

SE ONLINE
Fall 2022 Bible Reading Plan
EVERYTHING IS BACKWARDS

Week One: EVERYTHING IS BACKWARDS

From the opening sentences of the Sermon on the Mount, it's clear that Jesus isn't here to uphold the status quo. Indeed, the eight Beatitudes are eight bombshells intended to explode our ideas of what this life is all about. These statements of blessing force us to consider all the ways this world is broken and remind us that the only real way forward is to move backwards.

READ: Matthew 5:1-16

REFLECTION

- Matthew chapters 5-7 comprise what is often referred to as the “Sermon on the Mount.” This represents the longest continuous body of Jesus’ teaching in the Bible. The sermon’s overarching theme is the “Kingdom of Heaven” and what it means to live under God’s rule (Matt. 4:23).
 - **“He went up on a mountainside”** mirrors the language used when Moses ascended Mt. Sinai to receive the Law (Exodus 19:3).
 - The end of Matthew 4 tells us that Jesus was surrounded by the sick, demon-possessed, and poor. They would have certainly welcomed the good news presented in this passage!
- This opening section of the Sermon is often referred to as the “Beatitudes,” a title taken from the Latin word for “blessed.” By beginning with these pictures of what it truly means to be blessed, Jesus immediately disorients us. He shows us that what the world values is often in direct contradiction to what the Kingdom values.
 - Philip Yancey: *“His words seem revolutionary to us only because we think like people who live an average of sixty or seventy years on a planet made of rocks and trees and soil. Jesus introduced a new way of thinking, raising sights to a life that extends into eternity and involves unseen worlds we have not the capacity to detect. He came to establish an alternate community centered on values from that invisible world, ‘on earth as it is in heaven.’”*
- **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.”**
 - The poverty of spirit Jesus describes here is a recognition that we have nothing before God. Entering the Kingdom is a matter of humble submission and the acknowledgement that we have nothing apart from Him.
- **“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”**
 - This world gives us a lot to mourn about. We mourn about the sin in our own lives. We mourn the sin and suffering in the world. The good news is that God has a plan to make all things right in Christ.
- **“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”**

- The word “meek” is a word that means strength under control. Meek people are not doormats; they are people whose strength is submitted to a Master.
- **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”**
 - This Beatitude forces us to consider what we are hungry for. Moreover, it asks us to evaluate the things we fill up on. God’s righteousness is the only thing that satisfies. As Kenneth Bailey said: *“You can pig-out on righteousness with no negative side effects.”*
- **“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”**
 - The mercy Jesus commends is both a feeling and an action. Our experience of God’s mercy should motivate us to be merciful. This is a theme Jesus will return to later in the Sermon (Matt. 6:12, 14-15).
- **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”**
 - “Pure in heart” is about having alignment between who we are inside and out. When who we are matches what we do, we have integrity because our lives are fully integrated and whole.
- **“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”**
 - As believers, we should want the peace we’ve experienced to define as many lives as possible. When we bring shalom to those around us, we share in the character of our Father.
- **“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”**
 - Living the way Jesus commands will ultimately draw us into direct conflict with the world. Regardless of the cost, there is the call to stand firm.
- **“You are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world...”**
 - We might be tempted to think that we have to escape the world to live this way. Instead, Jesus tells us that our radical lives in this world are the very means by which God calls more and more people to Himself.

RESPONSE:

- If our culture wrote its own set of “Beatitudes,” what would they say? How do we normally describe the “blessed” life? How does this compare/contrast to Jesus’ description?
- As you think about these eight statements of blessing, which is the most surprising to you? Why? Of the eight statements, which is the most difficult for you to embody?
- The Beatitudes contain no commands, and yet they are very challenging. What would a life lived according to these values look like? Think back over the previous week. How would living these things out have changed what happened?
- In what ways would this kind of life be attractive to someone who doesn’t know Jesus? How would it point them to Him?
- Think about the crowd gathered on that mountain. How do you think they would have received these words? If Jesus preached these Beatitudes today, what kinds of people would be drawn to this message?

Week Two: BACKWARDS MOTIVATIONS

In Jesus' day, the 613 laws of the Old Testament had become little more than boxes to check off before you die. Rather than using the Law for righteousness, the people were content to look to them merely as rules and regulations. While our natural inclination is to only do the bare minimum, Jesus challenges us to give it everything we've got.

READ: Matthew 5:17-48

REFLECTION

- In the second section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus turns His attention to the Law. The Pharisees of Jesus' day had attempted to quantify and codify nearly every element of the Torah. They had become so concerned with the minutia of God's Word that they missed out on what God really had for them.
 - Matthew 23:23: **"What sorrow awaits you teacher of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law – justice, mercy, and faith..."**
 - Our natural inclination is to do as little as we can to get by. Jesus confronts that kind of thinking, pushing us to consider not just what God wants us to do, but who God wants us to become.
 - Dallas Willard: *"To be sure, law is not the source of rightness, but it is forever the course of rightness."*
- Matthew 5:17-48 shows us how Jesus' teaching both fulfills and supersedes the Old Testament laws. By walking us through seven Old Testament commands, Jesus refers us back to the Law and then reminds us what the Law was really meant to do. It wasn't about behavior modification; it was about heart transformation.
 - Each section of this teaching begins with the refrain, "You have heard it said... but I tell you..." Jesus restates an Old Testament law (including a couple from the Ten Commandments) and then talks about their true fulfillment in the Kingdom.
- Matthew 5:21-26: **"You must not murder..."**
 - The sixth commandment prohibited the act of murder. Hopefully, that's a pretty easy command for you to fulfill. But, the command wasn't just about not killing people; it was about pursuing right relationships (5:23-24).
 - Jesus pushes us back to the place where murder begins. The act of murder doesn't happen in a vacuum. Like it did with Cain (Genesis 4), murder begins with the decision to let hate and resentment fester. Kingdom people keep an eye on what's in their heart.
- Matthew 5:27-30: **"You must not commit adultery..."**
 - The seventh commandment confined sex to the covenant of marriage by prohibiting adultery. Again, not a difficult command to keep. Yet, Jesus takes the command to its root. It's not enough to avoid the physical act; we must avoid the mental act, as well.

- Tim Challis: *“The one who looks with lust has placed himself at the very center of the universe and functionally believes that others exist for his pleasure. In pride he elevates himself to the place of God.”*
- **Matthew 5:31-32: “A man can divorce his wife...”**
 - In Jesus’ day, there were some rabbis who taught that the Law allowed divorce for almost any reason. Jesus reminds us that God ordained marriage as a commitment that can only be broken under the most difficult of circumstances.
 - Though Jesus’ words seem strong to us, we need to remember that this teaching is more about the bond of marriage than it is about the causes for divorce.
- **Matthew 5:33-37: “You must not break your vows...”**
 - It wasn’t uncommon in those times for people to appeal to a higher power in order to prove the truthfulness of their words. By swearing to something greater than themselves, they could guarantee their honesty. Jesus tells us that Kingdom people are so filled with the truth that they leak it in all their interactions.
- **Matthew 5:38-42: “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth...”**
 - It may sound barbaric to us, but the law of eye for eye and tooth for tooth (Leviticus 24) prohibited escalating acts of vengeance. By limiting the penalty to the offense, the Law kept our tendency toward revenge in check.
 - There’s something within us that wants to see other people suffer the way we have suffered. But, Jesus tells us that kingdom people ultimately value forgiveness over fairness.
- **Matthew 5:43-48: “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy...”**
 - Though Leviticus 19:18 commanded the people to love their neighbors, rabbi sought to limit the command by teaching that people could hate their enemies. Jesus’ words here remind us that God doesn’t just love the people who love Him. He gives some gifts that are common to all people.
 - **“Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.”** Jesus calls us to the same perfection in love that defines God Himself. If our righteousness is truly to be greater than that of the Pharisees (5:20), this is what we must aim for.

RESPONSE:

- Why do we tend to focus more on behavior modification than heart transformation? How have you seen this tendency in your own life? How does Jesus challenge this?
- What’s your typical motivation for wanting to follow God’s commands? In your opinion, is this a good motivation? What motivation does Jesus give us in these verses?
- In what ways does this section of the Sermon on the Mount show us the true purpose of the Law? How did God intend these commands to improve our life and relationships?
- Of the six commands Jesus restates in these verses, which is the most challenging to you? Why? How do Jesus’ words confront you in this area of your life?
- What would a life lived according to this passage look like? How would they treat the people around them? What would their relationships look like? Based on what we’ve seen throughout Matthew 5, how would you define a Kingdom individual?

Week Three: BACKWARDS RELIGION

Whereas other religious leaders taught their followers to make themselves look good to God, Jesus found such solutions untenable. Things aren't going to change if we make ourselves better. They're only going to change as we know Him better. Jesus doesn't call people to a religion that will improve them; He calls people to a relationship that will transform them.

READ: Matthew 6:1-18

REFLECTION

- The religious leaders of Jesus' time taught that there were three primary religious practices – Giving, Prayer, and Fasting. So, it should come as no great surprise that when Jesus talked about religious expression, He began with these very practices.
 - When we think of religion, we often think of the things we have to do to get close to God. We imagine that God is up on the mountain and we have to make our own way up to where He is. So, we do our religious acts to try and gain His favor and earn our place in heaven.
 - But Jesus turns all that imagery backwards. He is God come down the mountain to get us. We don't have to prove our righteousness because Jesus has given us His. In light of that, how do we practice our faith? Jesus tells us exactly what these religious expressions look like in light of the cross.
- Matthew 6:1-4: **“Watch out! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven.”**
 - Jesus first cautions us against one of the most nefarious forms of religious expression. While we know that God Himself cannot be manipulated by our religious practices, that doesn't stop us from trying to manipulate the people around us. We can do great things more for the applause of men than for the approval of our God.
 - **“Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing...”** The picture Jesus paints here speaks to how habitual our giving should be. We should be so used to being generous that it becomes an almost involuntary action. Our left hand doesn't know what our right is doing because it is so used to giving that we do it without thinking.
- Matthew 6:5-15: **“When you pray...”**
 - In a parallel version of this teaching (Luke 11), we're told that Jesus gave His disciples this prayer after they asked Him how to pray. There was something about the way Jesus prayed that made His disciples want to know how He did it. The prayer He gave them in response has been repeated countless times since He first spoke it:
 - **“Our Father”** → Each word here is significant:
 - **“Our”** shows us the corporate focus on this prayer. Indeed, every request in this prayer is made in the first-person plural. This is not just a prayer for “me,” it is a prayer for “we.”

- **“Father”** shows us the intimacy of this prayer. It is the word “Abba,” which is a very personal title (much like “dad” in our language). Jesus was the first to suggest this as a title for addressing the God of the universe.
 - Philip Yancey: *“Whom we pray to matters more than how or what we pray.”*
 - **“May your Kingdom come...”** Given the Kingdom focus of this entire sermon, this request should not surprise us. This request reorients our life around the Kingdom. It forces us to consider what we are doing in our own lives to help God’s Kingdom and will to be manifested in this world.
 - **“Give us today the food we need...”** This request points us to God’s provision and care over His people. In a time when most people were day-laborers, there was a clear awareness of what was needed from day to day.
 - **“And forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven...”** Jesus ties the forgiveness we received from God to the forgiveness we are willing to extend to others. In case we doubt His meaning, He makes it clear in His teaching after the prayer (6:14-15). Those who have genuinely experienced forgiveness are generous in the way they forgive.
 - **“And don’t let us yield to temptation...”** This is a prayer for protection. God will not tempt us (James 1:13-15), but He will lead us through temptation if we trust in Him.
 - Dr. Al Mohler: *“This petition is one of kingdom warfare, asking that God conquer the powers of sin, Satan, and the demons so that we might live for His heavenly kingdom.”*
- Matthew 6:16-18: **“When you fast...”**
 - Fasting was intended to serve as a very tangible, physical discipline that reminded us of our need for God. Like they had with so many other things, people turned this practice into play-acting. They dramatized their discomfort while fasting, making sure everyone else knew how pious they were.

RESPONSE:

- Jesus begins this section of the Sermon on the Mount with a strong warning: “Watch out!” What does this tell us about the dangers of pretending? How can we be sure we’re doing the right things for the right reason?
- Why are we so tempted to trade the approval of God for the applause of men? How does Jesus try to discourage us from making that trade?
- What are some things you do without thinking? How did these things become so habitual for you? What would it take for you to practice spiritual disciplines in that same manner?
- The centerpiece of this section is the Lord’s Prayer. What stands out to you about this prayer? How does it inform/change the way you pray?
- What are some spiritual disciplines you need to improve on? What’s one small change you can make this week to make that discipline a part of your routine?

Week Four: BACKWARDS TREASURE

We are all treasure seekers. We want more money. We want a bigger house. We want a better marriage. We want a prestigious career. For as varied as these pursuits can be, they all come down to one thing: Security. We want to feel safe. Jesus tells us that security isn't something we gain for ourselves. It's something we can only be given by the One who gives us all things.

READ: Matthew 6:19-34

REFLECTION

- Every kingdom has its currency. Americans have dollars. The British have pounds. Somalians make purchases with shillings. The currencies of this world vary from kingdom to kingdom. Likewise, the Kingdom of Heaven has its own currency. At this point of the Sermon, it should come as no surprise that what the Kingdom values is far different than what the world values.
 - It may seem odd that Jesus would talk about topics like money and worry here in this sermon. Yet, these things are some of the greatest “pressure points” of faith. Our money reveals our priorities; our concerns reveal what we cherish. These things can distract and dissuade us from pursuing the King and His Kingdom.
- Matthew 6:19-21: **“Don’t store up treasures here on earth...”**
 - Jesus’ first piece of financial advice is to remind us that the treasures of this world all rot away. Precious metals rust and tarnish. Even the finest clothes can be infested with moths. None of this earth’s treasures last forever. Either they will leave us or we will leave them.
 - A..W. Tozer: “[Money] can be converted into food for the hungry and clothing for the poor; it can keep a missionary actively winning lost men to the light of the Gospel... Any temporal possession can be turned into everlasting wealth. Whatever is given to Christ is immediately touch with immortality.”
 - Jesus invites us to leverage that which is temporary to have an eternal impact in the lives of the people around us. We can use this world’s treasures to help draw people into the Kingdom. This is a similar point to the one Jesus makes in a parable He tells in Luke 16:1-15.
 - Luke 16:9: **“I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”**
- Matthew 6:22-23: **“The eye is the lamp of the body...”**
 - This paragraph is an interesting one, as it seems a little out of place. Yet, Jesus’ words here point us to the nefarious nature of greed. Greed, like lust, is driven by our response to the things we see. Somewhat ironically, however, we can’t always see greed in ourselves.
 - No one thinks of themselves as greedy. In fact, greed is a sin we would be far more likely to ascribe to another person than we would ourselves. When greed corrupts our lives, we are often oblivious to it.
- Matthew 6:24: **“No one can serve two masters...”**

- This is ultimately the key of this whole section. The twin issues of money and worry aren't issues of finance; they are issues of fealty. What lord do we serve? Which master do we obey? If we want to have a better idea of where our allegiances lie, money can be a good barometer.
- Paul David Tripp: *"The love of money sits right in the middle of a lifestyle that forgets eternity, that lives selfishly, that prioritizes the present, and that is more focused on your physical comfort than on your eternal destiny."*
- Matthew 6:25-32: **"And why worry..."**
 - Our anxieties have a way of revealing our allegiances. We worry about the things we care about. Jesus recognizes this in us. His words on worry remind us that we have a Father (and a King!) who can meet our every need. We don't have to give into worry, because He knows us and knows what we need.
 - Jesus paints a picture of how futile and useless worry can be. It doesn't accomplish anything in our lives. Worrying can't add a single moment to our lives. In fact, we now know what a devastating effect worry and anxiety can have on our health!
- Matthew 6:33: **"Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need."**
 - When I focus on God's Kingdom, I get to focus on the perfect King. I see the One who does have it all together – who has the power to do anything He wants to do. He is in control of everything. He is working out all of history for His glory and His plan. He is the King over and above all kings.
 - Focusing on God's Kingdom rather than my own alleviates my worries because He is a much better King than I am. If we focus on God's Kingdom – if we focus on God our King – then we know that He will take care of us.

RESPONSE:

- Make a list of some of the things you treasure. Then, go through each item on the list and ask yourself if it's an earthly treasure or a heavenly one. How do you need to better leverage your earthly treasures to make an eternal impact?
- As you look at the items you treasure, are there any common threads revealed there? If it's true that your heart follows your treasure, then what does this reveal about the state of your heart?
- What are some things you worry about? Why do you think you get preoccupied with these issues? How do each of these areas reveal a struggle with control? What would it take for you to trust God more in these areas?
- Has there ever been a time in your life where worry accomplished anything? In what ways have you found worrying to be a useless activity? How does it divide our attention from what's really happening today? In what ways does it take our attention away from God?
- "Seek the kingdom of God above all else..." What would this look like in your life? How can you seek the Kingdom in your home? Your workplace? Your neighborhood?

Week Five: BACKWARDS RELATIONSHIPS

READ: Matthew 7:1-12

*If we're being honest, most of our relationships operate on who can do the most good for us. Yet, Jesus challenges us to stop judging other people by our own criteria and instead view everyone we come into contact with as God's own children. Jesus anchors all of this in a rule that truly sets Him apart: **"Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you."***

READ: Matthew 7:1-12

REFLECTION

- This section constitutes the most challenging sections of the Sermon on the Mount. Compared to the rest of the Sermon, this section seems a little disjointed and random. The commands don't really seem to flow together. Yet, these commands together paint a picture of what Kingdom relationships should look like.
 - Dallas Willard: *"Taken in isolation... [these verses] appear to be just a few striking but unrelated points about this and that... But they are not. They are absolutely vital points in the overall teaching and its progression. They illustrate the inner texture of kingdom life with family, friends, co-workers, and 'next door' neighbors. They illustrate the kingdom attitude towards those closest to us."*
- Matthew 7:1: **"Do not judge others, and you will not be judged."**
 - Jesus' words here are among some of His most well-known and misquoted. It's often used today to speak against Christians who make moral judgments on contemporary issues. Yet, Jesus isn't asking us to stop being discerning. Rather, He speaks against that kind of judgmental spirit that can creep into our hearts.
 - When we become a part of God's Kingdom, we recognize that we are not qualified to judge others. There is only one Judge – one Lawgiver and King – and we are not Him. Those who live for the Kingdom should refuse to judge others because they recognize that they have no authority to do so.
 - Randy Harris: *"Jesus gives us a completely different way to think about generosity. He talks about generosity in our judgments of other people. What would happen if we developed such generosity of spirit? ...It's a generosity of love. It's a generosity of giving the benefit of the doubt. What would happen if... we looked, not for what was worse in them, but we looked for the image of God that's in every human being?"*
- Matthew 7:2: **"The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged."**
 - Jesus makes it clear that the way we judge others will eventually come back on us. If we hold people to extrabiblical or personal standards, we may find that God uses those same criteria in judging us (Luke 6:37-38).
 - Jesus' further illustration about the log and the speck reminds us that we lack the vision necessary to rightly judge others. We can't always see the whole story.

Many times, we can't see beyond our own sinful practices. Jesus reminds us that any confrontation over another's sin requires humility.

- **Matthew 7:6: "Don't waste what is holy..."**
 - This, by far, is the most confusing statement in the Sermon on the Mount. What is Jesus saying here? Though there are many interpretations, one of the most common is that Jesus is reminding us of the need for discernment. Doing away with a judgmental spirit doesn't mean that we throw all discernment out the window. We must still recognize the holy from the profane.
- **Matthew 7:7-11: "Keep on asking..."**
 - In the middle of talking to us about being generous in our own relationships, Jesus reminds us of the generosity of our Father. We have a God who hears us in prayer. When we ask, He answers. When we knock, He opens the door. Understanding how God has responded to us should serve as a guidepost for how we respond to the people around us.
 - In verses 9-11, Jesus uses the imagery of parents and their children to illustrate how God treats us. If our kids ask for good things, we don't give them things that will harm them. Instead, we give them what they need. We have the assurance God does that for us.
- **Matthew 7:12: "Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you."**
 - This one sentence so neatly sums up the entire relationship ethic of the Kingdom. Though other religions teach a similar principle, Jesus is the only One who states this command in its positive form. Other people said, "Don't do to others what you don't want them to do to you." You could fulfill that command by doing nothing. But, Jesus forces us to be active in pursuing the good of those around us.

RESPONSE:

- Why is it so easy for us to have a judgmental spirit? In your opinion, why do we tend to look down on other people? Why is it so much easier for us to condemn another person than to empathize with them?
- Take another look at the Randy Harris quote about generosity of spirit. What are some of the obstacles that keep you from living that way? What are some reminders/practices you can build into your day to help you remember to live this way?
- How do you draw the line between being discerning and not being judgmental? How can Christians stand for truth without being condemning? How do we see Jesus strike that balance in His life and ministry?
- Make a list of the ways God has been generous with you. How have you seen His generosity throughout your life? What are some ways you can share that same kind of generosity with the people in your life?
- What would it look like for someone to perfectly live out the "Golden Rule"? How would that change your relationships? How would it change your home life? How would following this rule transform you? How would it transform the people around you?

Week Six: BACKWARDS LIVING

When all is said and done, there are only two ways your story goes. There's good fruit and there's bad fruit. There's a firm foundation and there's the shaky ground. There's a path that leads to life and there a path that leads to death. If we want to better understand the choices we're faced with today, we need to think in light of the choice we'll face on the last day.

READ: Matthew 7:13-29

REFLECTION:

- As Jesus wraps up the Sermon on the Mount, He concludes with some challenges. After all, He hasn't designed this sermon as a harmless soliloquy. This sermon is meant to push us to a decision point. There are decisions to be made here. Will we serve the Kingdom of God or will we build our own kingdoms? Will we follow Jesus as our King or will we go our own way? The end of the Sermon puts the ball solidly in our court.
 - The conclusion/invitation of the Sermon on the Mount is built around four short vignettes. Each of these short calls us to decide what we believe not only about what Jesus has said, but about Jesus Himself. As He has throughout this message, Jesus encourages us to build our very lives on God's eternal Kingdom.
 - Mark Buchanan: *"What you see is not what you get. What you see will vanish, never to reappear. What is coming is permanent, never to diminish. It endures forever. It is more real."*
- Matthew 7:13-14: **"You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate..."**
 - Jesus begins with the imagery of two paths. This would have been a very familiar picture to His audience, as the Old Testament repeatedly calls back to the idea of two roads that lead to very different destinations (see Psalm 1:6).
 - The roads are differentiated by their size and popularity. The road to destruction is wide, with many people on it. The road that leads to life is a narrow path with considerably less foot traffic. But Jesus reminds us that it's not the difficulty of the path that matters, it's the destination.
- Matthew 7:15-20: **"Beware of false prophets..."**
 - In this section, we read of the dangers of false teachers and their teaching. Just because someone claims to represent Jesus doesn't mean they actually have a relationship with Him. Jesus knows that there are many who would use His message for their own selfish gains.
 - One of the ways Jesus encourages us to evaluate teaching and teachers is the fruit they produce. What does their personal life look like? What kind of spiritual fruit (Galatians 5:22-23) is evident in their lives? More than that, what kind of fruit does their teaching produce? If you were to live out their words, what kind of impact would it have on your life?
- Matthew 7:21-23: **"Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven."**

- Jesus doesn't just talk about false teachers; He also has some strong words for false followers. In a section that is incredibly challenging, Jesus asks us to look into our own hearts. Are we really following Him the way we claim to be?
- The false disciples in this section did the right things. They professed the right beliefs. But, their lives were still far from Him. They knew a lot about Jesus, but they never really had a relationship with him. This truth is revealed in Christ's own words to them: **"I never knew you."**
- J.I. Packer: *"Interest in theology, and knowledge about God, and the capacity to think clearly and talk well on Christian themes is not the same thing as knowing Him. We may know much about God and yet all the time we may hardly know God at all... A little knowledge of God is worth more than a great deal of knowledge about Him."*
- **Matthew 7:24-27: "Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise..."**
 - This final image calls us to decide what we are building our lives on. If life is like a house, then building your life on Jesus' teaching is like building on a strong foundation. Building on any other foundation, by contrast, is like building on sand. Eventually, life has a way of revealing our ultimate foundation.
 - Notice that the storms come on both houses, regardless of their foundation. Jesus doesn't promise that following Him will lead to a storm-free life. Instead, He promises that when the storms do come, our lives will stand firm.
 - D.A. Carson: *"What, then, is the essential characteristic of the true believer, the genuine disciple of Jesus Christ? It is not loud profession, nor spectacular spiritual triumphs, nor protestations of great spiritual experience. Rather, his chief characteristic is obedience."*
- **Mathew 7:28-29: "...the crowds were amazed at His teaching, for He taught with real authority."**
 - Jesus had a unique didn't just speak these words as a teacher. They were the very essence of who He was. The Sermon on the Mount is about more than just the Kingdom. It's a picture of the King!

RESPONSE:

- Jesus here presents Himself as the dividing line of all history. How has this been proven true in the millennia since He lived? How has this been proven true in your own life?
- Why do you think the road that leads to the Kingdom is so narrow? What is Jesus communicating to us about life in the Kingdom? What does the wideness of the other path tell us about our world?
- What criteria should we use to identify false teachers? What does "good fruit" look like in a life? What does it look like in a ministry? How might these things apply to your life?
- In your opinion, what's the difference between knowing about God and truly knowing God? In what ways is relationship easier than religion? In what ways is it more difficult?
- What "storms" have you seen in your life? Why did the foundation of your life matter in those moments? What difference does it make to have built your life on the rock?