

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 27, Chapter 7 and 8

We'll conclude Yeshua's Sermon on the Mount today, which we have spent 17 lessons studying because of its incomparable value, and we'll also open the door into Matthew chapter 8. But first let's take a look back on the all-important (and not just a little bit scary) topic from last week about what Yeshua meant by what He said in Chapter 7 verses 22 and 23.

CJB Matthew 7:22-23 ²² *On that Day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we expel demons in your name? Didn't we perform many miracles in your name?'* ²³ *Then I will tell them to their faces, 'I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!'*

The phrase of our focus is "workers of lawlessness". The bottom line is that after a thorough study of this term last week, the conclusion is that the term "lawlessness" can only indicate one thing: "Torah-lessness" or "The Law of Moses-lessness". It is the Greek word *anomia* being translated that most literally means "without law". We even find Paul using this same term (many years after Yeshua's time on earth) to describe the anti-Christ. Working backwards from Paul, we have to ask ourselves a basic question: is the anti-Christ called the "Man of Lawlessness" because he thumbs his nose at societal civil and criminal laws? If so, according to which set of human laws is he rebelling? International law? American law? European Union law? Sharia law? My question is somewhat rhetorical in that the answer is obvious: it can be none of these manmade law codes. The anti-Christ is called such because He is by nature against (he is anti) God. The only laws that God validates are the ones that He has laid down for mankind: the biblical Law of Moses; the anti-Christ wants none of that. So it is that in Jesus's statement in verse 23 that "workers of lawlessness" is a term

describing all those who deny and/or disobey God's commandments; the Torah, The Law. Remember: there was no such thing as a New Testament in Yeshua's day and such a thing wouldn't exist for nearly 2 more centuries after His death and resurrection. So neither Christ nor Paul could in any way be referring to the supposed New Testament laws that replace the Old Testament laws. The reference to "lawlessness" can only be to the Old Testament laws since that was the only Holy Scripture in existence in that era, and especially since Yeshua's entire sermon is based on His teaching and authoritative interpretation of the Torah in light of the recent arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

Therefore when taken in proper context "workers of lawlessness" include non-Believers, fake Believers, and self-deceived Believers. It is my opinion that a goodly portion of the Church is, and has been for centuries, self-deceived because of the adoption of doctrines that specifically deny the relevance of The Law of Moses for Christ followers and in fact legislates **against** following it. Yet there is a gray area in between a "worker of lawlessness" and a person who is, in chapter 5 verse 19, relegated to being "least in the Kingdom of Heaven" for not obeying The Law and for teaching against it.

CJB Matthew 5:19 ¹⁹ *So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.*

That is to say that in 7:23, the "workers of lawlessness" are those who are denied entry into the Kingdom of Heaven. But in 5:19, whoever disobeys The Law and teaches others to do so will be those who are given entry into the Kingdom (based upon their trust in Messiah Yeshua), but they will be placed (forever) on the absolute lowest rung of whatever societal structure exists within the Kingdom of Heaven. Where that fine but hazy line exists between those two designations I do not know. However in both cases the issue is a chosen and determined disobedience to God's Torah. So the wise thing for a Believer to do in order to avoid either of these eternal consequences is to quit listening to a blinded Church that says that the Law is dead and gone and that Christ has replaced the Law of Moses with a Law of Jesus (something that doesn't biblically exist); and therefore once we get our salvation we can sort of retire because subservience to God or unquestioned obedience to any divinely given rule is legalism and thus to be avoided as a bad thing. This doctrine is an agenda driven lie and it will lead us to a very harsh outcome that Christ Himself has warned us against. I plead with

you; if you value your eternity, then out of self-preservation I suggest you consider fleeing such a congregation even if it means being ostracized from your social circle. The one thing I can assure you is that you will lose some of the relationships you've had with friends and acquaintances in that congregation; so the count the cost. Yet, which means more to you as a Believer: obeying God and His Word and reaping those eternal rewards? Or disobeying God and His Word and suffering the consequences?

Let's read Matthew 7 starting at verse 24.

RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 7:24 - end

Yeshua says that every man that hears His words and DOES them is a like a wise person who builds the foundation of his house on the rock. In a different setting Luke has Yeshua saying the same thing, only slightly differently.

^{CJB} **Luke 11:28** *But he said, "Far more blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it!"*

What is being expressed is the Hebrew concept of **shema**. **Shema** means to hear and obey, or to hear and do. The concept is rather simple. In all ages it is fallen man's tendency to want to be emotionally uplifted by hearing fine words of truth, but then when it comes time to put those words into action, passivity or ambivalence sets in. Jesus is telling His audience that while it is to their merit that they came to hear Him, and many listened intently and being there and hearing and agreeing with Him was good, but insufficient. Do not we see the same thing happening in both Synagogue and Church in modern times? Perhaps even we ourselves are guilty of it. We feel very good about ourselves that we set aside that hour or so each week to go to a worship service and to sit quietly and listen to the sermon. But once we leave our seats and get back to the real world, do we remember what was said? Or more importantly, does it convert to actions and deeds?

Not too long before he passed away, in a TV interview Billy Graham confessed that after decades of follow up his organization had done on the millions that had left their seats and come forward at his Crusades, only a little over 1% continued on in any recognizable way with the commitment to Christ that they had so enthusiastically made there. The 99% heard and were moved by it; but they did not do. And because they didn't do, their rush of conviction to make a positive

change in their lives quickly faded away. Yeshua will, at a later time, actually address this issue in a famous parable about sowing seeds in various kinds of soil. God gave the basis for this ordinance and principle of **shema**, and the outcome for ignoring it, in Deuteronomy 28.

^{CJB} **Deuteronomy 28:15** *"But if you refuse to pay attention to what ADONAI your God says, and do not observe and obey all his mitzvot and regulations which I am giving you today, then all the following curses will be yours in abundance:*

For the next few verses Jesus gives an illustration of how valuable it is to pay attention to what He has just taught and to live it out. So He draws a simple analogy that is self-evident to everyone present: the man who builds his house on rock versus the man who builds his house on sand. Clearly not one in His audience would build his house on sand anymore than we would. So the point He is making is easily understood.

For us, the thing to understand is that He is speaking mostly about the foundation of the house.... an analogy for our spiritual foundation. That is, every house necessarily starts with a foundation. Any experienced builder will tell you that the foundation and the soil under it is the key to it all. Begin with a faulty foundation or unstable soil and everything above it will be shaky and short lived. Begin with a firm soil and a solid, correctly constructed foundation, and everything above it will be safe, secure, and long lived. The foundation He is speaking about is The Torah.... The Law of Moses. Or in more modern thinking, The Bible (all of it, not just the New Testament). If the foundation is built on rock then it means our spiritual foundation is built on proper doctrine. If the foundation is built on sand, then it is built on poor and incorrect doctrine.

Notice that what happens next has to do with when calamity strikes. That is, Christ's point is about the inevitable tough times that come into every person's life, Believer or non-Believer, if we live long enough. Sand or rock, when the weather is good (indicating good times), then everything seems safe and secure. The foundation stays in place and so the house seems to be properly built. But, when the weather turns foul (indicating bad times), the foundation is put to the test. If it is a good foundation, the house will survive the storm. But if it has a bad foundation, the house will not.

To do the will of the Father in Heaven is the prudent thing for us to do and is

evidence of the good fruit that Yeshua spoke about earlier in His sermon. Friends, modern Christianity has put a permanent happy face on our faith walk; or more appropriately faith "stroll", although in reality too often ours is a lazy faith. We believe that we should trust in Christ and our reward will be nothing but fair weather and smooth sailing ahead. But then the inevitable and unexpected happens, and because of the poor and shaky doctrine we have been taught, we blame God for our troubles feeling that He has failed in His promise to protect us from bad things happening in our lives. Many walk away from God disillusioned and feeling jilted. These are those who built their houses on sand..... most did so unknowingly, or perhaps a better word is to say they did it ignorantly. So to ignore Jesus's words, and to believe that God's laws and commands, which Christ has been urging us to uphold, are no longer relevant to a Christian, is to build one's house on sand. I can say it no more plainly than that, for that is precisely what Christ is teaching.

Yeshua's Sermon on the Mount has now come to a close. He has spoken for a long time, addressed many subjects, and summed it all up in the last few verses. Now the Gospel writer Matthew makes a comment. He says the crowd Jesus had talked to was amazed by what they had heard. It was not only the Godly principles He taught (some long forgotten), but rather it was the authority by which He spoke. There was no equivocating. There was no quoting or borrowing from one of the renowned and known teachers or speakers of His day to validate what He taught. Matthew says He spoke far above the Torah teachers. It is important to understand who Christ was being compared to. Where our CJB says "Torah teachers", the Greek is **grammateus**. It more literally translates to "scribes". In Yeshua's day "scribes" were the primary teachers in the Synagogues. Thus most scribes (perhaps all) were Pharisees and while they no doubt taught God's Word, it was taught within the context of Jewish Tradition. Yeshua taught within the context of the biblical Torah; not Tradition. While not all Tradition is to be held suspect, Tradition cannot be compared to God's immutable Word. When we hear God's Word told in truth, it is transformative.

Let's move on to Matthew chapter 8.

READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 8 all

As usual, we need to ignore the chapter marking and understand that the first verse of what we call chapter 8 connects with the final verse of chapter 7. So, immediately following the conclusion of His speech, Yeshua and His Disciples go

down from the hills above the Galilee and journey a few miles to where He was living at that time: Capernaum. Along the way, as one might expect, large numbers of people who heard Him speak followed Him. What we read about Him doing 2000 years ago, they witnessed in person. He miraculously healed 3 people. It could well have been more who were healed (and probably was), but Matthew liked to record things in threes.

I want to remind you that no doubt the people who followed Him down the mountain came expecting miracle healings. After all, to this point Jesus was still seen by the Jews as a **Tzadik**, a Holy Man, because healing is what a Holy Man did. Yeshua had not yet revealed that He was the Messiah nor had He plainly disclosed that He was divine.

During His walk back to his residence He encountered a person with a skin disease. Nearly all Bible translations will say "leper"; but the CJB has it right when it says **Tzara'at**. I don't have to describe to you what a leper is; it is a dreadful, disfiguring disease that does terrible things to the person who receives no medical treatment. **Tzara'at** is a special kind of skin disease that includes a number of skin maladies. The unique feature about it is its source: it is God-imposed upon a person as a means of discipline and punishment.

We need to notice how Matthew structured his narrative. We have Yeshua go up a mountain, and then come back down a mountain, and then we have Him dealing with a person stricken with a skin disease. We find this same pattern with Moses, whom Matthew is quite intent on comparing to Christ. Numbers 12 tells the story Moses' sister Miriam who spoke against her brother, complaining that if Moses could prophesy then so should she. God struck her with **Tzara'at** for her rebellion and apostasy. Moses prayed to God to deliver her from her skin disease and God said He would, but only after she was separated from her people for 7 days. So now we find Christ, God incarnate, heal a person with skin disease. But there is more to this story.

Hours earlier Christ had told people that in order to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven one needs to ask, seek, and knock. So Christ didn't notice this sick person and go to him; rather the sick person sought out Christ, knelt before Him (meaning he sort of blocked His path and made himself noticeable) and asked to be healed. Yeshua said He would heal him. We are meant to notice the terminology. The word "healed" is not actually used. Instead the afflicted man asked Yeshua to make him clean. This is because ritual cleanness is the central

issue for a person that has been divinely struck with **Tzara'at**. That is, generally speaking, the various skin ailments that one could receive as punishment were not fatal. Instead they made the person ritually unclean, which meant they had to be isolated away from all others so that they would not pass their uncleanness to someone else by touching them. Such a thing was not only devastating from a social status standpoint, but it could be economically devastating as well especially if a family man was stricken because it could almost immediately throw the entire family into poverty.

I find it ironic that even in the 21st century, in the most advanced societies, that getting a disease that requires isolation (or isolation to keep from the disease) reveals the tremendous economic impact isolation and separation can have on people. The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 has caused millions and millions of people to be thrown out of work or to lose their businesses mostly because of the government imposed isolation. So when we read in the Bible about the plight of people isolated due to ritual impurity, perhaps we have a better idea now of just what that meant for them in both social and economic terms.

Please pay special attention to what Christ does: He precisely follows the Law of Moses in dealing with this diseased man. Why would we expect anything else? Yeshua has just come from teaching for several hours about the need for following the Torah law, and specifically and unmistakably saying that in no way did He abolish it or even modify it. Believe me; those many Jews looking on, as well the man who was stricken, knew exactly what the procedure was during the period of impurity and then the procedure for emerging from it. So had Yeshua deviated from it at all, it would have been immediately detected. Thus the terms clean and cleansed are correctly used several times. The same story is told in Mark 1 beginning at verse 40, and it is nearly word for word as in Matthew's narrative.

Some of the skin diseases these Jews contracted were long term; some were life long. Because they required isolation for as long as the infirmity lasted, there was little more feared and dreaded than **Tzara'at**. I say this because one of the objections to the reliability of this story is that first we are told that great crowds followed Yeshua down the mountain; and then the diseased man, who is unclean, approaches Him. After healing the man Yeshua says not to tell anyone about it. It seems incredulous that a huge crowd witnessed this, but the man is supposed to keep what is already public, secret. In reality, this man would have been isolated along with others that had his disease, and would not have been

out wandering the streets. Jesus had to have passed along an area where the isolated unclean lived. While admittedly I'm speculating, it is not imaginable that when the man with **Tzara'at** suddenly appeared and approached Yeshua that the crowd didn't quickly back away in fear. How far back I'm not certain, but you can bet their "social distancing" was a lot more than 6 feet! Thus when we read that Christ cleansed him, and then told him not to say anything, the crowd probably would not only have not overheard the conversation, but perhaps didn't even know the man was healed. Typically the stricken wore sackcloth as a sign of mourning and as an outward warning so that the other townspeople should steer clear.

Some Bible scholars also question this story as not authentic because they say a proper Jew would never touch a person with **Tzara'at** as it was against the Law of Moses; that is not true. There is no Torah law against touching an unclean person; however there was danger in doing so. It would have brought with it the contracting of that person's ritual impurity; so people didn't do that. I don't know if other Holy Men might have done such a thing as touching an unclean person; but Jesus did. And what is so interesting is that Christ did what only God could do: He cleansed. What should have happened is that the unclean man passed his uncleanness to Christ; because a clean person cannot pass along their cleanness to an unclean person. It is a one way street. And yet, that is exactly what Yeshua did. His touch passed His own ritual purity along to the impure man making him clean. I want to repeat; this was not a healing per se. From the Jewish and biblical viewpoint, this was a cleansing; healing and cleansing are two different things.

Next Yeshua tells the man to go to the priest AND to offer the sacrifice that Moses commanded. This is precisely what the Law of Moses says a person who is potentially cleansed of their **Tzara'at** is to do. He is to go to a priest to be inspected. If the priest pronounces the person as cleansed he is released from his isolation and then usually an altar sacrifice is to follow. If ever there was continuing proof that Yeshua had not abolished The Law of Moses it is here because He specifically instructs the man to follow the Law as found in Leviticus 13 and 14. But why is the man not supposed to say anything to anyone about the cleansing? There's been a few theories put forth about this, but none of them hold any water. The one with the most consensus is that Jesus didn't want to divulge who He was just yet. However a Holy Man healing a person afflicted with **Tzara'at**, and then the cleansed person telling others about it, would have in no way unmasked Jesus as the Messiah. Nonetheless, in the hindsight of

Christian history, the many miraculous things Yeshua did definitively add up to the conclusion that He was the Messiah that Israel had hoped for; but not the one they expected.

In verse 5 Yeshua finally arrives home in Capernaum. There He is confronted with a worried Roman soldier; a Centurion. On its face this is kind of a peculiar story because we have a Roman army officer (no doubt a gentile) approaching a Jew, hat in hand, and asking for his help. It is interesting that we find a few stories in the New Testament involving Centurions and it can be generally said that they are upright men of honor and have respect among the Jewish community. It seems that this Roman soldier has noticed the authentically miraculous healings of Yeshua and so trusts Him. He doesn't seem to confess any belief in the God of Israel, nor does he mention anything resembling a religious faith in Christ. However clearly the Centurion is both desperate and sold on Jesus's power to heal..... regardless of how He manages to do it. So the Roman explains that his orderly is paralyzed and in suffering. More likely this is not an orderly but rather a house slave. Yeshua offers to go to the Roman's home and to heal the servant (we don't know whether the house slave is a Jew or gentile).

Most Bible versions say that the Centurion begins to address Yeshua by calling Him "Lord". The CJB says "sir". The Greek word being translated is *kurios* and it is the equivalent of the Hebrew *adon* or *adonai*. It is a word of respect. It can be translated as sir, Mr., master, and yes, lord. But little "L" lord. However over the centuries because the word can be translated to "lord", then it is assumed that the Roman meant it in a religious way because it is so common for Christians to refer to Jesus as "The Lord". This is not what the Roman army officer was implying. Saying "lord" was neither an indication that he had converted to the Hebrew religion nor that He was declaring a religious allegiance to Yeshua. He was simply being respectful and courteous, especially because he understood that Yeshua was a miracle healer and He was the best hope for saving the life of the servant.

The soldier declines Yeshua's offer to go to the officer's home in order to heal the young man. The officer was of course aware that it was Jewish Tradition that gentiles were automatically considered unclean, and therefore so were their homes. The belief was that a Jew entering the house of a gentile would be rendered ritually impure and thus have to go through the hassle of a period of time of isolation and purification, then an immersion. Out of an abundance of

politeness, rather than ask Yeshua to go against His culture and religious Traditions, the soldier says that it is not necessary for Him to actually be present with the house slave to heal him; all that has to be done is for Yeshua to order it and it will occur. And he thinks this is so because as a soldier, he is a man under the authority of one over him, and so whatever he is ordered to do it is dutifully carried out. And further, since he has 100 men under him, he is confident that if he issues an order, it will be carried out whether he is present or not. For all the wrong reasons, the Centurion was actually on the right track.

Yeshua is astonished and says that He has not known anyone in Israel with as much trust as this gentile; a soldier who actually represents oppression to most Jews. Bible translations will more often than not say faith instead of trust. Regardless, let's not get carried away. This is NOT a religious trust or faith that the Centurion holds in Jesus. However Yeshua's response about the lesser trust present among the Israelites **is** meant in a religious context. The Centurion holds a kind of deep, confident, unequivocal conviction that this Jewish Holy Man can heal his very ill house slave, and Yeshua sees it as an excellent model for the kind of deep, confident, unequivocal trust that His followers ought to have in the God of Israel and His Son. What we have found so far is that even as concerns His 12 Disciples, whatever trust they have in their Master amounts to "seeing is believing". So the kind of trust that is based on an invisible promise and the uttering of a word (instead of visible proof or a sign) is what Yeshua wants to see from His followers. The sad reality is that Israel, those who were elected by God to be the natural inheritors of His Kingdom, have not lived up to their calling. Ironically, this gentile Roman soldier (an enemy) better expresses what a healthy faith looks like than does Israel.

Verse 11 says something that on the surface feels out of place. Some Bible scholars use it as proof that all that Yeshua has been teaching has been concerning the End Times, and not the present. Actually, while this statement is indeed speaking of a future time, likely it is also Christ expanding on the matter of Israel and their place in the Kingdom of Heaven. He says that many will come from the east and the west (presumably traveling to the Land of Israel) in order to take their place at a banquet in the Kingdom of Heaven. And strangely that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will also be present. First: while it is not across the board, generally speaking in the Bible when the compound term east and west is used, it applies to the exiles and dispersed of Israel. Second: when north and south are used together, in general it applies to gentiles (again, this is not universal in the Bible but it does seem to be a pattern). Considering the context

of Yeshua's statement, then I think He is speaking about the return of the 10 Israelite tribes (the so-called 10 Lost Tribes) that were dispersed to the east and west by Assyria in the 8th century B.C. This is a prophesied event, most famously recorded by Ezekiel chapters 36, 37, and 38. Assuming that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are there in the flesh so to speak, then this must be occurring after the general resurrection that is to come. But it also moderates Yeshua's negative comment about this Roman soldier having more faith than any one in Israel to indicate that despite a general unfaithfulness in Israel, the descendants of the Israelite exiles will be welcomed into the Kingdom of Heaven.

And yet He says in verse 12 that those born for the Kingdom will not be allowed in but rather they will be rejected to the live in the darkness that is the condition that all who are excluded will experience. So who are these that are born for the Kingdom, but excluded? Let me first say that in no way should we read-in the word "all"... that is "all" who are born for the Kingdom. Rather it is that among those born for the Kingdom some (perhaps the majority) will be excluded. The Greek word being translated as "born for the Kingdom" is *huios*, and it more literally means "sons of the Kingdom". Again, the subject's context seems to be Israel, so these sons are apparently those of Israel who are indeed born as God's people, yet most will not be allowed into the Kingdom. Why? Judging from Christ's statement in 7:23, it is because these are natural born Israelites that refuse to sincerely trust Yeshua as God's Son, Lord, and Savior. The idea is that not all Israelites will automatically be granted citizenship in God's Kingdom. This would have been a startling pronouncement because the Jews of that day believed that being born as Jews guaranteed them a place in the eternal Kingdom; it was, and remains, not so. Clearly Christ taught the Apostle Peter this reality about Israel as well. Open your Bibles to 2Peter chapter 2.

READ 2PETER CHAPTER 2:1 - 17

All whom Peter said would be cast into darkness is specifically about certain members of Israel, thus I have little doubt that Matthew 8:10 - 12 is also speaking about certain members of Israel.

This episode concerning the Centurion concludes with Yeshua confirming that because of the officer's trust that Yeshua can do what He says He can do, Yeshua has already done it. The house servant was already healed before the Centurion went home. Indeed, the soldier was correct; merely Yeshua's word could heal.

We'll continue with Matthew chapter 8 next time.