

3

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: 11 January 2014

Preacher: Sam Low

[0 : 0 0] Those of you who know me even a little bit will know that AFL is one of my passions and in particular you will also know that I support three teams. I support the West Coast Eagles, I support the GWS Giants and I support whoever is playing against the Sydney Swans.

This has been at times a joyful experience and at other times somewhat painful. There was the year that the Swans beat the Eagles in the grand final, it's not one I like to talk about but I thought I'd share with you a little bit about why I have this distaste for Swans as a team and for Swans fans and it can be summarised in one word, bandwagon. Basically, my problem with the Sydney Swans fans is that people only support the Swans when they're winning.

I remember as a young kid going to watch the Swans play, this was during the longest premiership drought in AFL history. They hadn't won a game in over two years and there was less than 2,000 people in the entire stadium but in the last few years they have managed to win once or twice and suddenly there is a lot more red or white to be found around Sydney and I just feel like if you're going to be a supporter, you have to take the bad with the good. You've got to actually earn the good, you've got to earn the wins and the right to brag. Now, I know that there are some exceptions, Rachel, I'm going to single you out as one of those exceptions, but your recruiting drive is single-handedly responsible for a significant portion of the bandwagon.

I have an issue with fair weather followers. I have an issue with people who sign up and wear the jersey and wear the scarf only when things are going well. And that's kind of where Jesus ends up in this passage, not dealing with swan supporters necessarily, but dealing with fair weather followers. You remember that Jesus begins this sermon surrounded by a crowd, sitting on a mountain, talking to his disciples with a multitude eagerly listening in. And why are they listening in?

Because they've seen the miracles. Because Jesus speaks impressively. Because it's a good show. And Jesus is looking at this crowd full of pseudo-followers, full of fair weather followers, and having explained that the narrow road, the kingdom of heaven, takes more than fair weather, he finishes with a very serious and scary warning. By basically putting on the table that many people who look like the genuine article when it comes to following Jesus will actually prove not to be.

[2 : 56] This is his final word after three chapters of unpacking what we should do, how we should treat other people, our purity, how we should worship. He finishes with the warning, some who look genuine will actually prove not to be. It's the scary word of verse 23 in chapter 7, then I'll tell them plainly, I never knew you, away from me you evildoers. And I can speak from my own life and I'm sure that sadly many of us can, refer to people who have been in church, who have been in youth group, maybe who have even served in ministry alongside us, who as life got more difficult, as the demands of following Jesus seem to increase, their commitments seem to decrease. And so Jesus finishes with the story of the two builders in verse 24, and he wants us to understand the difference between being fake and genuine. It's very, very simple. You ready? The difference between being fake, between being a fair weather follower of Jesus, and being a genuine Christian, is doing. That's what he says. Verse 24, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. They're the genuine article. Or verse 26, everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The difference between the one who goes the distance and the one who is just showing up while things are going well, is doing. Hearing is only the start. It's a good start and it's an important start, but it's only a start. If we stop there, we haven't achieved anything. I wonder if sometimes you find yourself tempted to feel a little sense of pride because you sat in church and listened to a sermon today. Well, at least some of it. It was long.

Or maybe you read your Bible this morning and you go into the day feeling very proud of the fact that God's Word was speaking to you this morning and you heard it. Jesus' message is, hearing is good. It's essential. Without hearing, you've got no hope, but hearing is only the beginning. When I was younger, I used to go surfing with my brothers and my dad and often you would hear an alarm come out from the surf club letting us know that A, there's sharks in the water and B, if we want to be safe, it's time to come into the beach.

Hearing that alarm is an essential step to me being safe, but it's not the whole thing. If I just hear the alarm but don't do anything about it, all that alarm does is tell me that I'm about to get eaten.

Hearing is an essential step, but it's just the beginning. I need to do, I need to act, I need to practice what I hear. So it sounds simple enough, this passage. It sounds like we could finish the sermon now and everyone could go home, okay, I've got to do what I hear, tick, easy, ready to go.

But there is an awkwardness because the thing that Jesus just said throws a spanner in the works. Look back with me at verse 21. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me, evildoers.

[6 : 37] Apparently, all we have to do to be genuine is do, is put into practice, is action. But those couple of verses before tell us that it's not just any actions that are going to be okay. Because the message of this whole sermon has been that you can do good things badly. You can do good things in a wrong way. In chapter 5, Jesus unpacks the commandments that these people have heard, the boxes that they are ticking. But he says, even as you tick the box, you don't actually honour me.

He says, you have found a way to turn obeying commandments into doing the bare minimum and treating me like I'm this oppressive overlord. In chapter 6, we went through religious acts.

In chapter 6, he talked about religious acts. He talked about prayer. He talked about giving. He talked about fasting. And he explained that you can actually do those things in a way that doesn't honour God. And then in verse 22, we see that you can even do miracles in a way that doesn't honour God. I mean, did you catch that? It's easy to skip past that verse. But verse 22 says that they prophesied in his name, they drove out demons, they performed many miracles. There's no reason for us to believe that what actually happened was they thought they did that, but it wasn't true.

Apparently, they did miracles. Yet still, Jesus turns to them and says, away from me, I never knew you. So on one hand, the difference between being fake and being genuine is doing.

But on the other hand, we need to be more specific because you can do the things that are in this sermon in the wrong way. So look closely at verse 24.

[8 : 39] Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. Jesus is being really specific here. These words are the thing that matter.

These words are the things that we need to put into practice. These words are his way of referring back to everything that he has said in the last few chapters. And that gives us a clue that this sermon is not a list of things that you need to do and a list of things that you mustn't do.

This sermon is one message from Jesus about life in the kingdom. This sermon is not a list of rules. This sermon is a gospel message from Jesus.

Jesus is explaining what it means to follow him. This whole sermon, even when he says, you've heard it said, but now I'm raising the bar. This whole sermon is a message of grace.

It's a message of forgiveness. It's a message of God's love. It's there. We get clues the whole way through. The beginning of the sermon, chapter 5, verse 3. Flip back there with me. The sermon begins, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[9 : 57] The essential starting point for this life that Jesus is describing is poverty of spirit, is an awareness that we're not good enough. As we go through, there's this clue that this life in the kingdom is about more than just obedience. There's the invitation for us to think of God as our Father. We're invited to pray to him as our Father in heaven. There's this incredible gospel message. Look at chapter 5, verse 43.

You have heard that it was said, love your neighbor and hate your enemies. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.

He causes his son to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. The whole way through, Jesus, as he lifts the bar for obedience, keeps pointing to a God who loves people who don't deserve it. The message of this sermon is grace. It's that God loves you in spite of your failure. And maybe the most significant one, in chapter 5, verse 17, Jesus says, do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. That includes the law that demands a sacrifice for sin. They might not have understood it at the time, but Jesus is pointing to the fact that he will die so that they can be forgiven. He will die so that they can know what this life in the kingdom is like, so they can know about that blessed life that we looked at a couple of weeks ago. Jesus' message at the end of the Sermon on the Mount is this, putting the gospel into practice is what matters. It's not about walking away from this series with a list of things to do and not do. It is about the gospel, the whole message, which means more than you think it does. Let me say that again. Putting the gospel into practice means more than you think it does. It means, at very least, knowing Jesus. I mean, did you catch the clue for us there? Back in chapter 7, having sent these people away who perform miracles, why does he send them away? His words are, I never knew you. Life in the kingdom is, first of all, about knowing Jesus.

It's about knowing the King and being known by the King. It includes being forgiven. It includes being obedient, but first and foremost, it is about the relationship that God has made possible through Jesus. But more than that, putting the gospel into practice isn't just the beginning. Putting the gospel into practice isn't just about being forgiven because of Jesus' death on the cross so that we can begin this life. And then we leave the gospel and we move on to the next bit. The gospel is always.

Jesus is always. That's why we come back to this at the end of all these rules which are still there and which still matter because the gospel is the essential bit. The message of the story of the two builders is that the minute you forget the gospel, it doesn't actually matter how well you build from that point on. It doesn't matter how hard you try to obey Jesus. It doesn't matter how much effort you put into being holy. If you forget the gospel, the foundation is gone and your house, your life, will collapse. The gospel is more than the starting point. It's the beginning. It's the middle. It's the end.

[13 : 44] It's the everything. And the danger for us when we read something like the Sermon on the Mount with all these rules that are in there is that we get scared of the commands because we look at them as a standard that we can't actually reach. They're like an ideal and all that we get from them is this sense of guilt.

And so we just try and pretend they're not there. We try and dismiss them as unimportant. We try and rush to the bit where God says he loves us and where God says we're forgiven. But the problem with that and the problem with the way that the Pharisees obeyed the law in Jesus' day and the problem with the miracle workers in verse 21 and even the problem with us is that sometimes we look at these laws, no matter how many times we've heard the gospel, we open the Bible and we look at these laws as a means of being good enough for God. We feel a weight because we think if God is going to love me, I need to meet the standard that is in these pages. Yeah, I know Jesus forgave me. That's how I started out. But now that I'm a Christian, if I don't live up to this standard, I'm going to somehow fall off.

I'm going to somehow miss out. I'm going to somehow be those people who are sent away. But there is nothing wrong with the laws in these pages. Jesus is speaking them. Jesus is telling us that they still matter for our lives, but our motivation for obeying them is what matters. If our reason for obeying the laws that we read in Scripture is hoping that somehow we can earn God's love, then what we actually do is reject Jesus. If the instructions that you read in these pages make you feel a weight because you feel like you need to hit a point or a mark before God will love you, then what you're saying is, somehow I can do it by myself. It might be a difficult task, but somehow I can do it and therefore I don't need Jesus. And no matter how long you've been around church, no matter how many times you've heard the gospel, it is a temptation for us to slip back having been forgiven into the kind of obedience that feels like we need to do this if God is going to love us. And when we do that, we change these rules and make them into something that they were never supposed to be. We hear the gospel, but we don't actually put it into practice. Now the scary thing as we've worked through this sermon is that people who are on the narrow road, people who have built their house on the rock and people who have built their house on the sand or who are traveling on the broad road might look very similar. They might even be doing similar things. I mean, we know for a fact that there was miracle workers on the wide road. There are miracle workers who built their house on the sand. It might be that both are praying, it might be that both are trying not to murder, trying not to be angry, but the difference is the relationship between what they are doing, between their obedience and Jesus.

One person sees their obedience as taking the place of Jesus and the other person sees their obedience as a response to Jesus. If there is obedience but no forgiveness, there is nothing.

Obedience without forgiveness is useless. But there is a balance warning for us. This isn't a get out of jail free card. This isn't put up your feet because you've been forgiven. This isn't Jesus putting a little clause on the end of the sermon going, I know you're feeling pressure, but don't worry about it, you're forgiven, so it doesn't matter. This isn't instruction to pull out the hammock.

[17 : 42] To say that the gospel matters doesn't mean that we don't have to do anything. It doesn't mean that all of this sermon was a big waste of time because really all Jesus needed to say was, I died, I'm alive and you're forgiven. That would be missing the point of the gospel.

That would be missing the point of grace. Just as obedience without forgiveness is useless, forgiveness without obedience is incomplete.

The gospel message is one that calls us to a new kind of obedience, not to no obedience at all. I remember when I was growing up playing football, I was around 11 or 12 and I had aspirations that one day I would play for a team that wasn't Sydney. And I remember that the first step in this process was getting out of the team that I played for on the weekend, my club side, into the representative squad. And what I had to do to do that was go to tryouts. And it always amazed me how the second you surround a group of 11-year-olds with men and clipboards judging whether or not you're in or out, how quickly the standard dropped. The pressure of somebody else deciding whether or not I got to meet this goal of playing in the representative game, of being a Sydney representative, would just completely make me unable to do things that I could normally do. Suddenly I couldn't catch a ball.

Suddenly I was tired after running 15 metres. Suddenly trying to kick a goal was just beyond me. But then, once you're in the team, it's like you're totally relaxed again. It's not that you stopped playing football. It's not that you stopped doing the things from before. But now you're doing them for the enjoyment in anticipation of the game that you were trying to get to all along.

The kind of obedience that Jesus is calling us to in this Sermon on the Mount is an obedience that is growing, that is increasing. But it's no longer an obedience that dictates whether or not we are on Jesus' team. It's no longer the line that decides whether we're in the kingdom or out of the kingdom.

[19 : 51] It's now the life that he has given us in anticipation of the eternal life that he has prepared for us. Where finally we will get all of these things right and live all of them the way that we are supposed to.

Jesus has lifted the burden for us, but obedience still matters. Because grace is not just the means by which you start the narrow road.

It's also the thing that empowers you to live your life as a follower of Jesus. Look quickly at chapter 5 with me, where we started two weeks ago.

The Beatitudes begin with our need for grace. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. But very quickly we find in verse 6, Grace both offers us unconditional forgiveness and releases us to start running and obeying more with greater intensity, with deeper love, with more motivation, with more freedom.

Grace doesn't release us from the law. Jesus says, I've come to fulfill it. Grace doesn't take the law away. What it does is it empowers us to use the law the way it's supposed to work.

[21 : 12] Not as something to give us guilt, not as something to intimidate us, but as a model for life in the kingdom.

As a model of what we are being called to on that final day when Jesus our King will arrive and right every wrong. Grace gives us a way of dealing with the fact that we fail and fall short.

It gives us a way of coping with guilt that isn't hopeless. Now when we look at this instruction not to be angry or not to look at another man's wife lustfully, instead of wallowing in self-pity because we've stuffed that up 15 times in the day, we're driven to the cross, to Jesus, to the confidence we have.

Because in the cross we find forgiveness and we find that desire to want to live life in God's kingdom. When we look at Jesus we are given the motivation to obey, to live the life that he has designed, to get the blessing that he has built into our obedience.

See what Jesus is arguing for throughout this sermon is the difference between two kinds of obedience. He's not actually talking about obedience and disobedience. There's the obedience that is trying to be good enough for God which rejects the gospel.

[22 : 34] And there is the obedience which is fiercer and deeper and greater in light of the forgiveness that we have been shown and the grace that we have received in Jesus.

The difference between these two kinds of obedience is the relationship with Jesus. They might actually look very similar to the outsider.

But according to this passage Jesus says eventually it will be obvious. When the storms come, when Jesus returns, those who know Jesus will be welcomed into his kingdom.

Those who are still carrying the burden of trying to be good enough will be sent away to their fearful fate. So what does it look like for us to live out this kind of obedience?

Well it looks like using whatever God has given you. If last week you were convicted and challenged about the temptation to be hypocritical in the way that you do your religious acts, if you attempted to pray to impress people, if you attempted to show off about your personal devotion, to show off about your generosity, then open the Bible.

[23 : 50] Memorise verses that convict you that God is the only one worth living for. Gather a Christian brother or sister that God has provided to hold you accountable. Pray.

Ask God to change your heart. Do whatever it takes. Because obedience matters when we're forgiven. It doesn't make us forgiven, but forgiveness without obedience is incomplete.

Complete. This sermon begins with a need for us to be poor in spirit. To depend on Jesus. And this sermon ends with a reminder that we need to stay poor in spirit.

That it is the gospel at the beginning, it is the gospel in the middle, and it is the gospel until Jesus comes back. We need Jesus to stay front and center when we fail and when we try to obey.

Because that protects us from that burdensome kind of obedience. I want to finish off by looking again at verse 24. In chapter 7.

[25 : 02] Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the 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. When you hear the message of the gospel, when you hear that Jesus loves you even though you don't deserve it, when you hear that Jesus died for you so you could be forgiven, when you hear that Jesus rose and has designed this incredible life in the kingdom for you, and you live in wholehearted obedience, then that word is for you.

Whatever storms may come, whatever struggles, whatever persecution, whatever guilt, whatever obstacles, you will not fall. You will not be moved.

That is the message of the gospel. We have an unshakable hope that even when we fail, God's love cannot be broken. To those of us who are burdened by the weight of what Jesus demands from us in these chapters, who feel hopeless and inadequate, hear the promise of the gospel.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And put that into practice by embracing a new, joyful kind of obedience.

[26 : 40] And for those of us who are more tempted to relax in light of the gospel, tempted to put our feet up, hear the words of Jesus, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

And put it into practice. With a deeper desire for obedience, even in those who feel the weight of their eternal destiny. Because our God is worth it.

And because His love demands nothing less. Let's pray. Father God, we want to thank you so much for the message.

We want to thank you for the life that you have designed for us. We want to acknowledge that so quickly we forget your love. We forget your grace.

We forget all that you have done for us. We want to admit that so quickly when we remember, we get lazy. Father, forgive us for both of these errors.

[28 : 01] Instead, God, fill us with the peace that comes from knowing that our Savior is risen and that our forgiveness is eternal. Fill us with the hunger and thirst that Jesus describes here, that we might grow in righteousness, that we might grow in our obedience to you.

May we fight for our purity and for our holiness in anticipation of the eternity that you have prepared for those who love you.

Thank you for our unshakable hope. Thank you for Jesus, our Savior. Amen.