

October 3, 2021

"But I tell you..."

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man...but everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man..."
Matthew 7:24-27



Jesus began his 'sermon on the mount' with this challenge; *"...unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."* Through the rest of his lesson he demonstrates the difference between true righteousness and the shallow imitation practiced by the religious. He finally concludes his lesson with this commandment: *"So, in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you..."* which he says sums up the Law and the Prophets.

In order to practice true righteousness then, we must look to this standard of measure, and to this standard alone. How do we treat others? The true righteousness of God is perfectly measured in how we treat others.

Even as we read this very clear and very strict teaching, our minds, I think, begin to dilute its message. How we treat others, we decide, depends on how they behave. How we treat others depends, we decide, on societies' norms. How we treat others, we decide, depends on... Jesus is setting a very clear standard of righteousness and then, as he concludes his lesson, he drives home this very standard with a final challenge; *"...everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man..."*

Sometimes I am afraid that the Sunday School song we learned like the one that goes with this passage may lead us to miss our Lord's point. The song focuses on the outcome of this choice, but the standard that Jesus sets in his conclusion is focused on our response to Jesus' command; on our choice.

"Everyone..." Everyone means that all of us, individually, must make the choice. This is not a choice that can be made by the whole. This is a choice that can only be made by the one. I must decide what I will do with my Lord's instruction and you must decide what you will do with that same instruction.

"...who hears these words..." Jesus' teachings always demand this personal response. It is too easy for all of us to read Jesus' words or to hear them preached and to go away doing nothing with those words. In a very real way this non-response is our response and Jesus addresses this in the second part of his statement.

"...and puts them into practice..." The test of our submission to the Master's direction is always found in our practice. If I personally determine to treat others in the way I would like to be treated no matter who or what they are and no matter what others are doing or not doing, then I am putting Jesus' teachings into practice. If I choose to dilute Jesus' commandment then I am choosing to reject Jesus.

Our Lord would conclude that in our practice, in our obedience, we demonstrate either our wisdom or our foolishness. Either I personally and individually choose obedience or I personally and individually reject obedience and the truth or my choice will be found in my practice.

So, in this final admonition Jesus demands that we choose. Do we choose the wise way or the foolish? Do we hear his teachings and put them into practice or do we ignore and reject them? In making our choice we must also accept that our choice will have consequences. We will either survive the storms of this life or we will be destroyed by them. It is all in the choices that we personally and individually make.