

“Kingdom People” – Week 17

SUNDAY, JANUARY 11, 2026 - MICHAEL BOWERS



Summary - “Kingdom People Produce Kingdom Fruit”

We have all been to a movie theatre at some point, and unless you arrived terribly late, you most likely sat through the previews. The previews are designed to give you a glimpse into what is to come in the future, and to peak your interest so that you eventually dive into the movie experience even more. The Sermon on the Mount from Jesus in Matthew 5-7 is a deep dive into His kingdom and what the rest of His teaching, life, example, death, and resurrection would come to mean for those listening. It really is a preview of the next few years of Jesus' ministry and teaching. And unlike movie previews, it did not, and still does not, disappoint. We could call Matthew 7:13-27 the application section of His sermon, or maybe the decision section. In light of everything He preached leading up to this point, Jesus says, essentially, “Now that you’ve heard all this, what are you going to do about it?” As He drove His audience to application, Jesus presented His listeners with four paired alternatives, which author Chuck Swindoll points out in his commentary Insights on Matthew:

- “two gates—the narrow one leading to life or the wide one leading to destruction (7:13-14)
- two trees—the good one bearing good fruit or the bad one bearing bad fruit (7:15-20)
- two responses—the genuine disciple who does the will of God or the hypocritical hearer who talks the talk, but does not walk the walk (7:21-23)
- two foundations—the one built on rock or the one built on sand (7:24-27)”

Jesus’ call to a decision, in response to His message, is really a call to faith for unbelievers, and a call to discipleship for believers. It’s a call to repentance, to trust in and obey the King, the long-awaited Messiah. It’s a call to become Kingdom People, people of action, and yes, even the intentions of the heart. It’s a call, then and now, to realize there are two paths: one that leads to life, down the narrow path; one that protects us from false teaching; one that leads to fruit in our lives; one that leads to salvation. And I want to ask you today to truly examine the path or direction your life is currently heading. The book of Matthew, and the entire sermon on the mount that we have been studying, is Jesus saying to his disciples, “As you follow me, you are following a narrow path and your identity will no longer be your preferences, your direction, but rather they will be mine.” This week we zoom in on verses 15-20 for this study.

Scripture - Matthew 7:15-20 (see 7:13-27 for deeper study)

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.

Key Apps, Websites, and Online Tools for Further Study

- <https://www.blueletterbible.org/>
- <https://www.biblegateway.com/>
- <https://biblehub.com/>
- <https://www.youversion.com/>
- <https://www.bibleref.com/>
- <https://bible.org/>
- <https://netbible.org/>
- <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/>
- <https://www.desiringgod.org/>
- <https://www.gty.org/>
- <https://www.gotquestions.org/>
- <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/>
- <https://carm.org/>
- <https://dwellapp.io/>

Further Scripture Study

Deuteronomy 13:1-5, 18:20-22; Jeremiah 23:1-40; Matthew 5-7; [Matthew 7:13-27](#); Luke 13:1-8; John 15:1-8; Acts 20:28-30; Galatians 5:16-25; Colossians 1-4; James 2:14-26; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1

As you study the scripture verses provided for this week, study for right context and right questions...

Right Context:

- The verse itself and key word(s) that stand out in the verse (meanings)
- The verses around the verse, the section of scripture, the chapter, the book, old/new testament, and relation to the rest of scripture
- Author and Date (Who wrote the book and when?)
- Audience (Who is the book written to? Main characters in the story and/or text?)
- Main points and overall purpose of the book
- Historical background, cultural significance, setting, people, rulers, etc.
- Scripture references; let scripture interpret scripture as much as possible

Right Questions:

- What does this passage say?
- What does this passage mean to its original audience?
- What is this passage teaching me about God?
- What does this passage tell us about man?
- What does this passage demand of me? (Is there a command to obey? Is there a promise to claim? Is there a sin to avoid? How is this applicable to me?)
- How does this passage change the way I relate to people? (What actions must I take in response to this passage?)
- What does this passage prompt me to pray? (For God, for others, for my community, for family, etc.)

Key Thoughts

Two paths. Two distinct destinations.

Jesus is announcing: you may have a name, but now your identity, your calling, your direction is to pursue Jesus and proclaim his name, living according to his teaching. Your salvation, your foundation, your hope is in Jesus. When we surrender to Jesus we are carrying the name of Jesus.

This week, Jesus is going to teach us that our identity, more than our name, is connected to who we are in/through a relationship with Jesus Christ. A right relationship with God will produce right living.

Again, there are four different sets of two paths in vs. 13-27:

- Two gates - narrow/broad, life/destruction
- Two trees - false/truth, bad fruit/good fruit
- Two responses - honesty and obedience/disobedience
- Two foundations - a house that can stand the storm/one that cannot.

This week we want to zoom in on vs. 15-20

Jesus is issuing a warning to a group of people who will proclaim truth, who seemingly have good intentions, but whose teaching is destructive, divisive, and elusive. These are false teachers/prophets. (vs. 15-20)

The description of false prophets as sheep gives us the picture of them moving in and about the flock. They elude and hide their true identities behind costumes. But beneath the surface, they are predators, set on destruction. False prophets, as stated by Jesus, do not restrict themselves to false preachers and teachers; they are those who proclaim to have surrendered to Jesus Christ, yet they have not.

In 2026, it is imperative to ask questions of those who are leading us. It is not always easy to spot false teachers in our midst, but Jesus is outlining how by asking, "what fruit are they producing?" We should pay attention to how teachers and leaders handle God's Word.

- Do they place themselves under the authority of God's word in belief and obedience? (Teacher worth following.)
- Do they stand over it and judge it, correct it, or neglect it? (False teacher)
- Do they have a high view of the person of Christ?
- A devotion to His finished work on the cross as the substitute for sinners?
- An unswerving commitment to the miraculous bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead?
- Do they embrace the doctrine of the Trinity—one God in three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)?
- Do they encourage followers to give their devotion to Jesus or to them?
- Do they promote a godly lifestyle, along with unity, grace, and mercy among those they lead?
- Does their teaching lead to wickedness, division, legalism, or hurt?

Key Thoughts

Then we can drill down further and ask ourselves: when we are listening to, learning from, and growing under one of our pastors, another pastor, or some random person on the internet...

- Is there truly a congregation, or only a group of online followers? Do they meet regularly with real people in the room, at home, in their office, and are they accountable to anyone?
- Is my walk with Christ getting deeper as a result of a particular teacher's influence?
- Am I enjoying closer harmony with others in the family of God because of their teaching?
- If I follow the teaching they are providing from God's word, will it produce spiritual fruit in my life and the lives of those around me?
- Does the teaching of the pastor, person, lead me into community, or further into isolation? Community = the local church established by Jesus. Isolation - a cult that aims to quarantine me from leading others toward a relationship with Jesus.

Jesus gives us a method to evaluate these false teachers when he says, "You will recognize them by their fruit." (verses 16-20). Do their actions, attitudes, and intentions align with the condition of their heart?

- What Jesus has against them is not "Your words are wrong."
- Jesus doesn't say, "What's wrong with you is you need better theology."
- He doesn't say, "What's wrong with you is your words don't accurately represent me."
- What he says is, "Your words, what you say, are incongruent with who you are."
- Your name tag, as a follower of Jesus, does not match your actions. And this applies to leaders in a church body as well as to anyone who claims to be a follower of Jesus or a Kingdom Person.

Jesus is saying, "You claim to be a part of me, but your fruit is not of me." A tree that is producing vibrant fruit and displaying growth, is healthy, and the fruit can be examined, and it is good. You will discover them not by their words or even their theological stances being taught, but by their actions, by their fruit. This comes from being connected to Jesus. (see also Luke 13:1-9; John 15:1-8)

These are words and visuals spoken from Jesus' mouth. There is a constant movement toward our lives, actions, attitudes, and the intentions of our hearts, which becomes noticeable in the outward expression of our lives.

These statements from Jesus lead to some looming questions.

- Can we simply pray a prayer to follow Jesus, and our life go unchanged? Not according to these words from Jesus.
- Is it ok to be a follower of Jesus, yet continue to live with behaviors, actions, and attitudes that are contrary to the word of God and have no remorse, brokenness, nor seek repentance? Not according to Jesus. Bad fruit, no real relationship. Now, this is not for us to be the judge and jury on someone's salvation or relationship with Jesus, especially to random people, but it does demand that we ask this of those in leadership over us and of those we lead. Are you convicted of sin? Do you regularly seek repentance?

Key Thoughts

The apostle Paul gives a distinct listing of works, fruit of the flesh vs. fruit of the spirit. Fruit, actions, and attitudes that come from someone surrendered to Christ vs. someone surrendered to self. They produce vastly different fruit. (Galatians 5:16-24)

This is all being taught at the beginning of his ministry. Jesus is warning the disciples to keep their eyes open for those within the movement who are teaching false doctrine and living in ways that are counter to Jesus' calling. He is calling them to search for those producing good fruit because they are connected, committed, and healthy. Jesus has an expectation that following him will change your life.

This message, given early in Jesus's ministry clearly communicates to us His desire for surrender to Him, His path, His ways, and our actions, attitudes, and the desires of our hearts. Furthermore, if the guys who would stand with Jesus, walk with Jesus, teach alongside Jesus, perform miracles - if they needed this teaching lodged in their head and their heart from the beginning, then we, who don't have the moment to literally walk alongside Jesus, need to be taught and reminded of the simplest, yet most profound teachings as well.

Our decision to surrender Christ demands a change in our lives, in our attitudes, in our actions, and in the condition of our hearts. Jesus is making it clear that being a disciple means far more than church attendance. Being a follower of Jesus is not declared simply because know the name of the Lord, uses his name, or even does mighty works in his name. The declaration of Jesus, which follows, is filled with authority. Jesus is raising the bar for his followers then and now, to press on. (see Matthew 7:21-23)

We must listen closely to the words from Jesus because he is not impressed here with the flowery words, public prayers, but the actions which come from a heart of obedience. Jesus says, "The Lord is not impressed with your words." Your word count in your prayers does not impress me. To simply proclaim you believe puts you on the same level as the demons. (see James 2:19)

Jesus was not impressed simply by the statement of belief, but by a lifestyle of belief. But he was even investigating the actions, because they were performing actions, but had no inner changes.

Action without surrender is simply action. Words without action are simply words. They must align. They must lead to and show obedience to Christ and His Word. Make disciples, baptize, and pursue His teaching. Walk the narrow path, pursue teachers of truth and community, surrender and be obedient, and stand on Christ and His Word as your foundation.

It's ordinary people coming to Jesus, only Jesus, and being met by an extraordinary Savior, and He's changing us in a way that, over time, is displayed in our everyday obedience in our lives. That's what God delights in! In fact, that's what God is using through His kingdom people to run darkness out of the world as the light of Jesus shines through us. (go back to Matthew 5:13-16)

God elevates the ordinary to point others to Jesus Christ. In the kingdom of God, ordinary, faithful obedience to Jesus is the new extraordinary. The ordinary made extraordinary for the glory of God.

Reflect & Respond

Has your decision for Christ changed your life? How? Please share.

Are you convicted of sin in your life? Do you regularly seek repentance? (see Psalm 51)

We must examine the two paths (see in summary on page 1 or on page 3 of this guide) and follow the one that leads us toward Jesus and ask the following questions:

- Do I act on what Jesus commands in His Word? Or do I walk away from His Word none the wiser?
- Do I face the trials and tribulations of life with confidence or with fear?
- Am I continuing, day after day, to build my life on the foundation of Christ and His Word? Or am I depending on other things, like the wisdom of the world, the advice of foolish teachers, or my own shaky emotions?

Take some time to really examine the teachers that you listen to in person, online, through a podcast, on TV, or from a book. It is not always easy to spot false teachers in our midst. But Jesus is outlining how by what fruit they are producing. How are the teachers that you listen to doing based upon the questions below?

- Do they place themselves under the authority of God's word in belief and obedience? (Teacher worth following.)
- Do they stand over it and judge it, correct it, or neglect it? (False teacher)
- Do they have a high view of the person of Christ?
- A devotion to His finished work on the cross as the substitute for sinners?
- An unswerving commitment to the miraculous bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead?
- Do they embrace the doctrine of the Trinity—one God in three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)?
- Do they encourage followers to give their devotion to Jesus or to them?
- Do they promote a godly lifestyle, along with unity, grace, and mercy among those they lead?
- Does their teaching lead to wickedness, division, legalism, or hurt?

How are you abiding in Christ in this current season? How has God been pruning you lately in your walk with Him so that you can be healthier and thus produce good fruit? (see John 15:1-8)

What is one step of obedience you can make this week to pursue the path that leads to life, good fruit, and a firm foundation?