

The Christian Manifesto Conclusion: So, What Are You Going to Do?
From the Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”
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Introduction

Years ago, I had the privilege of attending college. While I was there, like many students, I lived in a dormitory. One of the fun things about dorm living is learning about other students - That may include students who are no longer living in the dorms. One time, I learned about a student who was no longer there – he had to drop out of college. It turns out he was on the football team with a sports scholarship. Now, sometimes athletes with sports scholarships are bright people who could succeed at anything. At other times, well, student athletes can sometimes be people who don't have a lot going for them academically. That was the case with this student.

When I found out about him, I remember asking, “What was his problem?” Another student answered this way: “Let me just say that one time he handed in a research paper. The first word of the paper was ‘therefore’.”

Normally, the word “therefore” follows a series of statements and comes just before the main point someone is trying to make. Putting that word “therefore” at the beginning of a paper means the person using it doesn't know anything about writing for communicating ideas.

In this article, we're going to hear about someone using the word “therefore”. He's a master communicator, and he's using it quite correctly. He's made a long series of statements, and now he wants to make the final point.

We've been studying the book of Matthew, chapters 5 through 7, for a while now - A section we're calling “the Christian Manifesto”. We're at the end of Chapter 7, so we're at the end of this body of teaching given by our Lord. So today, we look at the conclusion. After making a long series of important points, we now ask, “So, what are you going to do?”

Let's read:

24 “Therefore (There's that word!) everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” 28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were

amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. (Matthew 7:24-28)

To understand this text, we need to ask two questions. 1) Jesus starts with the words, “Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine...” What are the words he’s talking about? What is the ‘therefore’ about? 2) Why are the words important?

Let’s look to find the answers to these questions.

I. What are the words Jesus is talking about?

“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine... (v 224)”

What are the words that Jesus is talking about? Note: He says they’re “his words” (“...these words of mine...”). I want to suggest that he’s talking about the presentation that he has just made: The words that are recorded in Matthew five through seven. Chapter five begins with Matthew saying this:

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them. (Matthew 5:1-2)

After this, Jesus went on to share the important block of teachings that we’ve been studying. The words that Jesus shared are often called “The Sermon on the Mount”. We’ve been suggesting that the teachings would be better called, “The Christian Manifesto.” One of the things that Jesus often discussed was the kingdom of heaven. So, this could also be called, “The Manifesto of the Kingdom.”

Recall, history has seen other manifestos. The best known is the Communist manifesto by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. This book has resulted in the death of tens of millions of people. That’s a message for another day. For now, we just need to know that a manifesto has 3 parts:

- The world has something wrong with it.
- What the world should look like.
- How to go about changing the world.

The points are not always made in this order and are often intermingled. The words that Jesus shared fit this pattern.

A. What Residents of the Kingdom of Heaven Look Like

First, Jesus tells us what residents of his kingdom will look like. They will be blessed, or happy. They don’t look like residents of this world.

Poor In Spirit

The residents of the world are confident in themselves and their righteousness. Jesus says, no, the residents of the kingdom of heaven are poor in spirit. They understand that they are sinners. They understand that their sin makes them spiritually bankrupt before God. Because they understand this, they are in the end happy. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Those Who Mourn

The residents of this world try to live their lives pursuing happiness. Jesus says, no, the residents of his kingdom are those who mourn. They look at their spiritual state and feel grief. Further, they recognize that many of the problems of this world are caused by their sin. This realization makes them sad. They accept responsibility for who they are and what they've done. Because of this, in the end, they are happier than many celebrities whose lives appear to be endless parties. Jesus says those who mourn will be comforted.

The Meek

The residents of the world are strong. They get what they want when they want. The model of the day was the Roman Empire. The empire had what were thought to be the greatest minds in the world backed by the mightiest army. They rode into weaker nations and made them bow before the might of Rome.

Jesus says, no, the residents of the kingdom of heaven are meek - They're gentle. Note: They aren't necessarily weak. But, they choose to rely on their loving heavenly father to give them what they need when the Father thinks they need it. Jesus says those people, the meek, will inherit the earth.

Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

The residents of this world hunger for all kinds of things: Riches, popularity, and fun, to name a few. To this, Jesus says that the residents of the kingdom of heaven hunger and thirst for righteousness. Those looking for anything else may or may not find it. If they find it, they may or may not get the amount that they crave. But Jesus says those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed - Because they will be satisfied.

The Merciful

The residents of this world remember when they've been hurt. They make sure that they get revenge. They get payment. They get justice. Jesus says, "no". The residents of the kingdom of heaven are merciful. They feel compassion for others - Even those who have hurt them. The residents of the kingdom of heaven know how to forgive the people who have hurt them.

Because of this, they are blessed, because they shall receive mercy. Because they are poor in spirit, they know that they need it!

The Pure in Heart

The residents of the world want anything that will satisfy for the moment. Jesus says that the residents of the kingdom are the pure in heart. They want one thing: God. Jesus says they are blessed because God will honor their longings. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

The Peacemakers

The residents of this world are involved in a war. In fact, a revolution. They want to kick God off his throne. But the great king is merciful and forgiving. He offers peace to any that will accept him as their sovereign ruler. Jesus says that the residents of the kingdom of heaven recognize that God alone belongs on the throne of the universe - And the throne of their hearts. They accept God's offer of peace. Then, they tell others. Jesus says that these people are blessed, for they will be called children of God.

The Persecuted

Because the world is at war with its Creator, when someone submits to the great King, those still in rebellion will persecute them. Jesus says these people, persecuted, will be blessed. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Salt and Light

Jesus says that the residents of his kingdom will be salt and light. Salt acts as a preservative. The followers of Jesus are used by God to keep the world from becoming as bad as it can be. Salt gives flavor to dull food. The message of God's love gives hope to the hopeless. It gives meaning to life. Jesus warns that, if the salt loses its flavor, it's not good for anything anymore. It can only be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

Without light, people stumble around at night. Jesus wants his followers to be the light of the world. God's truth helps a world wandering in the darkness of superstition and evil.

B. Things that Matter to the Master

So, now that everyone knows what residents of the kingdom of heaven look like, Jesus moves on to problems in the world. There are things that matter to the Master, and those things are under attack.

God's Word Matters to the Master.

The first things Jesus teaches here is that God's Word matters. From the first day in the Garden of Eden, God has been talking with humans. When he does, he shares his heart. The most important things he has shared are collected in the pages of the Bible. But ever since God started talking to humans, sinister forces have been attacking his Word.

At the time of Jesus, the Word came under attack by none less than the religious leaders of the day. They ignored much of what was written. They concentrated on small sections that made them look good. They made-up other things and promoted those things to the level of Scripture. To this, Jesus said that all of God's Word is important. That's why followers of Jesus today honor the entire Bible. We don't just read the "happy verses" that make us feel good. We don't add to the Scripture. Jesus warned that anyone who wants to be a resident of the kingdom of heaven would have to do better than the religious leaders of his day.

Human Life Matters to The Master.

Next, we learned that there was a problem in the world of values. It was like the department store where pranksters snuck in overnight and changed all the price tags. When they were done, a mink coat sold for \$1.95. A box of paper clips sold for \$5000.

Jesus shared here that human life matters to the Master. In fact, human life may be the reason this world was created. Like God's Word, ever since the Garden, the value of human life has come under attack. It started with murder of an innocent young man named Abel by his brother Cain. From there, it's grown into all kinds of terror.

Jesus taught that the problem was deeper than murder - It was hatred in the human heart. He taught that you don't get points for merely avoiding the physical act of murder. You must look into your heart and deal with the hatred that dwells there.

Marriage Matters to the Master.

Another thing that matters to the Master is marriage. Marriage is a wonderful gift that God gave to the first humans and to all that followed. Marriage is a lifelong union between one man and one woman meant to bring purpose, love, and happiness on all levels. It may be part of expressing the very image of God. It is at its best when both parties are followers of the one true God, and who promise to love each other in vows made before God and others. Like God's Word and like human life, ever since the Garden, the gift of marriage has come under attack.

It started with men taking multiple wives. Then, men and women started working at ways to dump each other and find others they liked better - This is also known as frivolous divorce. Others form temporary unions ranging from one-night stands to casual partnerships outside of the covenant of marriage. Still others turn away from one-man-one-woman to members of their own gender.

Some accept the importance of marriage and would never commit adultery but enter into all kinds of sin in their minds. To this last group, Jesus warned that even lust in the heart was as bad as adultery. Marriage matters to the Master. Sometimes in the most extreme of cases, Jesus will recognize a divorce. But we are to do everything we can to help before that point arrives.

Truth Matters to the Master.

Next, Jesus taught that truth matters to the Master. People in his day came up with all kinds of practices that covered their dishonesty. They made oaths and promises, but never fully intended to keep their word. Jesus said to let our yes be yes, and let our no be no - Because truth matters to the Master.

Humility Matters to the Master.

In the Garden of Eden, the Serpent tempted Adam and Eve with the promise that they could be like God if they would disobey him. But that could never be. God is God, and everything in his creation is something lower. The humble person accepts that. In fact, the humble person treats others as though they have more importance than themselves.

Everyone in the human race is tempted to think of themselves as being more important than those around them. It's reflected most in our anger when people don't do what we want. The anger grows when our others hurt us. Jesus taught that even those who hurt us should be treated as though they are more important than us. If someone slaps you on the cheek, turn to them the other cheek as well.

Love Matters to the Master.

From there, Jesus moved to an even higher level: He taught that Love matters to the Master. Humility is a state of mind that recognizes the value of others. Love values people from the heart. Love isn't just good feelings. Jesus says it's easy to love people who do what we want. Even the most evil of people know how to be nice to their children. Jesus said that we need to learn to love even those who hate us and persecute us. We need to pray for them. It's not just the intellectual act of obedience - It's becoming like our Father in heaven, who send his rain on the righteous and the unrighteous as well. Jesus says those who understand this and practice it will be children of the heavenly Father.

Perfection Matters to the Master.

How should we practice all the things we've learned so far? Perfectly! Because perfection matters to the Master. Jesus said: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:48)" Who can be perfect? In practice, nobody can - Nobody, that is, except God. That's why we need God to forgive us. The cross of Christ fills the gap between our imperfection and the perfection that we were created for.

But forgiveness doesn't mean to be lazy. God has compassion on his children, but we must still remember the high standards that are set for us.

C. Best Practices for Followers of Jesus

So now that everyone knows what Matters to the Master, Jesus moves on. There are things that every follower of God does. But do we do them in the most effective way?

Do we need to figure out how to do everything from scratch? No, Jesus gave his followers best practices - Ways to be effective.

Jesus taught about charity – giving to the needy. He taught about fasting and prayer. The best practices all had one thing in common: Secrecy! No follower of Jesus gives or fasts or prays to impress others. We give and fast and pray because it's pleasing to one person: God.

The Pattern for Prayer

In this section, Jesus gave his followers a pattern for prayer. It's often called "The Lord's Prayer", but that doesn't really tell us what's in it.

- We are to pray to the Father in the name of the Son, Jesus Christ.
- We pray that God's name will be hallowed.
- We pray that his kingdom will come and that his will be done.
- We acknowledge daily dependence on God.
- We pray daily for our bread.
- We must be reminded daily that we need God's forgiveness.
- We must be reminded daily that if we don't forgive others, we don't really understand God's forgiveness for us.
- We must ask daily for protection against temptation and the Evil One, the Devil.

Best Practices for Wealth Management

Jesus gave his followers best practices for wealth management. Our ultimate goal is to build treasure in heaven. That doesn't mean to quit your job and live on the roof in a white sheet. It's not wrong to keep money in the bank and plan for the future. And we still need to work hard at our jobs. But in the end, we need to be reminded that treasure on earth leads to moths and rust destroying. It leads to thieves breaking in and stealing.

A Tale of Two Masters

Worse, money can become an idol. It can become our master. In fact, all kinds of earthly things can become our master. That's why we need to talk about idolatry. In the old days, people worshipped statues. They worshipped statues because the statues gave them stuff, or so they

believed. At some point, the statues got lost, and people began to worship the stuff. That leads to the tale of two masters.

If your master is God, in the end you will reach heaven. If your master is anything else, you will go someplace else. That would be bad enough, but there's the life you lead in the meantime. If your master is something from this world, you will spend your time in worrying. You will be drained. The things you gather may make you happy for a moment. But in the end, those things and the pursuit of them will sap your life energy.

D. Principles for Changing the World

That leads us to the final part of any good manifesto. Jesus has told us about many of the problems of our world. We know what the residents of the kingdom of heaven are like. So, how do we go about changing the world? Jesus gave his followers principles for doing that.

Start with Yourself.

First, start with yourself. Stop pointing fingers at others. Allow God to search your heart and teach you how to be better. Take the log out of your own eye before trying to take the speck out of someone else's eye.

Be Careful – Not everyone wants to be Changed.

Next, Jesus shares some surprising advice. As we said earlier, those who have accepted God's offer of peace want to be peacemakers - The pass along what they know so others can enjoy God. Some will happily accept. But some do not wish to be changed. They will resist – some to the point of being dangerous. Here's the surprising advice: Jesus says we are under no obligation to hang around when people attack us.

Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces. (Matthew 7:6)

The Father Delights in Helping You.

Next, know when you go out to change the world that your heavenly Father is there to help. In fact, he delights in helping.

So, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8)

There is No Middle.

Then, Jesus warns us: As we seek to change ourselves and our world, there is no middle. There is a narrow gate and a wide gate. There is a narrow road and a wide road. The narrow gate leads to the narrow road which leads to life - Eternal life. The wide gate leads to the wide road which leads to destruction - Eternal destruction.

Beware of Deceivers and the Deceived.

Along the way, there will be deceivers. Heartless people who claim to speak for God, but who only speak for themselves. Perhaps worse, there will be those who are deceived. They will really believe what they say. They will believe that they should enter heaven. But Jesus, who will stand at the entrance to heaven, will have to say: "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers! (Matthew 7:23)"

II. Why are the Words Important?

So, now we are at the end of the Manifesto. We know that the world has something wrong with it. We can add that we know there's something wrong with us. We know what the world should look like. And we know what we should look like. We know how to go about changing the world. And we know how to invite God to help change us.

So, again, what are you going to do?

That brings us to the second question that we mentioned earlier. Why should we listen his words? Why should we obey? Here's the answer: ***Because there is great reward for those who follow. And there is great loss for those who don't.***

In his conclusion text (See pages 2-3) Jesus talks about two men. They had some things in common. They both wanted to build a house. Apparently, the same kind of house. But one built on a rock. The word here indicates not just a single stone, but a rocky outcropping. A place of solid bedrock. The other built on sand.

We're told that one day a storm came - Apparently, the same storm. After the storm, the house built on the rock was still standing. The man who built it had his beautiful home, and he had it forever. The other man's house came down. We're told it came down with a great crash.

Why should we listen to the words of Jesus? Why should we obey? Because there is great reward for those who follow. There is great loss for those who don't.

There's another reason we should listen to these words. There's another reason we should obey.

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. (Matthew 7:28-29)

The people who were listening knew they were hearing someone special. He wasn't like anyone they ever heard before. They heard teachers of the law. All teachers have to quote someone else. A mere human teacher could say, "The Scriptures say". Jesus said amazing things. He said, "You have heard, but ***I say to you.***"

Here's what Jesus said just a few sentences earlier:

21 Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (Matthew 7:21-23)

Jesus says that ***he*** is the one will be standing at the gates of heaven. ***He*** decides who gets in and who doesn't. He says he has the ability to look into the hearts of people and know whether they're true believers or not. Entrance to heaven depends on whether or not you know ***him***.

In the final statement of the Manifesto, Jesus says that people need to listen to ***his*** words: "These words of mine." We need to listen to these words, because they are the words of more than a man. These are the words of God visiting the face of the earth. There is no higher authority.

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

Today we have finished a journey. A journey through one of the most important bodies of teaching given in history: The Christian Manifesto.

There are not the words of a mere mortal. They are the words of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ - God himself visiting the face of the earth.

So again, we ask: What are you going to do?

I hope that you will listen. I hope that you will go back and review – These articles, along with recorded audio and video, are all available online on our web site. See the links at the end of this article.

I hope that you will try, with God's help to live these words. I hope that you will take the advice of Jesus and be like the man who built his house on the rock. The storms came. The winds blew. But his house stood strong.

Let's ask God's help to build our lives on the solid rock of Jesus Christ - So that we will be able to know him and live in his kingdom for all eternity.

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church
www.TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site
PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:

PeaceWithGod.net
