

Matthew 5-7 - A Backwards Sermon

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 June 2015

Preacher: Guest: Billy Spink

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Thank you, gentlemen, and thank you. Thank you for your hospitality in greeting me and my wife as we have been given the blessing of spending a few days in your fair city and seeing the church transformed into Vacation Bible School Central. I don't think this was done for the celebration of my arrival, but I trust that it will be a wonderful greeting to the children as they come through the week, and we will be praying for you because we have some special grandchildren that will be participating here. I'd like to ask you to pray for us because as we return home to Memphis this afternoon, we start Bible school in the morning too, and I have the fifth and sixth grade boys, and you know what they're like. But it's a wonderful time for us to celebrate. We're actually going to be doing a Bible curriculum based on the prophet Jonah, and I hear that you all have sometime in the past done a series on Jonah. In fact, I'm going to borrow this little fella and take him back to Memphis with me. What's his name? Hanaj? And where did you get that? How did you come up with that name?

It's Jonah's name spelled backwards. Well, isn't that interesting? Because this morning, I want to give you a backward sermon. So you're one step ahead of me. You already do things backwards. Imagine if you got up in the morning and you greeted everyone by saying good night, and at the end of the day, you went to bed and you said good morning. Imagine if you got up in the morning and you ate dinner, and just before bed you had breakfast. Imagine that you went to school or into the neighborhood and you chose for 24 hours to walk backwards. Wouldn't that be an odd experience? And yet this morning, what I'm going to do is you're going to join me in making homiletical history. How many of you have ever made homiletical history? I didn't think so. In 34 years of preaching at my church, I have never made homiletical history. But here today on this stage, we will make homiletical history because we are going to preach a backward sermon. If it flops, Will will be here to clean up the mess. But what I want to do is I want to preach through the sermon that Jesus preached in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount. Except for our purposes this morning, we're going to preach it Matthew 7, 6, and 5. So if you want to use your pew Bibles, you'll find it on pages 812 through 809.

Did you get that? 812 through 809? Before we start, let's do the most important thing. Let's pray. Father, as we come to your Word, we want to enjoy the study of your Word and the proclamation of your truth. But we don't want to make a circus of it. We don't want to take it lightly. We want you to speak to our hearts and our minds of your great love for us through Jesus Christ our Lord. And we ask, Father, that you would accomplish your purposes in our hearts this morning, myself included. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. I love to preach through the Sermon on the Mount because everybody loves the Sermon on the Mount. After all, who does not love the golden rule? And who does not appreciate the Lord's Prayer? And who does not memorize the Beatitudes? All of those things and many other memorable things are contained in these three chapters of Matthew that are called the Sermon on the Mount.

[4 : 43] But let's be careful about our approach to this sermon. John MacArthur, and I assume many of you would recognize that name, says this, That's an interesting statement. Hell will be filled with people who love the Sermon on the Mount, who love to hear the Beatitudes read, who love to hear the Lord's Prayer said, who love to abide by the golden rule, because in their attempt to please God and attain their salvation, they have determined that the Sermon on the Mount has been given them to show simply the principles of the way to live the Christian life. If that's the case in your heart, I have good news for you this morning.

Because just as hell will be filled with those who love the Sermon on the Mount, heaven will be filled with those who have come to understand what Jesus was really saying.

And that's what we want to understand this morning. We want to begin this sermon as that sermon ends. The closing paragraph of the Sermon on the Mount really gets our attention. Matthew chapter 7 at verse 24.

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat against that house and it fell and great was the fall of it.

Our children learn the song, the wise man built his house on the rock. And every generation of children is taught that song. Why? Because we want them to understand the necessity of a firm and solid foundation for a faithful and fruitful life. But notice there are dangerous warnings attached to this paragraph. There is a foolish man. There's a collapsing house and great was the fall of it.

[7:10] There's disappointment and tragedy. If what? If your house is built upon sand. Now I have a dear friend who just recently said these words to me. I'm going to have to take my wife down to the coast because every once in a while she needs to get a little sand between her toes.

Are you like that? Every once in a while you need to get to the beach and you need to get a little bit of sand between your toes. It's good therapy for you. And that may be true about the beach, but to get a little sand between your toes is not a wise thing according to the Lord Jesus. That's why he's given us this sermon. That's why he's correcting some misconceptions. That's why he wants to put rock under our feet, not sand. This sermon is not just a collection of wise sayings. It's a matter of life and death, standing or falling, success or failure, victory or defeat, even heaven or hell. Do you see why I'm starting at the end? This paragraph gets our attention that we might realize what's at stake in this sermon.

So let's get the sand out from between our toes this morning. Let's listen to this sermon and try to truly discern what's on our Lord's heart. And let's begin, of course, at chapter 7.

In chapter 7, Jesus describes it this way, our world is filled with people who make false assumptions and live with false hopes. False assumptions, false hopes. As Jesus preaches, he realizes he's surrounded by people whose feet are firmly planted in the sand, not rock, on lies, not truth. They may not know it, they may not admit it, they may be blind to it, but that is the truth. How so? First, they're traveling on the wrong highway. Notice verses 13 and 14 of chapter 7. Jesus says, enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

For the gate is narrow, the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. This is vacation season. Imagine the disappointment of preparing for vacation and leaving for vacation and moving out on vacation only to take a few wrong turns, and you end up in the middle of nowhere.

[10:04] Not your intended destination. As Will grew up, I'm not going to belabor the Will stories with you this morning, but this is a good spot for one.

As Will grew up, he was admired by many people. He gave counsel to friends, but there was one area of counsel he was never asked for.

Directions. He was directionally challenged. The GPS was an answer to prayer. If you use one, you can thank Will for that, because we never knew when he left the house whether he would get to his destination.

Jesus is talking about that in this passage. Imagine leaving and living on a highway that doesn't get you to the right place.

Multiply that by a thousand and consider the tragedy of living your whole life climbing the ladder of success only to find that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall at the end.

[11:19] False assumptions can lead to disastrous results. But not only are they traveling on the wrong highway, they are trusting in the wrong object.

They have hope and confidence. They have expectation. But it's not in the right object. Notice chapter 7 at verse 21. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

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 mighty works in your name? And then I will declare to them, I never

knew you.

Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. Again, another surprise. First, it's a large company traveling down a wide road that when they get to the end of that road, it's destruction.

And now it's people who have actively been at work in the life of the church who are told that he never knew them. Depart from me. Maybe we could paraphrase it this way.

[12:24] Lord, Lord, I served in VBS, remember? I went on a mission trip to Peru. I was active in the youth ministry. I volunteered at Lincoln Village.

I was even ordained to office. What if Jesus took those claims and threw them out of court? Have any of you read Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress?

Hands? Pilgrim's Progress? You know how it ends? You remember how it ends? It's a glorious... You've got to read the ending.

The glorious arrival of Christian and hopeful into the celestial city. And the incredible description of the glory of the place.

Such that Bunyan says, When I had seen it, I wish I had been among them. But if you've read it, you know that that's not the end.

[13:22] Because there's another couple of paragraphs that follow that description. When Bunyan says, Another man crossed the river of death.

And another man climbed the mountain to the gate of the celestial city. And another man sought to enter therein. And he was asked for his certificate.

And he had none. And he was not let in. In fact, he was led away. And this is how Pilgrim's Progress ends.

And I saw that there was a way to hell even from the gates of heaven. Wow. Jesus gets our attention in this seventh chapter.

He's describing the tragic situation of people who think they are Christians but are not. Who think they are headed to heaven but are denied entrance. Who think they are standing on the rock when in fact they are on the sand destined to collapse.

[14:30] Not to stand. Well then we need to hear more. What do we learn if we move back to chapter 6?

What do we learn from that chapter? We learn this. Our world is filled with people whose bodies are at church but whose hearts are in the world.

Church is definitely a part of their life. But upon closer examination, we see that they claim to trust God but their hearts are flooded with anxiety.

They're people whose lives are filled with worry and fret and fear and doubt. Chapter 6 at verse 25.

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on.

Verse 27. And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to a span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Verse 31. Therefore do not be anxious, saying what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear?

[15:35] For the Gentiles seek after all these things. Anxious, anxious, anxious, Jesus preaches to them because he's seen through their smiles and he's examined their hearts.

They claim to trust God, but they fail the eye test, how they live and think and speak. They don't sleep at night and they don't relax during the day.

The future scares them and the present frustrates them. They claim to trust God, but their hearts are anxious. They claim to worship God, but they crave the approval of man.

Chapter 6 and verse 1. Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them. They do a lot of good things for the wrong reasons.

And Jesus goes into a discussion of giving and follows that with a discussion of praying and then digs even deeper and speaks to those who fast.

[16:39] Givers, prayers, fasters, doing all the right things for the wrong motivation to be seen by men.

And then they claim to value God, but they treasure the things of earth. Chapter 6, verse 19. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. My wife and I have just started cleaning our attic.

I don't recommend it. It's really not a lot of fun. It's very convicting to see what you treasure, to see what you've kept, and how much of it, how much of it.

We sing in Christ alone, but do we really live it? We sing all to Jesus, I surrender, but we don't.

[18:01] We sang this morning, I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold. I sang that song, but boy, oh boy, was that convicting because I'm not sure I meant it, and I'm not sure I live it.

We say Jesus is all the world to me, but you couldn't tell it by following people for a week or looking at their checkbooks. Their bodies are at church, but their heart is in the world.

Sometimes after preaching, when I go to the back door, I have people say things like this, Preacher, you were really preaching to me this morning. You really got me today.

That means I stepped on their toes, I meddled a bit, I spoke to a touchy area in their lives. Well, I can say to Jesus, you got me today.

This whole subject of where my heart is, is exposed by Jesus' words. He's making us examine our hearts, and I'm not liking what I see, my selfish attitudes, my private fears, my hidden motives.

[19:18] I live and work and worship in the church, but that's no guarantee that my heart isn't still often in the world.

So first, Jesus raises the reality of false assumptions and false hopes, and then he identifies the weaknesses of our hearts and our hidden idols. Well, we need to hear more.

Finally, moving backwards to chapter 5, we learn our world is filled with people who are in desperate need of a deliverance outside themselves. Desperate need of deliverance outside themselves.

My guess is you have your favorite TV shows, right? Your weekly shows that you wouldn't miss. You record them if you have to be out so you can see them later.

One of the shows that my wife and I have gotten into lately is Scorpion. Any Scorpion watchers in here? Thank you. We'll talk after the service.

[20:23] Scorpion is obviously a very popular show. It is the story of a group of geniuses. See, only a few people really can understand it.

A group of geniuses that solve the problems of national security by their brains. Okay? And in one particular episode, Walter, who is the chief genius, drives off a cliff at a high rate of speed.

His car hurtles over the cliff. It falls about 100 feet. It's on a precipice, teetering on this precipice. And Walter inside is bleeding.

He's been badly injured. And the Scorpion team realizes that they have about an hour to rescue him. Well, I hate to ruin it for you, but they do.

They figure out a way to rescue Walter from this car. But it really does kind of make you wonder how in the world they're ever going to rescue the man from this horrible predicament.

[21:31] Well, my friends, Jesus in chapter 5 is describing man in an even worse predicament because it's a spiritual predicament. And if you study chapter 5, you'll be amazed that Jesus demands from us what no man can deliver.

Have you ever thought about the gospel that way? Jesus demands from us what we cannot deliver. Notice in verse 20 of chapter 5, he says, for I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

That ought to blow you away. You want to go to the kingdom of heaven, right? But he says, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.

Now, the problem is the Pharisees and the scribes were the poster children of what righteousness was all about. How in the world could the average ordinary guy have a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees?

Then to make matters worse, he begins a series of explanation of Old Testament commands describing how true righteousness must include not just the letter of the law, but the spirit of the law.

[22:47] He says, you've heard that it was said you shall not kill, but I tell you, you shall not even be angry. You've heard that it was said you shall not commit adultery, but I tell you that if you even lust in your heart, you've committed adultery.

So Jesus takes the definition of righteousness and expands it to proportions that no man can reach.

And then if he's just not satisfied with that, at the end of the chapter, verse 48, he just puts it simply, you therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

If anybody thought they had passed the first two measures, he gets them on the third. You've just got to be perfect. Great! The kingdom of heaven is a hopeless wish, right?

Well, he then goes on to promise what no one can imagine. In the Beatitudes, Jesus speaks of those who possess the kingdom of heaven, inherit the earth, receive mercy, are satisfied.

[24 : 02] they'll see God, be called the sons of God. Great is their reward in heaven. Now I'm really confused because he's just set me up for failure, but at the same time told me that it's possible to have all these wonderful blessings.

What's he saying? What's he mean? How can the incredible demands of God be met with the incredible blessings of God? Well, it all starts with empty hands, not impressive performances. Chapter 5, verse 3, blessed are the poor in spirit. It starts by admitting you can't, not guaranteeing that you will. Years ago, I heard this description by Max Licato.

you don't impress the officials at NASA with a paper airplane. You don't boast about crayon sketches in the presence of Picasso. You don't claim equality with Einstein because you can write H₂O.

And you don't boast about your goodness in the presence of the perfect. Mark it down, God does not save us because of what we've done. The first step to joy is a plea for help, an acknowledgement of moral destitution, an admission of inward poverty.

[25 : 21] Those who taste God's presence have declared spiritual bankruptcy and are aware of their spiritual crisis. Their cupboards are bare, their pockets are empty, their options are gone.

They have long since stopped demanding justice. They are pleading for mercy. They don't brag, they beg. And they ask God to do for them what they can't do without Him.

You see, our problem in this world is not with a backward sermon. It's with a backward gospel. Believing somehow that heaven is awarded to us on the basis of our success rather than given to us despite our failures.

If you study more closely chapter 5, Jesus is going to say that He came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it.

What we cannot do, He has done. And He offers to us a perfect righteousness. In chapter 6, He's going to invite us to pray, forgive us our debts.

[26 : 32] because He knows that He's headed to a cross where He is going to shed His blood for the forgiveness of sin. In chapter 7, when He speaks of a narrow gate, perhaps He's thinking to a later date in John chapter 10 when He says, I am the gate of the sheep.

The gospel requires that we admit there is sand between our toes and we ask to be cleansed. And when we do, the blood of Jesus washes away our guilt and God places our feet upon a rock.

The psalmist in Psalm 40 put it this way, I waited patiently for the Lord. He inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction out of the miry bog and He set my feet upon a rock making my steps secure.

What makes the gospel so beautiful is the depth of our problem and the height of God's solution. That rock is not a place.

It's a person. It's not a new set of rules. It's Jesus' blood and righteousness. That rock is not trying harder. It's resting in His sufficiency.

[27 : 47] It doesn't just point me in a new direction. It establishes in my heart a new affection. I'm loved and I love in return. I rest and I'm energized to obey.

It all sounds so backwards. That's why it's amazing grace. When this sermon begins in chapter 5 seeing the crowds He went up on the mountain and when He sat down His disciples came to Him. That's what we must do come to Him. And when they left in chapter 7 it says in verse 28 when Jesus finished these sayings the crowds were astonished at His teaching for He was teaching them as one who had authority and not as the scribes and when He came down from the mountain great crowds followed Him.

We must come to Him. Hear His voice and follow Him. in the past several years I've had the privilege of serving in a retirement community immediately across the street from my church. Imagine if across Jones Valley there was a retirement community of 400 to 500 people right there right in your face well that's what we've got. And I started offering myself as a chaplain and doing Bible studies and meeting people and ministering to people and now I'm the hired part-time

chaplain.

[29 : 17] It's an upscale retirement community. It's a place where the successful have come at the end of their life to be pampered and to enjoy community and fellowship.

And my message to these people has boiled down to one primary thought. Being good is not good enough.

They've served our country. They've built hospitals and churches and schools. They've loved the flag and paid their taxes.

They've raised their families and now in their waning years there are many of them resting on all that they have done and they want somebody to come along and say to them well done you've done such a good job and I go and tell them your goodness is not good enough.

And I try to point them to the sufficiency of Jesus Christ and the completion of his work and say to them empty hands clinging to the cross that's what God desires.

[30 : 37] The gospel of grace we set the gospel of grace backward when we act as if it's a reward for our performance.

We hear it accurately when we come to a table like this and believe that Jesus paid it all and all to him I owe.

The sermon on the mount is a hard hitting rebuke to our hearts it's not a collection of wise and sweet principles but a reminder to us that the true gospel of Jesus Christ meets us at the point of our emptiness and fills us with the fullness of God's love and grace and hope.

And it points us to this table because that's where Jesus is headed. He knows it and he loves it because he loves you and because he loves me.

Let's pray. Father we ask this morning that as we come to this table we would be convinced that we are desperately in need of a deliverance that only you can provide and in fact only you have provided in sending your son to this earth to give his life a ransom for sinners that we might turn from ourselves and receive and rest upon him alone and know the joy and the peace of standing upon the rock.

[32 : 23] And we pray this in his name. Amen. For more information visit us online at southwood.org For more information visit us online at southwood.org