

The Way of Jesus: A Better Way to Be Human
Part 6: How to Know If You're Really Following Jesus
Matthew 7

Summary: Jesus warns that not everyone who thinks they're following Him actually is... here's how to know for sure, according to Jesus himself.

Main Ideas:

"What Jesus would do" just looks like what we already wanted to do.
The voice you follow shapes the life you build.
We judge others by their worst actions and ourselves by our best intentions.
Citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven don't just avoid wrong... they initiate love.
A voice can sound right... and still lead you wrong.
Real truth doesn't just sound right... it produces the right kind of life.
Jesus didn't come to be a consultant. He came to be King.
Following Jesus isn't what you say... it's what you build your life on.

Invitation:

Ask Jesus for the courage to follow him on his terms.
Choose one teaching from the Sermon on the Mount and actually practice it.

Transcript:

IN: Let's start with a question: With so many voices telling you what to think right now... how do you know who to trust?

There are so many voices telling us what to think, believe, and what kind of person to be.

- And they're loud, convincing, and competing for our trust: politicians, influencers, talk shows... even pastors.

And it feels like whoever is loudest...or angriest...or most confident... wins.

Every voice promises: "Listen to me... you'll be right, secure, and you'll win."

- But deep down, we know they're not actually leading us anywhere solid.

RELIGIOUS ASSUMPTION: So you might say, "Why don't we just do what Jesus would do?"

That's a great idea... but here's the catch... which Jesus are we really following?

- The version shaped by our politics? Our upbringing?
- The version that conveniently agrees with everything we already believe?

Often, "what Jesus would do" just looks like what we already wanted to do.

- Just with his name stamped on it.

TENSION: And here's what's scary, according to Jesus (the real Jesus)...

- **It's possible to think you are following him...and be wrong.**

So let me ask you a second question: If someone asked you, "Are you actually following Jesus?" ... how would you know?

This isn't new... On Palm Sunday, when he entered Jerusalem... crowds shouted "Hosanna! Save us!"

- They thought they knew who Jesus was.
- They expected power, revolution, and political freedom.

But Jesus came on a donkey... not a warhorse.

- He didn't bring a kingdom of force, but a kingdom of love, peace, and humility.
- They wanted power as they defined it.
- Jesus came to redefine power entirely.

And in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus shows what that kingdom looks like.

- Not just what to believe, but how to live and become a different kind of human.

And at the end of his sermon, he sums it all up... **The voice you follow shapes the life you build**

GOD: And if we really want to be shaped by Jesus' voice... we probably need to start with what he actually says

- even when it's not what we expect.

Matthew 7:1-2 NLT *Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged.*

Now most people know this teaching... even if they're not church people.

- But it's often misunderstood

People hear "Do not judge" and think Jesus means never call anything wrong, never confront anyone, just be nice.

But if that were true, Jesus would contradict himself moments later when he tells us to watch out for false teachers.

- So Jesus isn't rejecting discernment.
- He's rejecting hypocrisy.

Matthew 7:3-5 NLT *And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.*

We're experts at judging... parenting, politics, religion, lifestyle...

- And our natural response when judged is to judge them for being judgmental.

We judge others by their worst actions and ourselves by our best intentions.

- And when we do that we're not following Jesus.
- We're sitting in his seat and building our lives on our own voice.

Jesus is exposing the fact that we don't really want guidance... we want control.

- We don't just want truth... we want to define truth.

Jesus is saying, "the Kingdom of Heaven already has a King. And it's not you."

So what do we do instead?

Matthew 7:7-8 NLT *Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.*

I used to read this as "Genie Jesus"... ask enough, get what you want.

Jesus isn't saying... ask for whatever you want, and I'll give it to you.

- He's saying stop relying on your voice... and be continually seeking the King and his Kingdom instead.
- Not to get control but to learn to trust the One who actually has it.

Then Jesus summarizes everything he's been teaching and the rest of the Jewish Scriptures...

Matthew 7:12 NLT *Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. [Then he says something huge...] This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.*

This is the law of the Kingdom of Heaven.

- The Law of Love.

Most of us are used to the negative version of this... **Don't** do to others what you **don't** want them to do to you.

But Jesus goes further. He says... **Citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven don't just avoid wrong... they initiate love.**

- Just as their Heavenly Father has done for them...

Jesus says... GO FIRST.

- Want patience, grace, acceptance?
- Go first... even if they don't return it.
- This is what it means to love your neighbor as yourself

This isn't something you fake or force.

This is what happens when God changes you from the inside out.

- When his Spirit reshapes your heart... you start loving people in ways you couldn't before.

Following Jesus isn't just about willpower or self-help.

- On our own, we can try to imitate him, but real change only happens when we rely on the Holy Spirit.

- Day by day, the Spirit empowers us to forgive, to love, and to obey... even when it's hard or doesn't make sense.

And here's what Jesus knows... This loving others sounds beautiful... but it's not natural.

So he ends this entire message with a choice.

- A clear, simple choice. But not an easy one.

Matthew 7:13-14 NLT *You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell [Better word is destruction] is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.*

There are two paths.

One is wide, easy, crowded... you just drift onto it.

- You trust your own voice
- You sit in the seat of the judge
- You treat people how they treat you
- It's the natural/usual way of being human.
- No surrender. No submission. No need for a King
- And it leads to a destroyed life

The other path is narrow. Difficult. And requires a decision

It's the way of Jesus.

- Trusting the King.
- Surrendering control.
- Letting him define what's good
- And choosing love even when it costs you.

It's narrow, not because it's exclusive, but because it requires a real decision

- To follow the King instead of your own voice.
- And it leads to true life now and forever.
- A clear choice but it's not easy.

And here's what makes this even more challenging...

- Not every voice that sounds right...is right.

So Jesus warns us...

Matthew 7:15-16a NLT *Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act.*

There are voices that sound right, even religious or patriotic, but lead to destruction.

- A voice can sound right... and still lead you wrong.

So Jesus says... Look at their fruit.

- What is the result of their life
- Where does their teaching lead people?
- What kind of person does it produce?

Because **real truth doesn't just sound right... it produces the right kind of life.**

Is this person and their voice producing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?

- That is the fruit that grows in a life shaped by God's Holy Spirit in the Kingdom of Heaven.

But here's where this gets even more uncomfortable...

- Jesus doesn't just say, 'Watch out for false voices out there.'
- He says, 'Examine your own life too.'

Because it's possible... to sound right... to look right... do religious things...

- And still not actually know him.

Matthew 7:21-23 NLT *Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws.'*

Those are some of the most sobering words Jesus ever said.

Notice what he doesn't say.

- He doesn't say, 'You didn't do enough.'
- He says, 'I never knew you.'"

This isn't about performance. It's about relationship.

- Not what you do for Jesus... but whether you actually know him... and follow him.

And this takes us all the way back to where we started...

- Are you actually following Jesus...or just a version of him you've created?"

Because don't miss this... Jesus just claimed to be the judge of all humanity.

- That's a big claim.

Jesus isn't just asking for agreement. He's calling for surrender, allegiance, a willingness to be transformed.

And that's exactly how he ends this message.

Matthew 7:24-27 NLT *Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't*

collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.

Two builders.

- Both hear his words. Both build a life. Both face storms.
- But only one stands.
- The difference isn't what they heard... it's what they did with it.

YOU: Anyone who listens... AND FOLLOWS. That's the difference.

Jesus isn't looking for fans or admirers.

- He's looking for people who build their lives on him.

We can cheer for Jesus, we can wave palm branches, and sing hosanna.

- And still be following voices that lead to destruction
- Whether it's our own or someone else's

Jesus didn't come to be a consultant. He came to be King.

So here's his invitation... Not just to hear his words... but to build your life on them and him.

- Where are you trusting your voice more than his?
- Where are you sitting in the seat of judge instead of trusting the King?
- Where is he calling you to actually follow, not just agree?"

INVITATION: If you're ready... Ask Jesus for the courage to follow him on his terms.

And then take one real step this week.

- Choose one teaching from the Sermon on the Mount and actually practice it... Even if it's hard

Maybe for you, this isn't just about rearranging priorities... maybe you've never actually surrendered to Jesus as King.

- You might have admired him, attended church, or learned about his teachings, but you realize now you've never chosen to actually trust him with your life.
- If that's you, Jesus is inviting you today... not to just agree with him, but to follow him, and to receive his forgiveness and new life.
- You can start that journey right now by telling him: "Jesus, I want to follow you for real. I surrender. Be the foundation and King of my life.

WE: Let's follow the real Jesus and listen to the only voice that matters.

The invitation is open to everyone... but the decision is ours

- To follow the King and walk his narrow path
- Or drift with every other voice down the wide one.

Imagine a life, family, and community built on love, joy, and peace... that shine like a city on a hill and change everything around them.

And it all comes down to this: What are you building your life on? Because only one foundation holds.

Following Jesus isn't what you say... it's what you build your life on.