implication is that we can also know who godly people are by their fruits. But what are those fruits? Would it include someone who prophesies in God's name, casts out demons, or performed miracles? Yeshua says in v. 21, “not everyone” who does these things “will enter the kingdom of heaven.” That is pretty shocking. It means that dramatic supernatural acts can be imitated by Satan, the god of this world. So instead of external acts, good fruit are inner characteristics of the heart that are associated with loving God and our neighbors. It is all about true citizenship in the kingdom of God based on His Lordship over our hearts, not any kinds of externals – from charity, prayer and fasting to prophecy and miracles.

7:24-27

And when you have your life in order spiritually as He has described, it will be like a house built on a rock (a firm foundation) that can withstand the stormy trials that come.

7:29

“He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.” In biblical times, not all teachers were considered to have authority to interpret Scripture. Most were called scribes (Heb. *soferim*) who not only copied Scripture, but were Torah teachers. But they could only teach the specific interpretations held by a select few rabbis who were said to have authority. It would be the equivalent of today's Sunday School teacher and an ordained minister. Because Yeshua was recognized as being a rabbi with authority (*s'mikah*), He was entitled to make new interpretations of existing Scripture and to pass judgments.

An indicator of him practicing authoritative interpretation are times when he says, “You have heard it said....but I say to you...” (Matt 5). We saw examples of this in chapter 5.

For these people on the hillside above the Sea of Galilee who were used to hearing the more common scribes or Torah teachers, it was amazing (v. 28) for them to hear a teaching with authority. And it still is amazing today. This sermon has been called the “manifesto of the kingdom of God” and the “constitution of the kingdom of heaven.” We might also characterize it as the “guide to the fulfillment of Torah and the Prophets.” So it is very worthy of our attention.

8:1-4

After finishing His Sermon that demonstrates His authority by way of teaching, Yeshua then

demonstrates His authority by working miracles. The first of them is the healing of a leper. Leprosy is a bacterial infection that causes lesions on the skin that become numb and thus susceptible to damage from physical trauma because the person cannot feel what is happening to an infected part of the body. Leprosy had significant implications for an individual because 2 entire chapters of the Law were dedicated to it (Lev 13-14). Basically the person was declared ritually unclean and was required to live outside of the community in order to avoid infecting other people. So that meant they could not participate in biblical forms of worship. If they became healed of the disease, which typically took between 5-20 years to occur naturally, there were specific steps that had to be completed for their ritual purity to be restored and they could return to society and worship.

Yeshua essentially accelerated that process by healing him instantaneously. Notice that Yeshua then told Him to report to the priest and to complete the required restoration steps according to the Law. Since He did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it (5:17), He let the ritual aspect remain, but He did something the Law could never do by providing the healing that enables the restoration process to take place.

8:5-13

The second healing is the servant of a Roman centurion (officer who typically commanded 80 men). In verses 10-11 Yeshua acknowledges the centurion as being a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, even though he was not an ethnic descendent of Israel. What evidence did Yeshua have to make that determination?

- The centurion had much authority, but in this case it was obvious that He recognized Yeshua's authority as being far superior to his own. He calls Yeshua "Lord" (*Kurios*), which is a term used to acknowledge someone with authority, including God. For a man of much stature, treating Yeshua in this way would be a very humbling thing to do, and humility is a marker for citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. As He said in Mat 5:3 – "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- The centurion was seeking healing for someone else, not himself. This act is consistent with Mat 5:7 – "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." When Yeshua said, "by their fruits you shall know them," these are the kinds of fruits that enabled Him to know that this man was a true citizen of the kingdom.

8:14-17

Peter is playing host to Yeshua and the disciples at his home in Capernaum. So that means his extended family is there, including his mother-in-law. She gets healed as well, in this case from a fever. Then a group of demon-possessed people show up and He cleans out the spirits.

v. 17 - All of these things in this chapter were done as fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy about the Messiah in Isa 53:4 – "Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried..." The base form of the word translated as "griefs" is *choli*, which is usually translated as "sickness" in the *Tanakh*. And the word translated as "sorrows" (*makobah*) has the sense of pain that causes sorrow. So while the overall thrust of Isaiah 53 is about the atoning work of the Messiah, this verse has to do with his healing ministry. Of course we also can recognize that sickness and pain are ultimately the result of sin because of the consequences that arose from the original sin in the Garden of Eden. And in that regard, Yeshua can bring physical healing to our lives not just because He is a miracle worker, but He has power over the consequences of sin.

Yeshua heals a leper, a Gentile, a woman, and people with demons. That diversity shows that it doesn't matter what society says about you, God has a place for you in His kingdom if you are made right by the power of Yeshua.

8:18-22

Then they head to the other side of the Sea of Galilee to get away from the crowds, but they find Him anyway. You might call this group "seekers."

v. 19 – one says he wants to follow Yeshua. Many people claim to want to follow Yeshua. But as they go along their journey of following Him, there seems to be a desire by many people to want to return to places of convenience. To this kind of person...

v. 20 – And Yeshua said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." There is a cost to following Yeshua. There is ridicule, and criticism, and discrimination as well as personal sacrifice.

v. 21 – Another supposed follower says "Permit me first to go and bury my father." Two things are going on here. First, this excuse is deceptive. If the father had just died, he would have been home sitting *shivah* as part of the mourning period, not out on the road engaging Yeshua in a discussion. More likely, this one would prefer returning home to live in comfort until his father's death when he could collect his inheritance and then conveniently become a disciple. Second, it raises the issue of religiosity. The burial of relatives who had died was a sacred obligation in Israel. In fact it was said to be more important than studying Torah. So here is how Yeshua responds to him...

v. 22 – "Follow Me and allow the dead to bury their own dead." He was not saying, "don't bury the dead." Rather, He was making it clear that if some religious practice gets in the way of pure faithfulness to God, we ought to set it aside. Putting it another way, He was saying words to the effect: "Let those who are spiritually dead find their fulfillment either in the pleasures of this world or in religious obligation. But I will show you even deeper things."

8:23-27

Then Yeshua demonstrates His authority over nature by causing the wind and sea to be calmed by declaring His will.

8:28-34

Finally He demonstrates His authority over the spiritual realm again by casting out demons, which is a reminder of the reality of that dimension

Altogether Yeshua has been revealing that He is the true King of the Kingdom of God by exercising authority

- Over the Word of God
- Over sickness and every aspect related to our physical bodies
- Over people of every kind
- Over nature
- And over the unseen spiritual realm.

He is the Lord over all things. And that is true whether we realize it or not. But when you do realize it and acknowledge Him as Lord, thus making us citizens of His kingdom, it is the greatest blessing of all.