

# WEEK 12: A CALL TO DECISIVENESS

TWO DESTINIES AND TWO FOUNDATIONS

Matthew 7:21–29



## The Place of the Passage

Jesus began to bring the Sermon on the Mount to a conclusion in Matthew 7:13. From that point on he introduced a series of contrasts that led us to a point of decisiveness about him. He emphasized how there are only two ways to life, a narrow way and a broad way, and we must choose the one we will follow (vv. 13–14). There are also two kinds of trees: healthy trees that bear the fruit of good works and diseased trees that do not (vv. 15–20). Now Jesus introduces two kinds of people who claim that Jesus is Lord:<sup>1</sup> those who claim his lordship without submitting to it and those who gladly do the will of God. There are also two kinds of builders: those who build their house on the foundation of Christ's teaching and those who do not. By the end of the sermon the astonished crowds—and all who hear him—must decide on which side of these contrasts they are.

**The Big Picture**

Jesus uses several contrasts to illustrate the point that there are ultimately only two ways to respond to his message.

**Reflection and Discussion**

Carefully and thoughtfully read this final section of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:21-29. Then use the provided questions to help you think more deeply about the text. (See *ESV Study Bible* notes on pages 1834-1835; online at [www.esv.org](http://www.esv.org).)

**A Warning: Beware of Self-Deception and False-Assurance (Matt. 7:21-23)**

In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus identifies several characteristics that do not necessarily indicate that someone is a true Christian. What are they? What other similar behaviors do professing Christians pursue that demonstrate that they are not necessarily true Christians (consider 1 Cor. 13:1-3)?

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While Jesus identifies a number of characteristics that people may replicate without actually being a part of his kingdom, what are the key realities in Matthew 7:21-23 that confirm that someone is an authentic Christian?

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At the heart of real Christianity is being known by Jesus (Matt. 7:23). Why is this essential (consider John 17:3 and Phil. 3:8-9)?

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Write a sentence that summarizes in your own words Jesus' main point in Matthew 7:21-23.

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**A Call to Wisdom: Building on the Right Foundation (Matt. 7:24-27)**

Jesus gives an illustration of two builders: two different people who build two different houses on two different foundations. What is the point that Jesus illustrates with this?

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Jesus says that the wise will not only hear his words but also do them (Matt. 7:24). Read James 1:22-27 and 2:14-16. How does James make a similar point?

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Although Jesus may have in mind various trials in life that expose our wisdom or folly, consider the context. Jesus is giving a series of contrasts: two pathways

(Matt. 7:13–14), two trees (vv. 15–20), two claims (vv. 21–23), and two builders (vv. 24–27). Review each of these and consider: what is the negative destination in each of these illustrations? To what, then, do you think the fall of the foolish builder's house refers?

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Jesus brings his teaching to a conclusion in Matthew 7:24–27. How does this conclusion reinforce particular things he has taught throughout the sermon?

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### A Fitting Response: Astonishment at Jesus' Authority (Matt. 7:28–29)

Although Jesus initially directed his teaching at his disciples (Matt. 5:1), by the time he finishes we learn that crowds have been listening (7:28). They are astonished at what they have heard. Think back over the whole Sermon on the Mount. What aspects of Jesus' teaching have you found astonishing or surprising?

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The crowds are particularly astonished at the uniqueness of Jesus' authority that comes through in his teaching. Look back over the whole Sermon on the Mount. What do you see that points to his unique authority?

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As you reflect on your study of the Sermon on the Mount, what are three aspects of Jesus' teaching that have been most instructive, challenging, or encouraging to you?

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What is the most important practical step you need to take in light of reading and studying Jesus' Sermon on the Mount?

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Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections have for you.

### Gospel Glimpses

**BEING KNOWN BY JESUS.** Jesus says that many may call him "Lord" and even do quite amazing works in his name, but he will declare to many of them in the judgment, "I never knew you" (Matt. 7:23). This shows that the nonnegotiable, essential, core reality of being a Christian is personal: knowing Jesus and being known by him. This is rightly alarming for any who are interested only in the miracles, reputation, or secondary benefits that come from being a Christian but do not know or love Christ himself. However, for all who come to Jesus for Jesus himself, for all who find Jesus himself to be the greatest treasure, this is not alarming; a relationship with Christ is the greatest part of what it means to be a Christian. At the heart of real Christianity is knowing—and, even better—being known by the triune God (1 Cor. 8:3; Gal. 4:8–9; Phil. 3:8–9). Eternal life itself is not just living forever; it is *knowing Jesus* now and forever (John 17:3).

**A KIND SAVIOR, WISE SAGE, AND AUTHORITATIVE KING.** Jesus calls everyone to be like a wise builder who builds his or her house on the firm foundation of Jesus’ teaching (Matt. 7:24–27). We cannot take only part of Jesus’ teaching as our foundation; we must take it whole. This means that Jesus is not just our Savior who forgives us but also our Sage who instructs us and our King who commands us. This is, in fact, wondrous news. Jesus does not forgive us and then leave us to fumble through life without wisdom. Neither is he a king who commands us with authority but will not forgive us when we fail. Instead, he is the perfect combination of grace, wisdom, and authority. He went to the cross to save us and now invites us to build our lives on his wise guidance.

**Whole-Bible Connections**

**HEARING AND DOING.** Jesus calls us not only to hear but also to do. He calls us to be a man or woman “who hears these words of mine and does them” (Matt. 7:24). Jesus is drawing on a long tradition, rooted in God’s central commands to Israel in Deuteronomy. Moses said to Israel, “Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them” (Deut. 6:1). And, “Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you” (v. 3). Just as Israel was not only to hear but also to do, so too all who follow Jesus are called not only to hear but also to practice his teaching. James reinforces Jesus’ message in his own way: “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22).

**WISDOM AND FOLLY.** Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount by urging listeners to be like a “wise man who built his house on the rock” rather than like a “foolish man who built his house on the sand” (Matt. 7:24–26). Jesus thus frames his entire teaching as wisdom. This draws on the theme of wisdom from the Old Testament. The book of Proverbs is the most obvious of this genre (Prov. 1:1–7), but many other Old Testament texts at critical points also call God’s people to wisdom (Ps. 107:43; Dan. 12:3, 10; Hos. 14:9). Wisdom is about living well in God’s world. The epitome of wisdom is trusting and following Jesus, while the height of folly is rejecting him while assuming life and eternity will still work out well for you.

**Theological Soundings**

**ASSURANCE OF SALVATION.** Jesus calls into question the ultimate salvation of those who claim him as Lord but do not do the will of his Father (Matt. 7:21). These kinds of statements lead some of us to wonder if we are saved. This question about the assurance of salvation is important, and the book of 1 John was

written to help true believers answer it (1 John 5:13). Assurance of salvation is grounded ultimately in the work of Christ—his death and resurrection for our sins—and it is personally confirmed by the testimony of the Holy Spirit. However, assurance is confirmed in our lives also through three marks, or evidences, of authentic Christianity: belief, love, and obedience (1 John 5:1–2). True followers of Christ believe rightly about him (doctrinal evidence), love God and his people (relational evidence), and grow in obedience to God’s commands (action evidence). These three strands form the triple cord of assurance.

**Personal Implications**

Reflect on how to apply what you have learned in this text to your everyday life. Make notes below on personal implications of (1) the *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) the *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) the *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole. Also write down what you have learned that can lead you to praise God, repent of sin, trust his gracious promises, and live in obedience to him.

**1. Gospel Glimpses**

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**2. Whole-Bible Connections**

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**3. Theological Soundings**

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#### 4. Matthew 7:21–29

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### As You Finish Studying the Sermon on the Mount . . .

We rejoice with you as you complete this study of the Sermon on the Mount! May what you have learned go with you day by day throughout your life. Now we would greatly encourage you to study the Word of God on a weekly, and even daily, basis. To continue your study of the Bible we invite you to consider other books in the Knowing the Bible series and to visit [www.knowingthebible.org](http://www.knowingthebible.org).

Lastly, take a moment again to look back through this study. Review again the notes that you have written, and the things that you have highlighted or underlined. Reflect again on the key themes that the Lord has been teaching you about himself and about his Word. May these things become a treasure for you throughout your life—this we pray in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

#### Definitions

<sup>1</sup> **Lord** – Someone superior in authority or status to another, similar to “master.” This term is a common translation for several different Hebrew titles for God in the OT, and in the NT it is often used for Jesus. When spelled in the OT with small capital letters (LORD) it translates the Hebrew “Yahweh” (YHWH), “I AM,” the personal name of God.

<sup>2</sup> **Judgment** – An assessment of something or someone, especially moral assessment. The Bible also speaks of a final day of judgment when Christ returns, when all those who have refused to repent will be judged (Rev. 20:12–15).