

The Gold Standard
A Prep Guide for Session Six of a Scholarly Stroll
Matthew 7.1 -12
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Choosing “the best part” of Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount is like naming the one favorite Beatles song or Rembrandt painting or Emily Dickenson poem or Hamilton the Musical scene – maybe even harder!

In this context of consistent profundity, though, I will offer you Matthew 7.1 -12 as the solution to what ails the 21st century American people. These may not be the most beautiful words in the Sermon. (For that, see “Blessed are the...” ...” and “Consider the lilies of the field...and the birds of the air.”) However, in my view they are the most “on the nose” instruction in the sermon for a population who have lost our way relative to truth and facts and prudent judgment and generally how to treat one another. We’ll see if I can make this claim stick when we gather on Monday evening. For now, here are some breadcrumbs for the sake of your preparation.

An Overview

Amid personal branding, social media footprints, and a host of other ways that our generations promote ourselves, the contemporary Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has recently called humility “the orphaned virtue of our age.” Add to this the centrality and righteous surety of our political convictions to us and the way this certainty makes us look at the people who disagree with us, and humility is most certainly in short supply.

In contrast, Jesus prized and prizes humility. We’ve already heard him bless the meek and poor in spirit. Luke’s Gospel features Jesus telling a story of a Pharisee and a tax collector that favors the latter for his famous words, “Lord have mercy on me, a sinner!” He interrupts James’s and John’s (in Mark, or their mother’s in Matthew) prestige grab to tell his disciples that greatness in his kingdom goes to servants and that the greatest among them will be slave of all. (Mark 10.35 -45; Matthew 20.20 -28) The capsule: “Any who exalt themselves shall be humbled, but any who humble themselves shall be exalted.” (Matthew 23.12)

In this homestretch section of the Sermon, Jesus’ value on humility comes to the fore in his approach to judgment. He paints the picture with color:

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your

own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.
(Matthew 7.1 -5)

It reminds us of another colorful scene, when Jesus stopped a lynch mob right outside the temple with the simple words, "Let the one who is without sin, cast the first stone."

The flipside of Jesus' preference for humility is his abhorrence for arrogance. The humble and blessed tax collector above, Jesus juxtaposed to the Pharisee who essentially trumpets his resume to the Almighty. Again in 18, Jesus lampoons a man who is forgiven a great sum but can't see fit to see the plight of one who owes him a few bucks. Things don't end well in Jesus' story of a rich man who won't deign to recognize poor Lazarus at his gate. (Luke 16) And while Gentile rulers "lord it over their subjects, it shall not be so among you!" Jesus consistently takes the arrogant down a notch. (Matthew 20.28)

Judgment or Condemnation?

As you read the familiar words of Matthew 7.1 -5 ask yourself what is the thrust of Jesus's "Judge not lest ye be judge" command. Interpreters have long debated how the Greek word KRINO which is most often translated as "judge" is to be understood here. What specific way of thinking and acting is Jesus commanding against? Spend some time pondering this question on our way to Monday night, when we will take it up directly. As a help to your pondering, you may wish to read Warren Carter's brief but helpful "Working Preacher" article listed in the resources below.

Another thing to notice as you read is that in Jesus's illustration of the two men, they are related as "brothers" or siblings (ADELPHOS). Throughout the New Testament writings, this term identifies members of the group of Jesus's followers. How does this impact your reading of the mini -parable of the plank and the sliver?

One help in asking whether Jesus's use of KRINO here bans assessment, on the one hand, or condemnation, on the other is the immediate context that follows – Jesus's "don't give dogs what is holy and don't cast pearls before swine". Ask yourself, if we are not to assess other people, how will we identify the dogs and pigs? But if we start assessing, how do we stop short of whatever Jesus means by the parable of the splinter and the log?

Finally, however we come out of 7.1 -6, we're left hoping to fit the ask -seek-knock section with the rest. Let the order of 7.1 -11 be a puzzle for you. Try on different solutions, different strands of connection, until you land on one you like. Then ask how all of it leads properly into the exquisite "do unto others" content of 7.12.

This puzzling is a wonderful gift that comes with reading this section of the Sermon. As you read and think, remember that if you keep digging there is priceless gold in them thar hills! (7.12)

Structure

Christian sermons and other religious orations generally fall into certain genres or categories that come with expectations about their structure. The most famous (or infamous) example in American culture is the three -point sermon, which some preachers follow so closely that congregants experience whiplash if the right reverend strays from it. Others tend toward narrative sermons or verse -by-verse Bible sermons. There are a few of these. They answer and sometimes shape listener expectation .

During our weeks together studying Jesus’s Sermon, I have generally not emphasized the structure of the sermon. That’s partly because, in this patch of scripture, which may be the single most commented -upon of the whole Bible, theories of Jesus’s structure or plan can seem even more numerous than drops of water in the sea. Reading through all such theories in commentaries and other interpretations would confuse any mind. Claiming with certainty to know “the” structure of the SOM would violate the Sermon’s call to humility.

My relative silence is also partly because the structural makeup of the sermon has overlapping themes that complicate the task of dividing it into eight logical sections for an 8 -week Yale Continuing Education course. A perfect example of this limitation arises in Matthew 6.19 -7.11

Broad Structure in 6.19 –7.11

With all that said, Jesus’s rhetoric features a carefully -laid structural pattern that interconnects our passages from Session Five and Session Six. Matthew 6.19 -34 and 7.1-11 exhibit a striking similarity in form. Consider these parallels:

Instruction

Exhortation	6.19	7.1-2	Exhortation
Parable on the Eye	6.22-23	7.3-5	Parable on the Eye
Second Parable	6.24	7.6	Second Parable

Encouragement

Heavenly Father’s Care (from minor to major.)	6.25-34	7.7-11	Heavenly Father’s Care (from minor to major)
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5.17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.”

7.12 “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

If we read this two-fold mention as an *inclusio*, Matthew’s Jesus is tying together the content between 5.16 and 7.13. But the next two questions throw us back into a sea of structure theories.

1. How do we fit together Jesus’s antitheses, teaching on hypocrisy and prayer (6.1-18), the section on money and worry (6.19 -34), and the teaching on judgment and confident requests. (7.1 -11)
2. Why does the *inclusio* leave aside the beatitudes, salt and light, the call to the narrow gate, the discernment of prophetic voices, and the assertion of solidity for Jesus’s teaching (5.1-16 and 7.13-27)?

In other words, structure needs to mean something for interpretation, if its to be a useful observation

A Final Word

These observations and prompts will hopefully give you a bit of content to chew on in preparation for our hour together on Monday evening. Come ready to read closely and listen closely for what Jesus is saying, not only to his first-century followers, but to our 21st-century selves.

Resources

[Dr. Warren Carter, “The Golden Rule”, Working Preacher](#)

Warren Carter is a world-renowned expert on Matthew’s Gospel. In this piece, he offers helpful insight into the word often translated “judge” in 7.1-2 and the connection between the parable of the log and the speck to the pearls -before-swine saying that follows it.

[Bible Hub Definition of an Inclusio](#)

I offer this reference primarily to send you to Bible Hub which is often a useful go-to for curious Bible people. This entry goes beyond simple definition and suggest several ways that an *inclusio* can work for its speaker or author.

[“Chiasmus” \(The Academy of American Poets\)](#)

This brief article defines and identifies the commonly -used rhetorical and poetic device of the Chiasm.

Our Class Reading Schedule

05JAN26	Blessed	Matthew 5.1 - 16
12JAN26	Deepening Torah	Matthew 5.17 - 30
19JAN26	Chasing Perfection	Matthew 5.31 - 48
26JAN26	Building Integrity	Matthew 6.1 - 18
02FEB26	Non-Anxious Presents	Matthew 6.19 - 34
09FEB26	The Gold Standard	Matthew 7.1 - 12
16FEB26	Discerning the Voices	Matthew 7.13 - 23
23FEB26	Solid Ground	Matthew 7.24 - 29