



Matthew 7:24-29
 The Story
 Jesus: No Ordinary Manⁱ

Rev. Brian North
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Have you ever met someone...or known someone in some capacity (work, friend, etc.) who just seemed beyond ordinary? Like just almost too good to be true? Gwen used to feel that way about me until reality set in about three days into our marriage. 😊

I have a friend who is like that. He's the friendliest guy ever, has three kids, his wife is a local news anchor and so he doesn't work outside the home - but he has owned his own landscaping business on the side, and now he's mostly used those skills and other skills he's developed to work on remodeling whatever home they're living in at the time. About 18 months ago they sold the one they'd been in the previous 3 or 4 years after he completely remodeled the whole thing, and bought another one, which he has now completely remodeled as well – playing general contractor and lining up all the sub-contractors, working with the city, and so forth, and doing a fair amount of the work himself, too. He's a strong Christian, he coaches his kids' sports teams, he does the grocery shopping and much of the cooking for the family, he is insistent that his family takes a Sabbath on Sundays – so no home remodeling on that day. He's involved in his kids' classrooms, he knows their teachers, he makes his kids lunches in the morning, takes his kids to school every day so his wife can get a good night of rest after doing the late-night news...and he picks them up in the afternoon because she's back at work by then. He's skilled in several sports, he works out at a gym and is in good shape, he's got classic “tall, dark and handsome” looks, he's generous with his time...and to top it all off: he's a drummer! So that makes him especially awesome. 😊 He truly seems to be beyond ordinary.

But the reality is, he's another human being created in the image of God like any of the rest of us. But: **When we look at the life of Jesus, we see that he really is no ordinary man.** When you read the gospel accounts of the life of Jesus, you can't help but notice a number of things that just are not normal – from his teachings to the crowds that followed to the miracles. And as we continue this series that's walking through the Bible chronologically, we're now into our third week on the life of Jesus after 21 weeks in the Old

Testament. The OT and the life of Jesus are inextricably linked together, and Jesus himself says that he came to “fulfill the law and the prophets” of the OT. Talk about beyond ordinary – who says such things, right? Coming from anybody else, it would just sound bizarre...or even crazy. But not with Jesus.

So last week we looked at Jesus’ baptism and a little bit at his wilderness experience that followed right after it. These two things were essentially precursors to his public ministry – though the baptism certainly would’ve been in front of whoever else was there at the Jordan River. And in those two events Jesus learned that his heavenly father loved him and was pleased with him, and was with him even in the most challenging of circumstances. This is what launches him into public ministry.

And there were two main things that marked Jesus’ public ministry. **The first thing that marked Jesus’ public ministry was his teachings.** Jesus was constantly teaching people. It’s what many people called him – whether they followed him and were a disciple of his, or whether they were more adversarial with him, they oftentimes called him “Rabbi” which simply means “teacher.” There were a variety of topics that he taught on – heaven, hell, money, ethics and morals, wise living, prayer, compassion, neighborliness, purposeful living, the Old Testament, murder, marriage, worrying, judging, priorities in life, and more: There were a lot of specific topics he taught on.

But if we were to try and sum up in one word or phrase what all is teaching was essentially about, I think we could say it was something along the lines of: **“Living as a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven.”** What does life look like as a heavenly kingdom citizen? What is the Kingdom of Heaven like? (Many of his parables begin with that phrase.) What does life look like to be in relationship with the Heavenly King, and how do we have a relationship with this King? How does that relationship then impact our earthly relationships? Any time he taught on a specific subject, it was somehow connected to living as a “citizen of the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus’ most common way of teaching was through parables. Jesus loved to tell stories. And his stories always communicated a point...always taught

something (Unlike many of the stories we tell: “Remember when we....”). Now, in any given gospel account, we only ever get a given story one time. But in the course of the four gospels we get a number of them two or three or four times; there’s a lot of overlap. Oftentimes it’s pretty clear that the different gospel writers are giving us the same accounting of when Jesus told that story. But I suspect that Jesus told many of his stories on multiple occasions, and that’s why there are differences between some of the renditions of the stories, or the location given for the stories that seem to be essentially the same one.

On probably three or four different times, maybe more than that, I’ve shared the story of how Gwen and I met, became friends, started dating a few weeks after she told me she never would – Which I can only say that the two of us ending up together was kind of like the Millennium Falcon getting caught in the tractor beam of, and drawn into the Death Star: there’s nothing that could be done about it. It’s like I was the Death Star (not sure I like that!) and Gwen was the Millennium Falcon. Or at least Chewbacca/Han Solo. Don’t like that thought, either! And so we got engaged, married, and so forth. And undoubtedly, each time I’ve told it, I’ve shared different details (never used a Star Wars reference before, for example), or phrased things a little differently. No doubt, Jesus told many of his stories multiple times as well, and the stories came out a little different each time.

Jesus’ stories revolved around things with which they were familiar. So we see parables using meals, a lost coin, marriage, seeds, weeds, landowners, fishing nets, families and more. Many of them are quite famous and well-known. You’re probably familiar with the parable of the sower who scattered a bunch of seed. Some of it fell on shallow soil or rocky soil or on the path, and that seed didn’t bear good fruit or even grow at all. Some of it fell on good soil, and Jesus says it grew and bore fruit 30, 60, even 100 times what was sown. He says that that is a parable about the Kingdom of heaven.

The parable of the prodigal son (in Luke 15) is another famous one. This son asks for his inheritance early, leaves home, squanders everything, comes to his senses, comes home unsure of the response but has a big apology planned out, and his father sees him in the distance, comes running out to greet and

welcome him and throws a big party to celebrate that he's returned. That one, like many others, are so vivid we have to remind ourselves that they're fiction, and not real stories.

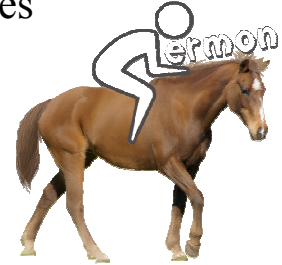
Maybe the most well-known of all of them is the parable of the Good Samaritan. Even that phrase, "good Samaritan" is well-known in our society – we even have hospitals named "Good Samaritan Hospital." Let me read it to you: **Jesus said [to an "expert in the law" who had asked "who is my neighbor?"]:** "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:30-37).

(Notice the "go and do" that echoes the passage we read from the end of the Sermon on the Mount? We'll come back to that in a bit.) Just in these three stories, we learn about the kingdom's growth, about how some people are receptive to the kingdom and it takes root in them, we learn about what God is looking for from kingdom citizens: bearing fruit in their lives; we learn about the forgiveness and graciousness of the King; we learn that everything the King has belongs to his children; we learn about being neighborly and how God expects us to treat one another; we learn that our neighbors are not just the people who live next to us, but the stranger in our midst. There's more, too, just in those three parables. So Jesus always conveyed something about the King and the Kingdom of heaven and what it meant to be a citizen

of God’s kingdom – both in an eternal sense and right here and now.

Jesus also taught in more straightforward ways that didn’t involve parables. The most famous of these is what we call the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5-7. If Jesus had a screen to project a sermon series graphic on for this teaching, maybe it would have looked something like this:



Sorry...a little “pastor humor” had to come in somewhere.

Now, we get a little shorter version of the Sermon on the Mount in the gospel according to Luke as well. This is one of those instances where people have often presumed that Matthew’s rendition of it and Luke’s rendition of it are from the same event. I think it’s highly possible that they were two different times when Jesus spoke on many of the same subjects and that’s why there are some differences. For instance, Matthew and Luke give us different geographical settings for them (In Luke: he goes “down” to “a level place,” probably a plain; in Matthew, it’s on the side of a hill), there are some slight differences in wording and what’s said, and Luke’s account is quite a bit shorter. And the fact is, Jesus probably taught on many of these things multiple times. But then at the end of the Sermon on the Mount he does actually close with a short parable, that was our Scripture reading this morning, about the two guys who built houses. One is on a good foundation, the other isn’t, and only the one with the good foundation survives the storms that come.

This is a parable about life and how to make it through. It’s not a parable about having abundant life or a joy-filled life, which Jesus teaches on elsewhere. It’s a parable about how to survive life... to weather the storms that it throws at us: pain, loss, brokenness, failure, grief, and so much more. (Loss of job, death of a loved one, divorce, etc.) The only way to make it through these kinds of experiences in life is to have a sure foundation. **And Jesus says that sure foundation comes from His words, when we put them in to practice.** So it’s not enough to just hear the words. The way we have this sure foundation is to live them out. So, everything he teaches on the

Sermon on the Mount about marriage, murder, adultery, divorce, judgment, oaths, loving your enemies, and so forth...all this stuff is not just meant for head knowledge. It's meant to be lived.

In fact, even though this parable about foundations is at the end of this straightforward teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and therefore is generally associated with the Sermon on the Mount, I think it's fair to say that it applies to all that Jesus taught – the Sermon on the Mount and all his other teachings, too. All of it is for the purpose of giving us a sure and certain foundation as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

One final thing about Jesus' teaching that is really what makes him no ordinary man is the authority with which he spoke. That was one of the things that the people of his day noted, including after the foundations parable Jesus told, where Matthew tells us the response of the people: that Jesus didn't teach like the other rabbis of their day; he taught as one with authority. His word stood on its own. He wasn't quoting other teachers, he didn't point people to anyone else, He didn't reference sources other than the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), he didn't lean on outside sources to gain credibility. He was credible and authoritative on his own. And in that way, he was no ordinary man in his teaching. So Jesus' teaching – the way he taught, what he taught, and the authority with which he taught, sets him apart from others.

The second thing that stands out about his life and sets him apart as no ordinary man were the miracles he performed. They were countless: healing people of blindness, of their inability to walk, of bleeding, mental illness, a couple people were raised from the dead, he fed thousands with just a few loaves of bread and some fish, and more.

The miracles of Jesus' show us a few things, but I want to focus on one: Many of the miracles were born out of compassion for whoever it was that was hoping for a miracle. In fact, actually, the miracles were really another way that Jesus taught. And: **He's teaching us about the compassion that He has for people, and therefore, the kind of compassion we are to have for others as well.** There's a need for healing, and Jesus meets it with a miracle.

There's a need for food, and Jesus meets it with a miracle. Now, for every blind person granted sight, deaf person granted hearing, lame person granted walking, sick person granted healing, dead person granted new life...there were many more who did not get that opportunity. At times the crowds were so big that not everyone who wanted to could make it to him. There were others who probably never made the effort and therefore we don't know about. There were probably still others who might've wanted to, but weren't in the right place at the right time.

And the fact is, all of them ended up facing one final obstacle that Jesus didn't help them overcome – at least at a certain level he didn't help them with it: they died. Even Lazarus, whom Jesus called forth out of the tomb, presumably died some time later. I'm pretty sure if he were still alive today, he'd be in the headlines occasionally. So even he died a permanent death. But then the cross and the empty tomb are the final miracle that Jesus did, also born out of compassion, and together they do deal with death and is available to everyone through faith in Jesus. So in the end, there's one final miracle that compassionately deals with the one ailment that every person has to face. And in all of the miracles that Jesus performed, we see the heart of God: the kind of heart that we are called to have as disciples of Jesus. It's a heart of compassion. Jesus never performed a miracle for his own benefit; they were always for others. And as disciples of Jesus' that's the kind of compassion we are called to have. His miracles teach us not only about God, but about how God intends for us to live, to have compassion for others.

You put all of this together – his teachings through stories or more straight forward ways and his teaching through miracles – you put all of it together and Jesus is saying that: **When we “hear and put to practice His word,” we build a foundation for life that can withstand the storms.** And this is not to say that the end goal is a selfish one, that we put his words to practice only so *we* can have that foundation: it's to help others have that foundation, too. But this is how we live with Jesus as our foundation. This is how we show our trust in Jesus. So often, “trusting Jesus” is boiled down to faith in the cross and the empty tomb. And certainly that's a huge part of it. When we get to Resurrection Sunday in three weeks, we're going to have a big worship celebration that's centered on the Resurrection. Clearly, that's important! But

Jesus calls us to faith in his whole life, not just his death and resurrection. He said it himself, that putting his teaching into practice is what gives us a firm foundation. It's not just head knowledge. It has to go from there to our hearts, and be carried out in our living. That's when we have the firm foundation of Jesus.

So: what's your foundation? (And I ask this of myself, too: What's my foundation?) Is our trust in Jesus only about the cross and the empty tomb (like a "get out of hell" free card?), or is our trust in Jesus encompassing of all that he taught as well, and putting it into practice? I hope your foundation and my foundation is found in living out his words...living with hearts filled with compassion for others as Jesus did...fully trusting in all of Jesus' extraordinary life, as well as his death and resurrection. Let's pray...Amen.

¹ Today's sermon correlates to Chapter 24 in "The Story." We took orders for copies of the book, "The Story" at church, but now you can get a copy of the book on your own online through many websites (Amazon.com, cbd.com, etc.). In fact, cbd.com (Christian Book Distributors) has them for \$5, hardback. Just search for "NIV The Story Bible" at their website.