

Moving from Hearing to Doing Jesus' Words
Matthew 7:7-29

Pastor Tom
May 31, 2015

There's a disease that has spread across much of the world. It started in the first third of the 1900's. People began to notice changes in the lives of people who had this disease. Its spread stopped for a while by World War 2. But once the war ended, the disease picked up again. It spread widely throughout North America in the 1950's. From there it spread to Europe, Australia and New Zealand. It continued to spread through the end of the century. Then in the 2000's it spread into parts of Asia. Now it's going into parts of India, China, Africa and South America. I wonder if any of us here today have this disease?

The first person to identify it was a man named Jay B. Nash. In 1938 he wrote a book with the disease's name as its title. He wrote "the machine age has, of course, already supplied an unexampled wealth of leisure and what happens? The average man who has time on his hands turns out to be a spectator, a watcher of somebody else, merely because that is the easiest thing. . . . Instead of expressing, he is willing to sit back and have his leisure time pursuits slapped on him like mustard – external, temporary and in the end "dust in the mouth."

Nash labelled the disease "Spectatoritis" – a tendency to watch rather than participate. During the first half of the 20th century, leisure time had steadily increased. Nash argued that because North Americans had never before been confronted with such large swaths of it, they had not developed a healthy "philosophy of leisure." Without this philosophy, people fell victim to what he dubbed "spectatoritis."

The author commenting on Nash's work writes "One can easily see how the specter of spectatoritis has seeped into all areas of our lives. Not only in obvious things like 100 million people watching the Super Bowl or 100,000 people watching a rock concert – but in areas which were formerly forums of active participation. A current trend in building of new homes is to include a theater room, a windowless room complete with large, movie theater like chairs, a speaker system and a big screen television. This is another one of those things that seems odd when you take a step back . . . a whole room in the house dedicated to just watching stuff. We've gone from having parlors for making conversation or recreation rooms for playing games to rooms in which people sit silently side by side in the dark."

The commentator also writes "I find it amusing that some websites have buttons in the response section of articles that allow people to like or dislike reader's comments. So if you're too lazy to write your own stuff and it's too much of a burden to even generate your own comment, you can still "participate" by showing your allegiance to

someone else's idea. But giving thumbs up or thumbs down is not real participation. Why? Because such participation is external, temporary, dust in the mouth. It doesn't involve any risk, any putting of your own skin in the game. It doesn't change anything in you or in the world. He closes with the question "are you a doer or a viewer?"¹

I think that Nash and this commentator are on to something. And some of our current culture does not help us move from viewing to doing. How many of us have gone to a movie and come out with a resolve that we are going to live differently? Do you go see the Avengers and declare I am now going to fight evil in my own world with more intensity and commitment? No – what did you think of that movie – it was a 5 or a 7 or a 3? Let's get on with doing whatever we do in life.

Have you; have I succumbed to the disease of spectatoritis? What does this have to do with Jesus' teaching from the Sermon on the Mount? Only this – We have heard Jesus' teaches about a lot of things from this message over the past few months. But are we actually going to do anything about it? Are we going to act on what we have heard or will we just remain in our seats and give Jesus a good clap for some clever wording and unique ways of putting things?

Such a response would be unacceptable to Jesus for anyone claiming to be His follower. In fact He declares **Kingdom disciples must move from hearing Jesus' words to putting them into practice.** A kingdom disciple is someone who has surrendered their life to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and entered into life under the reign of God. Jesus' words are everything we have heard or read from Matthew 5:1-7:7. To put Jesus' words into practice means to act on and obey them. It means to follow His teaching and open ourselves up to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

So we begin to see our lives demonstrating the beatitudes. We serve as salt of the earth and light of the world – we invest time and energy in being salt and light to people around us. We don't murder and address anger in our hearts. We don't commit adultery and fight lust in our hearts. We sanctify and hold high the gift of marriage. We speak without deceit and on it goes through the rest of the sermon.

Yet this all is incredibly hard to do. You don't just wake up one day and decide to be a Kingdom Disciple who puts into practice all of Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount in three easy steps. This calls for the long walk of obedience in the same direction. The question is how do we go about putting Jesus' words into practice? He answers this for us. He gives us ways, markers or warnings that will keep us on track as we move from hearing His Words to

¹ <http://www.artofmanliness.com/2011/08/28/viewers-vs-doers-the-rise-of-spectatoritis/>

actually doing them. So we will look at His counsel & commands as Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount. Then I want you to focus on maybe just one of these throughout the summer to work with the Holy Spirit in doing Jesus' word and not just hearing it.

Matthew 7:7-11 (ESV)

Mt 7:7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

How do we move from just hearing Jesus words to doing them?

1. Persistently pray to the Lord and He will reveal and open the way for you to live this way. (7:7-11) Ask, seek and knock add up to a strong encouragement to persistent prayer. Jesus promises that those who ask receive; those who seek will find and those who knock will find open doors. In this context, I can't help but tie the asking, seeking and knocking to all that Jesus has taught previously. Do we want to deal with the anger in our hearts? Do we struggle with lust or forgiveness or deceitful talk or vengeance? Do we need help to start loving our enemies instead of hating them? Then ask and strength will be given. Seek and you will find God's way to do this. Knock and the door will be opened when you thought there was no way it could ever happen.

When we look at this in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, it removes that question about asking for the Ferrari or the beautiful house or an endless vacation in the tropics. It's not about asking God as a Spiritual Santa Claus to get whatever we want. It's about coming to our Heavenly Father to ask for power, wisdom & strength to live out Jesus' words.

Jesus provides a reason for confidence when asking for these kinds of requests. Consider human fathers. All of us are stained by sin. So in that sense, we are evil or not completely holy. Yet what normal human father would give his child a stone if he was hungry for bread or would give a snake instead of a fish. In Jesus' time, a bread loaf was like a human fist rather than the sliced loaves of bread we get today. So you could deceive a child into thinking they were getting bread by giving a stone of the same size. And there were these eel like creatures in the sea of Galilee that were a form of snake. Though you could eat them, they were incredibly greasy and slimy compared to fish which fed the masses. Earthly fathers, stained by sin, would still do their best to give their children what they really needed.

So how much more would our Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him? God can supply anything to a righteous person who seeks His purposes. So if our prayer request is “Lord, help me to live out your words in the Sermon on the Mount,” God will provide.

I think that these verses also help us address the dilemma that we face as Christians with passages that command us to do something. We know that we can't save ourselves. We know that our works don't earn favor before God. Our salvation is by grace. But because of the great gift of our salvation, we need to respond. We have a role to trust God for His power and wisdom while doing what we are called to do. We trust God and exercise faith. We guard against going to either extreme. One extreme is to sit around trusting God and never acting on what He commands of us or provides for us. The other extreme is to try to solve everything without ever turning to God. We walk in this holy tension between God's part and our work and ask Him for wisdom to walk this way.

So, how do we move from hearing to doing Jesus' words?

1. Persistently pray for wisdom, power & strength to make the move.

The second way is found in Matthew 7:12 - “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Does anyone recognize this? It's the Golden Rule. **2. Do unto others as you would have them do to you. (7:12)** It's called the Golden Rule because Emperor Alexander Severus apparently had it written in gold on his wall. Jesus ties this basic principle to the revealed will of God. “If you do unto others as you would have them do to you, this is the law and the prophets, the revealed will of God.”

So in this simple saying, we find a simple way to discover how to move from just hearing Jesus' words to doing them. What is the right thing to do? Think of the way you would like to be treated and then use that as a guideline for how you will treat others. So we can find a very practical application to this principle when we go driving. When you drive, how do you treat other drivers? Do you see them as competitors or as obstacles that get in the way of your busy life? But if we look at them from the perspective of the golden rule, how do you want other drivers to treat you? Do you want them to see you as an obstacle to their busy day and impatiently tail gate you until you get out their way? Do you want them to cut you off or not let you in when there is a lane reduction?

An amazing transformation can happen if we decide to treat other drivers like we hope to be treated. If you make space for people to get into your lane, most people give you a wave of thanks. Or if you stop for a pedestrian on a

busy street or make space for a trucker to make a wide turn, people respond with thanks. I know this is such a small thing. But maybe if we begin practicing this in our driving it will spill over to our lives in other areas. Then we begin to move from just hearing Jesus' words to doing them.

How do we move from viewers to doers? The next one is found in Matthew 7:13-14.

[13](#) "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. [14](#) For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

If you're going to move from merely hearing Jesus' words to actually doing them, you're going to be in the minority. **Recognize you will be in the minority (7:13-14)** We're not going to part of some worldwide popular movement if we obey Jesus' words. If we crave popularity and fitting in with whatever the crowd is doing then we will struggle to actually put Jesus' words into practice. In fact, our world is becoming more and more hostile to the Christian perspective in many areas. We were talking about this at the prayer gathering this past Wednesday. Canada used to be a place where the Christian world view was respected and practiced in many corners of Canadian life. Now we are the outsiders. We are more and more becoming the extremists. Our views especially on social issues are scorned or rejected outright and may even be illegal.

Jesus portrays this with a wide way and a narrow way. Now there's a bit of a question about whether he mentions one gate or two gates in verses 13 and 14. The ESV has chosen to talk about the narrow gate and the wide gate. But you may have a footnote that gives the alternative translation of a wide way not a wide gate. Whether it's a wide way or a wide gate, there is a less of a decision required to go the wide way. If there was a wide gate, you might not even notice the gate. It's hard to notice because so many people are going that way. But to choose the narrow gate requires a lot more deliberate action. This way requires passing through a narrow gate and promises a hard way. The wide way gives a sense of ease and comfort. You can enter and travel the wide way without many hassles. It's going with the flow.

But the narrow gate is hard. Few find it. So why would anyone in their right mind choose a path that is narrow to enter, harder to walk and far less traveled? It all depends on where the path ends. The narrow way – following Jesus' words ends in life. The wide way ends in destruction. Life is eternal life; life in the kingdom; life under the reign of

God. It is not found by following the crowd but by a deliberate and costly choice. This narrow way will lead to difficulty because of oppression and persecution of those on the majority way.

It is often a lot more comfortable to go with the crowd. We like comfort. How many people here don't like to be comfortable? But as we grow in Christ, there are those times, those moments, those situations when our discomfort with where the crowd is going outweighs the comfort of going with the crowd. The closer we get to Christ, the more uncomfortable we will be with some of the crowd's decisions. The closer we get to Christ, the more strength, power and conviction we will gain to say no to the crowd like the guy who refused to write "God is Dead" on a piece of paper in his philosophy class in the movie God's not dead. The more "comfortable" we are with Christ, the less comfortable we will be in going the way of the majority. Your presence here may already indicate a hunger after the narrow way. That's why it's important for us to gather together to be reminded that there are others going the narrow way. There are others who want to be doers of the word and not hearer's only.

Three down, two to go. How do we move from hearing to doing Jesus' words.

Matthew 7:15-20 (ESV)

[15](#) "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. [16](#) You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? [17](#) So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. [18](#) A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. [19](#) Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. [20](#) Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

4. Examine the lives of those who teach or influence you. (7:15-20) There's a lot of people out there who espouse or promote their viewpoints on things. You can find preachers and pastors on the web, on TV, on your computer and on the radio. People can put together a good talk or a good presentation. Or they can be famous and even a celebrity. We can take what they say at face value and God's truth because it sounds good. But there are people who the Bible calls false prophets. But how do you know it's right? Jesus talks about false prophets. They are dangerous because is that a lot of what they say or what surrounds them seems to make sense. It seems to point to success or something right about this person. In fact, Jesus describes them as getting in with the people. They look like sheep. But inwardly they are ravenous wolves. Some of these people may not even know that their wolves. But just by the force of their personality or their giftedness or their will, they are putting forth a false gospel or false way to know God.

If we do not discern false prophets or people who try to water down the demands of the Gospel & Jesus, we could get stuck being spectators. So Jesus tells us how we can recognize them. By their fruits; by looking at their

personal lives. Do their lives show and produce the good fruits of the kingdom? Well what are those good fruits? Success; fame; big numbers; big budgets? No. Does their life show evidence of the beatitudes? Does their life or teaching reveal the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control. People can say anything. But what does their life actually show evidence that they are doers and not merely viewers of Jesus’ words?

Matthew 7:21-23 ESV

[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. [22](#) 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 many mighty works in your name?’ [23](#) And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

5. Examine your own life to ensure you are Christ’s (7:21-23) Now I think a case can be made that this paragraph is tied with the previous paragraph about false prophets. Notice Jesus says practical obedience, not just saying “Jesus is Lord”, indicates the true disciple in verse 21. The one who actually obeys Jesus’ words proves he or she is a disciple. But even those who do miracles in Jesus’ name do not necessarily prove themselves to be a disciple. Some will prophesy in Jesus’ name. Some will cast out demons in Jesus’ name. Some will do mighty works in Jesus’ name. But on Judgment day, Jesus will say “depart from me, I never knew you.” So there is kind of a two part warning that Jesus gives us here. Don’t believe that someone is automatically a disciple because they say “Jesus is Lord.” Don’t automatically conclude that someone is a disciple of Christ if they do something miraculous or huge in Jesus’ name. The real test is do they obey Jesus’ words?

But I have framed this as a call to examine our own lives. There is no doubt in my mind that when we gather on Sundays, there are people here who think they are Christians just because they said Jesus is Lord one time in the past. Or they think they’re Christians because they’ve gone to church or done some religious stuff. I don’t want anyone here to have to hear those words from Jesus on Judgment Day – Depart from me – I never knew you.

And did you notice what Jesus says about himself here? I just don’t get how people can read the New Testament and conclude Jesus thought of himself as one of many great religious teachers in history and nothing more. Verse 23 – Then I will declare to them – I Jesus am doing the judging on Judgment Day. That is a role reserved for God Himself. Jesus Christ, the Judge on Judgment Day calls us to ensure that we do not deceive ourselves into thinking we are one of his. How can we know? If you have a desire to obey Jesus’ words, that’s a good indicator. If it bothers you

when you sin, that's a pretty good indicator. If you find yourself more and more drawn to the narrow way, that's an indicator. Please do not buy the lie of the wide way today that claims everyone is going to heaven and everyone goes to a better place when they die and it doesn't matter which God you trust – everyone will make it. That's the wide way – that's the message of false prophets. That's directly contrary to Jesus' own words.

So Jesus has given us 5 ways or 5 tools to help us move from merely hearing his words to putting them into practice. We started today by talking about the disease of spectatoritis. We declared that kingdom disciples must move from hearing Jesus' words to doing them. But isn't that overstating it a little? Must is a pretty strong word after all. We more prefer Kingdom disciples are invited to put Jesus' words into practice or "it would be good for us" to put His words into practice." Must Tom? Come on!

Matthew 7:24-27 (ESV)

[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. [25](#) 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. [26](#) And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. [27](#) 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."

Must we do Jesus' words? Well it depends if we want our lives to stand in the storm or collapse with a great crash in the storm. People listening to Jesus that day were likely overlooking the Sea of Galilee. The sand ringing the seashore was hard on the surface during the hot summer months. But a wise builder would not be fooled by surface conditions. He would dig down sometimes ten feet below the surface sand to the bedrock and there establish the foundation for his house. Then when the sea storms came, those houses on the rock would stand. The houses on the sand would fall.

I think the storms and the rain and wind that comes upon the houses has a two fold meaning. First, I think they refer to the pressures of life. When life is difficult and hard, a life founded on the rock will not crash in the sense that it won't give up the faith and God won't let that life crash apart. The life that is not built on Jesus is incredibly vulnerable to the storms and pressures of life.

But I also think the storm is connected to the previous verses where Jesus talks about Judgment Day. That day will be the ultimate storm. Yet a life founded upon Jesus and His words will withstand that fearsome day. Life found

apart from Jesus will fall with a great crash. So Yes, kingdom disciples must move from merely hearing to doing Jesus' words.

The Sermon on the Mount closes with the reaction of the crowds. Matthew 7:28-29

[28](#) And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, [29](#) for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

Other scribes and teachers quoted authorities greater than themselves. That's what I'm doing today. I didn't come up with this. These are Jesus' words. I quote him and other learned scholars who have dissected and understood this text far deeper than I have. But Jesus did not quote anyone. Jesus did not turn to someone else for backup. "Anyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock." I have not come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them. You have heard it said "you shall not commit adultery," but I say to you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

The crowds were amazed or astonished at his teaching and his own authority. But astonishment and amazement do not necessarily mean they accepted those teachings. Only when a person accepts Jesus' invitation and enters the kingdom of heaven does he or she become a disciple.

How will you move from viewing to doing this summer? God may have revealed to you today that your life is currently built on sand. Oh, it looks good from the outside. It looks like you have it all together. But you're not sure if you know Christ. You're not sure if you're one of God's children.

You can become one today – stop building my life on the sand. Instead you want to build your life on the solid rock of Jesus Christ. You do that by coming to Him as your Savior and Lord. That means that you admit that you've been a sand builder. You've been trying to live and build your life apart from Him. You confess that and turn away from that life. You put your trust and faith in Him as your Savior; the Lord over your life and your Foundation. When you put your trust in Christ, God will instantaneously do a remarkable, eternal, destiny changing work in your soul. You will be forgiven your sins. You will be pronounced not guilty forever based on Christ's work on the cross. You will be adopted into God's family as one of His children. You will begin the journey of building your life on the rock of Jesus Christ and the walk of a Kingdom Disciple.

Christians, Jesus asks us:

- 7:13–14: Will you enter the gate to life in the kingdom of heaven and embark on a life of following me? Or will you reject me for the popular road that leads to destruction?
- 7:15–20: Will you find in me the inner source of transformation that will produce the good fruit of life? Or will you follow the prophetic voices of this world that hype a promise of life but will only take you into the fires of hell?
- 7:21–23: Will you obey my Father's will and come to me as your only Lord? Or will you chase after false manifestations of spirituality that result in eternal banishment?
- 7:24–27: Will you build your life on me as your solid rock? Or will the pleasant ease of your life cause you to be unprepared for the storms that will come in this life and that will ultimately wash you away into the desolation of the afterlife?