

# The Sermon on the Mount: Life in the Kingdom

## Sermon #9: The Wise Always Applies

Matthew 7:24-29

Jeremiah Ebeling – August 7, 2022

Good morning, Grace. My name's Jeremiah and I'm one of the pastors on staff here. What powerful worship today, huh? It's so moving.

This summer we have been studying the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. And why would we spend an entire summer learning this sermon, going through the Sermon on the Mount? Well, for centuries now Christians and even many non-Christians have said that this sermon is the best teacher in human history teaching the best sermon that's ever been taught. That's why.

And today's passage that we're going to be studying is the final truth that Jesus chose to communicate to His disciples in this famous sermon. This is the last thing that He wants us to hear. It is the capstone of this Sermon on the Mount. And what He's going to say to us in this passage is, *This is what I want from you. This is how I want you to live the Christian life.* This is going to be the King telling us as His people, as members of His kingdom, how He wants us to live in His kingdom.

So, the question that Jesus is going to be answering today in the passage we're going to be in is this: When we hear His teaching, what will the wise person do with it? When a wise person hears the truths that Jesus communicates in the lessons that He teaches and preaches, what will He do with that truth that the foolish person won't do?

And you might think that Jesus would say that the wise person, when he hears His teaching, he's going to listen and not ignore those teachings. You might think that He would say that we are to memorize them and not forget them, or meditate on them, or share them with others who don't know them and not just keep them to ourselves.

But surprisingly, He doesn't say any of those things—at least not here. No, today in this passage at the end of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is going to say this, that the difference between the wise man and the foolish man is that the wise always applies. The wise always

applies. When a wise person hears Jesus' teaching, that person seeks out ways to put those teachings into practice and seeks to obey them, to do them.

You can see that in Matthew 7, verses 24 and 26. Jesus says this: **“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man.”**

The difference between the wise and the fool is that the wise always applies. The wise seek ways to put Jesus' words into practice.

And the Greek word that Jesus uses for “put into practice” is super complex. Do you know what it is? It means “do it.” It means “act on it.” It means “obey it.” It means to grab hold of that truth and don't let go until you have taken it into the substance of your character, your mind, your emotion, your will, your life, your theology. Work it into who you are. Do it. Put it into practice. That's what the wise do. The wise always applies.

And Jesus says this: *These words of mine are what we are to apply.* And of course, He's referring to the sermon that He's just taught, the Sermon on the Mount. These words that I've just taught you—put them into practice.

But of course, He's extending this. This also includes all of the Bible, all of God's Word. It covers the entire Scripture. And so, what He's saying is that anytime you go to the Bible to read it, to enjoy it, to read it for personal devotion or to prepare to share it or teach it to somebody ... He says that as a wise person, as a follower of His, as a disciple ... if you want to be wise, this is what you do. You be eager to put it into practice, looking for ways to get it into your own life. When you hear a sermon, a biblical lesson, as you're listening to that you're thinking of different ways that that truth and that passage ought to form your character and your theology, your very heart, your relationships, the way you interact with others. The wise always applies.

## **Two Ways We Can Be Foolish**

### **1. We Don't Hear the God's Word at All**

And this is what the wise person does. There are two ways that we can go wrong when it comes to the Bible. The first is that we don't hear it at all. We don't listen to it, we don't know it. The Bible is just an unused app on our phone or a dusty book on a bookshelf. We don't hear it at

all. And it's probably not news to any of us that biblical illiteracy is a serious issue in the American church. And it's getting worse, not better. We all probably know that.

In fact, as an example, a couple of years ago there was a Barna poll that went out and surveyed Christians about what they think about the Bible and what they know about the Bible. And this poll found that many Christians believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife ... you know, because Noah built the ark. It found that many Christians believe that the Sermon on the Mount that we're studying now was first taught by Billy Graham. He was a good preacher. He was good. My favorite was that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife. Yikes! It's humorous, and at the same time I share that because one of the things that we as a church want to do is that we want to help with this. We want to help all of us, our congregation here at Grace, to grow in our ability and our understanding of what the Bible says, what it means, and how it applies.

And one of the ways that we want to do that is through our central teachings team. This is a team of individuals who love the Lord and who love Scripture. And really, their core purpose as they teach on Sunday mornings throughout the year---one of the core purposes is that they want to raise the tide of biblical knowledge here at Grace. They want to raise the tide of theological understanding among all of us. Because you can't apply what you don't know.

If this is a need that you see in your life, if this is an area that you want and need to grow in---just knowing the Bible and understanding Scripture and have a deeper understanding of God and His character, knowing Him more intimately---then I encourage you to go to our website and click on "Courses" and see what our offerings are going to be this fall. Central teachings are going to be teaching a course this fall called "Kingdoms, Castles and Christ." Doesn't that sound cool? And they're going to be teaching about what the Bible says about God's perspective on authority, on government. And it's going to be an opportunity to take those truths from Scripture and understand God's view and to take that on our own; to apply it, to put it into practice in our own perspective on government and authority and these things.

So, that's an opportunity for you if this is an area where you want to grow in your life.

See, one way where we can go wrong when it comes to the Bible is that we don't hear it, we don't learn it, we don't know it. And I don't want that for us. We as a church don't want that for us. And so, if we're not taking in Scripture, if we're not doing those things, if we're not putting ourselves in a place to understand the Bible and God more intimately, what happens is that we become spiritually emaciated. Our soul and our spirit suffer from spiritual malnutrition.

## 2. We hear God's Word but We Don't Apply It

A second way that we can grow wrong and really what Jesus teaches about in this passage we're in today, is that we hear it but we don't apply it. We hear it and we don't apply it. And that's what we see that the fool does. In verse 26, Jesus says, **"Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man."** The fool hears Jesus' teaching but doesn't put it into practice and doesn't apply it.

But what's disconcerting to me is how much the fool actually gets right. The fool goes to Jesus for teaching, for learning, and not some other teacher. The fool goes to Jesus and then stays—he chooses to stay and listen and learn. The fool gets these things right. Do you know where the fool would be right now on a Sunday morning? Probably right here in a church, in a place like this. That's where a fool would be, probably eager to hear the Word of God, to learn from Jesus, inspired by what he hears. He probably even has plans to come back next week. But the one thing the fool doesn't do is the very thing that makes him a fool. The fool doesn't apply. The fool doesn't take that truth and bring it into his life in some meaningful way.

You look at this warning that Jesus is giving, and this warning is not for somebody out there; this warning is for us. When the sermon starts at the beginning of Matthew 5, Matthew writes that Jesus sits down on the mountainside and He began to teach His disciples. This caution was for them. The caution is for us, as His disciples.

Even the verb that Jesus uses in this short story, this word for "hear", actually means "hear and obey." See, He intends for us to marry those two, to keep those two together at all times. Surely if we come to Jesus to hear Him, to hear His teachings, surely, absolutely, certainly, we would be there to obey as well. Right? No, He says, *It's hear and obey. It's not just hear and walk away and forget—it's hear and obey.*

Jesus is a little like the seasoned pastor who started working at a new church. On his first Sunday he walked up onto the stage and taught an awesome sermon. Everybody loved it. Several of the congregants came up to him afterward and shook his hand and said, "Thank you very much. That was a really great sermon! We're so glad you're here."

The second Sunday the pastor walks back onto the stage and preaches the exact same sermon---same passage, same points, same everything. The congregation thought, *That was kind*



*of weird. He just taught that exact same sermon a week ago. Is everything okay with this guy? What's going on here?* But it was a good sermon, so they gave him the benefit of the doubt.

The third Sunday he walks back onto the stage and preaches the exact same sermon a third time. And now the congregation is just mad. They are livid. After the service several of them rushed up to the pastor and said, “What are you doing? You just preached the same sermon three Sundays in a row? What’s going on here?”

The pastor calmly said, “As soon as you start applying this passage, we’ll move on to the next one.”

You see, Jesus is saying to us, *It's not simply about hearing my teachings*. It’s not just about listening to them, reading them. That’s not how He keeps score. He says, *It's about doing my teachings*. It’s about taking those and bringing them into our lives and making them a part of who we are and how we live the Christian life and how we follow Him. That’s what He’s saying here.

You see, a second way that we can go wrong is that we hear the word but we don’t apply it into practice. Here’s a way to think about it. When we do this, when we hear the Bible but we don’t apply it, here’s a way to think about it. We become a spiritual swamp. You know, think about a swamp. You’ve got all this good stuff going in but nothing gets out. It’s all stuck there. And we get stuck. Like a swamp, over time we begin to stink.



Another way to think about it: when our spiritual calorie intake or consumption exceeds our spiritual calorie expenditure, we become spiritually obese. When our biblical knowledge—when we take it and consume it and don't turn it into fuel for becoming like Christ in all of life, or fuel for ministry, we become spiritually bloated. And that's the image that the Apostle Paul paints in 1 Corinthians 8 where he says, "Knowledge puffs up." He says that when we take in spiritual and biblical knowledge and we don't use that as fuel for loving others more deeply, that's knowledge that puffs us up. It's knowledge that bloats us. We become people who have all the right answers but not an ounce of humility. You know, we can ace a Bible test, but we don't know how to love others very well.

And the gap between our biblical knowledge and our application of that knowledge is very likely the measure of our pride. It's the measure of our arrogance. And so, that's what Jesus is telling us, that in this gap, in this space, that is where the seed of pharisaism can be planted. And that's where it takes root and that's where it grows. It eventually takes over. And the larger that gap, the more chance it has to grow and to spread in our lives.

So how do we avoid becoming a spiritual swamp? I don't want to be that. I know you don't want to be that. How do we run from spiritual obesity? Here's one way we can. Apply every time. The wise always applies, so apply every time. Every time you read the Bible, every time you hear a lesson from Scripture or you do a Bible study of some kind, look for one way to immediately bring that truth, that passage, that reality from God, into your life. And bring it into your character, your view of God, the way you treat others, the way you see the world. Look for an immediate way to do that.

And application doesn't always mean go do something. Sometimes it does. But sometimes it means to let this truth, let this passage or this lesson, change your mind. Let it reorient the grasp that you have of God's justice or His mercy and the depth at which you understand and appreciate and love that about the Lord.

That passage or lesson might challenge your values and it's going to cause you to reprioritize how much time you devote to Netflix or something else, or how much of your value or identity you get from work. It might challenge or change your will in the choices you're making about how you use humor in relationships, whether it's for good or for harm. There are a lot of ways to apply, but apply every time.

One thoughtful theologian had this idea of applying every time in mind when he wrote this. He said, "It is better in one year to have ten good verses transferred into the substance of our lives than to have every word of the Bible flash before our eyes." Let me read that one more time. It says, "It is better in one year to have ten good verses transferred into the substance of our lives than to have every word of the Bible flash before our eyes." He's just agreeing with Jesus. He's just saying that your soul and your spirit will be so much healthier if you take ten verses of Scripture, ten Bible verses, and you aggressively apply those for 365 days, as opposed to rushing through the entire Bible and not having the time or the capacity to apply it and put it into practice in some way in your life.

If you were to apply this to sermons, I might say this: that it's better to take in one sermon a week and apply it for seven days than to hear seven sermon podcasts a week and not have the energy or the ability to put them into practice—the time, the capacity, the margin to do that.

You see, when it comes to applying Scripture and bringing this biblical knowledge into our very souls, we need to go deep, not wide, most of the time. That's where the Spirit has space

to transfer it, to bring it into, as that writer said, the substance of who we are, so that it's not just up here, it's not stuck in our heads. It's in our very being.

Speaking of sermons, did you know that one of the biggest encouragements that you could offer Matt after he preaches a sermon or to the teacher of your Bible study or the teacher of your community is not to say, "Great job"? One of the best ways to encourage somebody in a position like that is to say, "You know, I appreciated that lesson, and this is how I plan to apply it. This is what I plan to do with it." Any communicator or small group leader is going to love to hear that. That's what Jesus says that counts. It's not just that you know it; it's not just that you're hearing it; but are you applying it? So, look for a way to encourage maybe in that way.

Look, do you want to become like Christ in all of life and help others do the same? If you want to do that then here's one way to do it. You are focused on applying every time you hear a sermon, you read a passage, and you look for one way—you kind of rummage around your life and figure out where this is needing to fit in, where God needs to bring this into who you are and your mind and your emotions and your intellect.

## Why Don't We Apply?

Now I want us to consider this question. Why don't we apply? Why does Jesus even need to teach this lesson? Why does He have to say, *Look, don't just hear it. Remember, put it into practice.* Why is it easier to hear Scripture than to hear it and do something about it?

### 1. It's Difficult

I think there are at least three reasons why we don't apply. And one of them is that it's difficult. It's really hard to apply. Just think about some of the teachings that we've discovered and heard again in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5, Jesus says, "**Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.**" And we love that teaching. We think it's a beautiful idea. But it is a really painful reality, isn't it? I mean, have you ever tried to pray for a next-door neighbor who has it out for you? For whatever reason they're just super hostile. Have you tried to care for and be kind to somebody like that? There's nothing romantic about that. It is a very painful experience. And do you know what it's going to require? It's going to require courage. It's going to take courage to choose to obey loving our enemies as Jesus has taught.

But what you'll find as you step courageously into putting that practice is that the reason that Jesus tells us to pray for those who persecute us is because He knows it's next to impossible to hate someone while you're praying for them. What we'll discover if we just say, "Jesus, I don't want to, but I'm going to put this into practice. I'm going to love my enemy, that neighbor that can't stand me." What you'll find is that as you pray for them for a week, for a couple of weeks, for a month, even just once a day, is that your heart will soften towards them over that time. And you'll be in a different place by the end of that. Pray for those who persecute you. It's not easy. It's going to take courage. But one of the reasons that Jesus says, *Look, you need to apply*, and one of the reasons we don't, is because it's difficult. It's hard.

## 2. It's Scary

A second reason why we don't apply is that it's scary. It can be frightening to obey the Lord, to apply Jesus' teachings. We don't know how it's going to turn out. We don't know where this is going to go. Again, in the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 5, Jesus says, *Let's turn the tables here. What if you're the enemy? What if you're somebody else's enemy?* And He says, *Look, if you're offering your gift at the table, if you're there to offer it to me and to worship me and you realize a brother or a sister in Christ has something that they're holding against you, leave that gift there. Pause your worship and wait. And what I want you to do first is I want you to go and do what you can to be reconciled. Do what you can to seek reconciliation with that person. Then come back and worship me.*

But again—have you done that? Man, it's really hard. It's really scary. How's this going to turn out? Often times we don't know. How's the conversation going to go? Are they going to turn on us? Are they going to laugh at us? Is it going to be awkward? So, fear sometimes will keep us from doing that. Do you know what? It's going to require faith. It's going to take faith that my role, my responsibility, is simply to obey Jesus in this, to go and seek reconciliation, and then to trust Him to have faith that the results will be up to Him. How that conversation goes—I can influence that but I can't determine that. I'm going to have to trust that one with God. My faith is in God as I seek to do what I can control and not to do what I can't.

So, the second reason that we don't apply is because it can be scary. It can be frightening. It's difficult, it takes courage. It's scary, it takes faith.



### 3. Easier Substitutes

And the third is that there are so many other substitutes for application. There are so many other options that fulfill us, that make us feel like we've done what we needed to do with this sermon. I'll give you two.

One is insight. Don't you love the euphoria of finding something new in Scripture, seeing something that you haven't seen before, maybe making a new connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament? That's really thrilling. And we love insight so much that often we will mistakenly judge a Bible lesson or a Bible study based on how many new things we learned. But the problem with that is often we settle for the middle satisfaction of learning some new insight. But we haven't taken that insight and embedded it into our souls, into our relationship with God and with others, then we're no godlier than when we started.

And so, one easier substitute for application is insight. I think this probably the one that stops most of us from getting to that next step of application.

But it's not just insight. Another substitute for application is that we apply it to someone else. *Oh, man, I know somebody who needs to hear this sermon or read that passage.* It's a friend or a family member or even an enemy. *They need to hear this!* And they probably do—that's the reality—they probably do. We have a good reason for thinking that. But the problem is that if we stop there and we haven't brought it into our own souls, then we've missed it. We've missed what Jesus says we are to be all about when we come into reading His Word, reading Scripture.

So, why don't we apply? It's difficult, it takes courage; it's scary, it requires faith; and there are many easier substitutions: insight, applying to someone else.

And then the last question I want us to consider in this passage is if the wise always applies, then what does the wise person gain from applying the word of God to his/her life? What does it benefit us to put Jesus' words into practice? How will we be blessed? Because Jesus tells us in this story how we're going to be blessed if we do that.

## Our House Will Stand When Storms Come

Let's go back to the passage to see what that is. Jesus is going to say this: Our house will stand when the storms come. That's how we'll benefit. Look at Matthew 7:24. We're going to look at the whole story this time. He says, **“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on a rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house. Yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”**

See, what do we gain from applying the words of Scripture to our lives? Jesus says that our house will stand when storms come.

And the reality is that when you look at this story, you look at this teaching, when do the wise and the fool find out what kind of builders they've been? When do they find out how they've been building? When do they find out if they've been wise or foolish? When do they find out if they've been putting Jesus' words into practice? It's not until the storms come. It's not until the wind is beating against their home that they discover whether or not they've been building wisely.

So, when the temptation knocks or when the crisis comes, that's when we find out whether we've been wise or foolish with the words of God. And the problem is that when the storm is pounding your house, that's no time to try and reinforce the foundation. By then it's too late.

So, when temptation is slamming against your door and you're sitting across the desk from your CEO who's telling you that you need to fabricate the numbers for the presentation that you're about to give to the company, it'll be too late to try and gain moral convictions. It'll be far too late to try and forage godly character, to engender the courage you're going to need in that moment to stand firm. You'll either have it or you won't.

When crises come flooding into our lives and you're suddenly lying in a hospital bed and you don't know for how long, it's going to be too late to negotiate whether or not you really believe in God's goodness. You won't have time to figure out whether you have faith in God's providence in every situation. You'll either have that faith or you won't. It'll be too late. You

can't patch a massive hole in a boat when you're surrounded by waves and they're crashing into you. It's too late.

And so, what do you do? Whether we stand firm or fall with a great crash, what it's going to depend on in those moments is how we've been building in the hours, in the days, in the weeks, in the months leading up to those temptations, those crises, when those storms hit. It's going to be how we've been building. It's when the sun is out and the wind is tame and it's calm and the waters are not rising. That's when we have to be the wise—the wise person who's taking truth after truth after truth from God's Word and looking around in our lives and figuring out where to take that truth in and make it part of who we are. That's how you gain the courage and the faith that you'll need for the hurricanes of life. That's what Jesus says.

You know, Christian saints of old became saints not simply by hearing or knowing God's Word; they became saints because they acted on God's Word. When it was hardest, when it was scariest to put one of Jesus' teachings into practice, they developed courage and faith, the courage and the faith they would later need. They would develop that courage and faith by acting on it, by doing it, by moving forward, by putting it into practice, even when it hurt. And when the storms came, they were able to stand. They were able to stand firm. They were ready. That's how Christian saints are made today as well.





When you put Scripture into practice, you won't be a spiritual swamp. You'll be like this—a living stream that flows freely and brings life and refreshment to everything and to everyone it touches. Do you want to be like that? So do I. That's what Jesus wants for us, too.

Let's go to Him in prayer now. Let's ask Him to do that in our souls—make us a living stream.

*Lord Jesus, we ask You—we beg You—that You might make us not simply hearers of the Word, but doers of the Word, that whenever we encounter Your Word, Your Scripture, we would be looking for how we're going to work that into the substance of who we are, our character, with the help of Your Spirit.*

*And with the writer of Hebrews, I pray this for us. I pray this for Grace Covenant Church: "Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, (may that same God of peace) equip you with every good thing for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever." And all of Grace Covenant Church said: Amen.*

