

SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR SUNDAY – NOVEMBER 12, 2023 @ CAPC OAKLAND

Matthew 7:12-29
NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

[Jesus continued teaching saying,]

¹² “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

¹³ “**Enter** through the narrow **gate**, for the gate is wide and the **road** is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. ¹⁴ For the **gate** is narrow and the **road** is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will know them by their fruits.

²¹ “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 in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you who behave lawlessly.’

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Matthew is one of four gospels – telling the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and his teachings. Matthew is the only one of the four to include the larger sermon on the mount (Chapters 5 to 7) with which we’re wrestling this fall. The context of the Sermon on the Mount is radically important, without it the teachings can seem like disparate moral teachings, as opposed to a radical reinterpretation and recreation of the world.

Jesus has invited everyone to “repent. Change the Way they live. Because the kingdom of heaven is here.” (Matthew 4:17) This sermon is all about what that kingdom looks like, an invitation to go against the grain of the world, not living as the majority in the Roman Empire do. It’s the creation of a counter-cultural community that infects the world with a different way of living with one another, for one another, and by the will of God. This last section of the teaching includes 3 eschatological destinies – of the last times, or the end of the world. The substance of the teaching concluded, Jesus candidly warns his listeners about the difficulties and risks of being a kingdom person.

Enter :: this word recalls one of the earliest warnings of the teaching in 5:20 “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” The disciples have already encountered God’s kingdom in Jesus, so it’s about participation in yet to be completed future of God’s purposes that Jesus teaches.

road:: one of the major symbols of Rome’s military and economic power. They were a trademark of the empire, allowing for smooth transportation and trade, the spread of communication and propaganda, the efficient moving around of troops and colonializing armies.

gate:: when entering a city you did so through a gate, which was a place that reinforced the power, control and propaganda of Rome. For example Above Antioch’s Easter gate was a the she-wolf nursing Romulus and Remus (the founder’s of Rome). The image proclaimed that Rome controlled the world. And could exploit and submit others as it wanted.

find:: this echoes with the earlier part of the teaching in Matthew 7:7-8 “Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”

false prophets:: in the Hebrew scripture they are false because of because of wrong messages, greed, false dealing, disagreement with

²⁴ “*Everyone*, then, who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵ The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on rock. ²⁶ And *everyone* who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”

²⁸ Now when Jesus had finished saying these words, the **CROWDS** were astounded at his teaching, ²⁹ for he taught them as one having authority and not as their scribes.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- Jesus is concluding his teaching inviting his hearers to active obedience, participating in his mission to bring the kingdom into the world. Does Jesus do this by sacring them into obedience with threats of judgment?; persuading them to be live this way because of consequences and rewards?; or teaching them discernment more than knowledge, so that they can choose to live the kingdom way? Is there a difference?
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – or to us, as a church – to act, speak, be, or change, through this word of scripture?

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

... the essence of God’s teachings. For example see the description in Jeremiah 6:13-14. “...everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.” False prophets speak an easy message, trying to divert disciples from the truth of God’s way that is at times hard, difficult to discern, and not fun to do. You can tell a false prophet by their practices and lifestyle.

You will know them by their fruit:: often in ancient literature and the Hebrew scriptures fruit is used as an metaphor to indicate the way of life (good fruit for a good life)... like in Psalm 1 “For from the least to the greatest of them, Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked or take the path that sinners tread or sit in the seat of scoffers, but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their *fruit* in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.”

And also in the words of John the Baptizer in Matthew 3:8-10 who talks of cutting down and burning bad or unfruitful trees. “Therefore, *bear fruit worthy of repentance*, and do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; therefore *every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.*” The image echoes the words spoken about false prophets who are discerned by their practices and lifestyle.

On that day:: this language evokes the phrase “the day of the Lord” symbol and eschatological moment of God’s judgement, or justice setting right the wrongs in the world. “Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near—” Joel 2:1. See also Isaiah 10:20; Hosea 1:5; & Amos 9:11.

everyone :: this word is repeated and consistently associated with the inseparable pairing of hearing and acting upon (God’s will or the words of Jesus). It’s connected to the image of a tree that bears good fruit.

hears these words of mine and does not act on them:: obedience is doing, not just believing.

CROWDS :: They’re in the middle, maybe on the fence about Jesus? The CROWDS are neither disciples nor opponents of Jesus. The sermon teaching ends on a similar note as it begins in Matthew 4:23-25 “23 Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. 25 And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.”

Notes taken from Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins. A sociopolitical and Religious Reading.* pp 186-195 and Thomas G. Long. *Matthew.* pp 80-85