

Choose this Day (Matt 7.13-27)

I. THE SERMON'S CONCLUSION

- A. This section serves as a conclusion and application to Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. With the exhortation of v. 13, he begins highlighting the necessity for a *response to his words*, as well as exploring several potential dangers that face those who hear his words.
- B. What has been implicit throughout much of the Sermon up to this point now becomes explicit in the ways Jesus calls his hearers to action. This teaching is not simply about correct doctrine or about being a better version of ourselves in the world. This teaching is about a *life-encompassing and life-altering decision*.
- C. The implication of this entire section is that we cannot remain neutral in our lives when faced with the choices of ultimate reality. Jesus is not asking us to merely enjoy his teachings, or to give mental assent to them. Rather, he is calling those who hear him to *radically reorient the entirety of their lives* around him and his teachings.
- D. One of the primary themes of the Sermon has been the reality of God's kingdom — its nature, its value system, and its ethics. Jesus here is calling for absolute allegiance to the reality of God's kingdom as the centerpiece of our lives.

³³But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matt 6.33)

- E. Throughout the whole of the Scripture it is clear that when God speaks it *demand*s a response. The hearers of God's word are called to either accept or reject his words. This is demonstrated by either seeking to walk in a spirit of obedience to his words (i.e., *faith*) or by hardening our hearts to his words.
- F. As Moses prepared the children of Israel to enter the promised land, he called them to *choose* which way they desired to respond. There were only two ways set before them — one that led to life (faith and obedience) or one that led to death (hardness of heart).

¹⁵See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live... ¹⁷But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn to worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸I declare to you today that you shall surely perish... ¹⁹I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curses. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days (Deut 30.15-20)

- G. In a similar manner, Jesus calls his hearers to choose the way they will respond to his words. The glorious reality of the New Covenant is that because of the gift of the Spirit, God's people are now given the *power* to walk in a spirit of obedience to his words.

¹⁰For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ¹¹And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. (Heb 8.10-11)

- H. Still, we must hear and respond to Jesus' words as a call to orient our lives around the way that will lead to true and lasting life in him. When we hear his voice, let us not harden our hearts in unbelief.

⁷Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion'... ¹²Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb 3.7, 12-13)

II. THE TWO WAYS (MATT 7.13-14)

¹³Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Matt 7.13-14)

- A. Jesus begins this conclusion with an exhortation for his disciples to *enter by the narrow gate*. This exhortation is built upon an image that Jesus gives to demonstrate that there are only two options before those who hear his words — we either accept them and follow him, or we reject them and continue walking in the path that leads toward destruction.
- B. Jesus compares the two possible responses to two types of gates and two types of roads.
 - 1. **Wide gate and easy way:** The first road is pictured as wide and luxurious, filled with ease and comfort. This path does not cost those who walk upon it. There is nothing that has to be left behind or forsaken.
 - 2. **Narrow gate and hard way:** The second road is pictured as narrow and difficult. Very few choose to walk through the narrow gate because the way is hard and it is costly to our fleshly desires.
- C. The implication from Jesus' picture is that there is now a *choice* before us who have heard his words. We can remain living in accordance with the prevailing cultural norms, value systems, and allegiances (fleshly, earthly, etc.) or we can choose to follow him. The way of this world is broad and easy but will ultimately lead to destruction. The way of the kingdom is difficult and narrow, but in the end, it is the only way that leads to true life.
- D. Jesus is concerned for our eternal well-being. Any message of salvation, flourishing, life, or prosperity that does not solely center on the person of Jesus, faith in him, and obedience to him, will ultimately lead to destruction.
- E. Jesus himself is the *narrow gate* through which we must enter into the way of life. There are no other paths to experience the fullness of life in God.

⁷So Jesus again said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep... ⁹I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. (John 10.7, 9)

- F. This exhortation highlights yet again that there is a real **cost** to discipleship. Jesus demands that the whole of our lives be reordered around allegiance to him alone. There is no "middle ground" in following him. This way will not be "greatly populated" and often times will be highly misunderstood (seen as radical, extremist, fundamentalist, legalistic, etc.).
- G. When Jesus calls a follower, he invites him to take up his cross and follow him in the way of self-sacrifice. It is only in the obedience of losing our lives that we can find true life in the end.

²⁴Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? (Matt 16.24-26)

- H. However, for those who seek to gain the whole world (i.e., walk the broad and easy way), they will ultimately lose their lives in the end. We must be equally bold about the **cost of non-discipleship**. To be hardened to the words of Jesus may result in "gaining the whole world", but in the end will lead to utter destruction.
- I. To follow Jesus is *difficult* for our flesh and our selfish desires. However, it is the truly liberating (*easy*) way for our hearts if we submit to learning his ways (i.e., walking in meekness and the beatitudes).

²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle (meek) and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matt 11.29-30)

III. BEWARE OF FALSE TEACHERS (MATT 7.15-20)

¹⁵Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶You will recognize them by their fruits... ¹⁷every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. (Matt 7.15-20)

- A. Jesus now turns to warn his followers to be on guard (*beware*) of false prophets and teachers who claim to speak for God.
- B. The need for discernment is high because false teachers appear harmless *for a time* (sheep's clothing). However, Jesus promises that over time, the destructive nature of their teaching will be seen for what it is.
- C. This section is connected to what Jesus has just exhorted because there will *always* be teachers who come along to promote the broad and easy way. Jesus wants our minds and hearts on guard so that we might discern teachers who seek to lead us astray.
- D. Jesus instructs his followers to evaluate someone's teaching by their *fruit*. This is essential because often times the nature of false teaching sounds (for a time) similar to the truth of the Scripture. However, it will often have destructive outcomes that work *counter* to the life of God manifested in his people by the Spirit.

E. Understanding the nature of fruit:

1. **Personal fruit:** There are times when the measure of a teaching ought to be evaluated by the nature of personal character and the evidences of God's grace in their life. Does a person *grow toward* the fruits of the Spirit and the beatitudes, or do they tend toward the fruits of the flesh?

¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these... ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Gal 5.19-24)

2. **Promoted fruit:** Another way of discerning the nature of false teaching is to see what *outcome* is being promoted by someone's teaching. Is a teacher seeking to call others to live in accordance with the fruits of the Spirit, the beatitudes, and obedience to Christ's commands?

¹⁹Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5.19)

3. **Fruit is not 'external':** One difficult reality when seeking to assess fruit is trying to make sense of fruit in an external manner. The fruit of a person's teaching *is not* to be equated with everyone who listens to their teaching accepting it, following it, and being fruitful (cf. Matt 13.1-9, 18-23). Jesus himself was called demon possessed and was abandoned by many because of his hard words.

⁶⁶After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. (John 6.66)

²⁵If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household. (Matt 10.25)

- F. Paul warns believers that there will be those who look for teachers to tell them what they already want to hear. Because of this, we need to be on our guard to know the voice of the Shepherd, so we can hear those who sound like him.

³For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths (2 Tim 4.3-4)

- G. It is also important that Jesus does not necessarily tell us what to *do* when we encounter false teaching — rather to be on guard against it in order that we might not be brought into deception by it. Jesus promises that there will be a day when trees that bear bad fruit will be brought into judgement for their deception.
- H. We stabilize ourselves against deception by giving ourselves to regular, prayerful engagement in God’s word; walking in a spirit of obedience; staying in proximate relationship with godly men and women; and gathering with other Christians under faithful proclamation of God’s word.

IV. TWO DANGERS (MATT 7.21-27)

- A. To close out the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus highlights two potential dangers that face those who hear his words. Both of these dangers are intended to emphasize the ***necessity of obedience*** as the expected response to belief in Jesus.
- B. First, Jesus outlines the danger of mere ***verbal profession*** that is void of a heart-level relationship with Jesus himself.

²¹Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’ (Matt 7.21-23)

- 1. Jesus declares there will be those who profess to know him, and even who minister in his name, but do not truly have a heart-level relationship with him that is defined by obedience.
- 2. Throughout the Scripture there is a dynamic relationship between intimacy with Christ through faith and the response of obedient submission to him in our lives.

⁹As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love (John 15.9-10)

- 3. In this section we are to further understand that ***fruitfulness*** before God is not simply to be equated with ***external impact***. Many times, people misinterpret God’s power in their ministry with his validation of their character or relationship with him.
- 4. We must seek to walk out a faithful obedience and love for Christ in the places where no one sees.
- C. The second danger Jesus highlights is a temptation to mere ***knowledge of his words*** without expressing obedience to them.

²⁴Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man... ²⁶And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man (Matt 7.24-27)

- 1. Jesus concludes the Sermon by teaching that there is a possibility of merely hearing his words and not responding to them. It is not enough for us to *know* Jesus’ teachings, or even to give some form of credence or assent to them.
- 2. The knowledge of Jesus’ words ***requires*** a faith filled response to them that seeks to walk in a spirit of obedience to his ways.
- D. Jesus sets before us a sober choice between life and death. When faced with the truths of eternity we cannot afford to try and find our own way. He calls us to respond to him with humble trust and “choose life”.