

# FIVE THINGS YOU SHOULD ASK YOURSELF

There are times when we need to examine our lives to determine how well we have embraced God's words and applied them in our lives. It's a sort of reality check! I have found five things you should ask yourself and with each of these questions I want you to examine your own response to them. They are found in the Lord's first sermon (Matthew 5-7) ...

- (1) What kind of citizen am I? In Matthew 5:3-16 Jesus begins His Sermon on the Mount by describing the characteristics of the citizens of His kingdom. These inhabitants are those who are exceedingly blessed: those who are poor in spirit, mourn over their sinfulness, and are gentle and meek with others. They have a hunger and a thirst for righteousness and seek to be peacemakers. They affect those around them for the good - as salt and light in the world. They are often persecuted because of their likeness to Jesus. Therefore, ask yourself, *"Are these types of attributes or qualities describing me? Am I merciful and pure of heart? Am I humble toward others? Am I honest with God about your own failings? Do I seek to make peace"*
- (2) How complete is my righteousness? In His next major section (Matthew 5:17:48), Jesus describes the perfect righteousness that we must strive to attain. He sums up this section by saying that we need to be 'perfect', as our heavenly Father is perfect. In other words, our righteousness needs to be "complete" in every way. Jesus described how our righteousness should extend far beyond simply refraining from murdering others. It needs to extend to our words and our attitudes toward others. We ought not to even speak or think wrongly toward others. We should always be true to our word. We must love our enemies as ourselves and never seek revenge. Jesus fulfilled every single one of these instructions to us (verse 17).

Yet, we cannot break these commandments (verse 19), but seek to keep them. Therefore, ask yourself, *"Are these standards of righteousness what I am seeking? Do I grieve in my heart when I let God down? Do I seek His help and counsel in all these areas?"*

(3) How good is my Christian character? In the next section (Matthew 6:1-7), Jesus describes what our practical righteousness should be like. In the first verse, He warns of doing charitable deeds before others to be noticed by them. He tells us to bless others in such a way that we don't think about what we gave (*do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing*). We are told to pray by going into our inner room and praying to God alone. We are to fast for only God to see. We are not to treasure the world's riches, nor be anxious for the future, or be judgmental of others. Our prayers should be constant and earnest and our love for others should be measured by what we would have them to do to us. Therefore, the next questions are straightforward, *"Do I practice my righteousness for people to see? When I come to church, am I coming to please God or for others to see me? When I give to others, am I seeking a reward of some kind or am I buying favour? Do I acknowledge my great need for God's daily provision for my basic necessities? Am I anxious concerning the future, or am I resting in God's care for me? Do I look down upon and speak poorly about others, who don't live up to my own level of spirituality? Am I loving my neighbour as myself?"*

(4) What path have I chosen? In this, the penultimate section of the Lord's sermon (Matthew 7:13-23), He calls us to choose between two options. We can enter the wide gate and travel the broad path to destruction or we can enter the small gate and travel the narrow path to the abundant life that He has so graciously secured for us.

We can listen to the false prophets or teachers and find ourselves cast from the presence of the Lord, or we can avoid these men and their teachings and abide in the liberty that the 'word of truth' brings us. Clearly, we can hear the words of Jesus and ignore them or we can believe them, embrace them and follow them. So ask yourself, *"Which path am I presently on? Have I entered through the right door? Am I travelling the narrow path. Or, have I chosen the path of least resistance - a path which enables me to neglect the instructions of Jesus, while allowing myself to think of myself as being in right-standing with God?"*

- (5) What is my response to God's word? It is interesting that Jesus kept this section for last (Matthew 7:24-27). I believe that this is the principle that holds all the others together. It is the glue that keeps everything intact. Here, Jesus describes two houses that were built. From the description we have in His parable, we can't find anything different about them. Both houses appear to be exactly the same! In the case of these identical houses, a storm came upon each one of them. The rain descended, which caused the floods to come upon the house. The winds also blew against the houses and beat upon each of them (verses 25, 27). From every indication we have in Jesus' parable, the storm that beat upon both of these houses was the same. The storm that Jesus describes here is a storm that we should fear. It would be strong enough to destroy our houses. The implication here is that the storm was strong and mighty - stronger and mightier than any storm previously experienced. Note, it's the storm that exposes the difference between these two houses; and the difference is the foundation upon which these houses were built. One is built on the rock. The other is built upon the sand. When the storm comes, the contrast between these houses will be very apparent. The one house will fall down and the other will stand.

Some people are like the house that is built upon the rock, who will be able to stand firm in the storms of life. Others are like the house that is built upon the sand, they will fall when difficult times arrive. Remember, in the storm, it will be obvious what sort of person you are. Notice how Jesus describes these people. He describes them as "*hearing these words of mine.*" (verses 24, 26). They are both "hearing" what Jesus is saying to them. Most often, the contrast between the wide and narrow ways are not between the church and the world, but between professing Christians and genuine Christians. It is no different here. Jesus is describing religious people, who are listening to Him speak. But notice the difference. The one responds in obedience. The other responds in disobedience. The one applies the things that are being taught. The other neglects the things that are being taught. This creates a huge difference between the two. Sure, the houses may look much alike, but in actuality, they are quite different. One has built his life upon what he hears God saying, and believing it, he does it. The other has build his life upon "hearing what God says" and then neglecting it.

This couldn't be any clearer, verse 24 says, "***Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them*** (in the margin, "he does them"), ***may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock, ...***" Verse 26 says, "***And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them*** (in the margin, "he does not do them"), ***will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand, ...***" Jesus is confronting each of us concerning our response to His words. When you hear God's word taught what is your response? What do you do? When you read the Bible on your own, how do you respond? What do you do? When the Lord's words have come into your ears, have you been convicted due to your lack of obedience, and have you cried out to God to give you a heart that longs to obey?

The Bible isn't simply a book that contains nice sayings for us to listen to and enjoy, or merely think about. Neither is the Bible an academic textbook to be studied. **The Bible is a life-changing book to be read and obeyed.** You don't have to look very far in the Bible to see this contrast between those who simply hear the word of God and those who obey the word of God. Look back to verse 21, ***"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven."*** Jesus doesn't care much whether you can 'talk-the-talk'; He wants to see you 'walk-the-walk'. Jesus said, ***"Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"*** (Luke 6:46). Can you see, it's not the saying from the lips that God wants. Neither is it the hearing in the ear that God commends. Rather, it is the obedience from the heart that He is seeking.

Finally, ask yourself these pertinent questions, *"Am I prepared to respond correctly when I hear God's word? Am I prepared to become a doer of His word, rather than a hearer only? Am I ready for change? Will I be able to turn to God and ask Him to change my heart so I can obey His word? Am I ready to change my house ("As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" - Josh. 24:15)? When my faith is weak, will I call out to the Lord and say, "I believe, help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24)? When the storms of life come, will I be left standing or will I crumble under the pressure? Am I a true disciple of the Lord Jesus?"*

Remember, with God all things are possible! That being true, however challenging your response has been to the numerous questions you've asked yourself today, with God nothing is impossible. So make up your mind that you are going to build your house on the rock and not on shifting sand. Live a life of obedience and you will live a life of victory. Amen!