

The Gospel of Matthew

SERMON ON THE MOUNT: TWO WAYS (7:13-29)

Before we begin our study of the first few verses, we need to consider this last section of the Sermon on the Mount as a whole because of a constant theme running throughout. Read Matthew 7:13-28 and complete the following statements.

There are _____ ways we can walk in this life.

Those on the _____ path hear and _____ the teachings of Christ.

Those on the _____ path do not _____ the teachings of Christ.

As we study the two paths (verses 13-14), the two trees (verses 15-20), two destinies (verses 21-23), and two foundations (verses 24-28), remember the harmony between the passages to keep your interpretation on track.

Two Paths (7:13-14)

Jesus paints a verbal picture of two paths in these verses: the wide and the narrow. Both paths possess their own distinct gate, destination, and also travelers. We will compare each aspect.

The Gates: Strait and Wide

Jesus calls the gate to the narrow path, "strait". This word isn't commonly used today; let's define it.

Strait –

Consider Jesus' teachings in John 10:9 and 14:6, along with Peter's proclamation in Acts 4:12 and complete the following statements.

The strait gate is _____; there is _____ other way.

The strait gate is _____ Himself.

Somewhere in my readings I recall the illustration of the gate being a tight squeeze that requires us to surrender all. There is nothing we can bring through this gate with us (a picture of repentance). Only by the grace of God can we pass through. The strait gate isn't impossible to find or enter with God's help, but it is hard for us to let go of all that we might pass through.

The meaning of wide is clear. It is easily found, easily entered, and can accommodate all you may wish to carry with you. No surrender required!

The Roads: Narrow and Broad

The meaning of narrow seems to be obvious, but my word study found that there is more to it than first meets the eye. It is a loaded word that provides both a visual picture and spiritual insight.

Narrow –

As we consider the teachings of Jesus and Paul, this word comes alive as the same Greek word (thilibo) is translated much differently, but carrying the same connotation that I believe Jesus intends here in Matthew 7:13-14. Read Mark 3:9, 2 Corinthians 1:6, 4:8, and 1 Thessalonians 3:2-4 and describe the narrow way.

Now consider the broad way. Read Acts 17:22-23 and Ephesians 2:2-3 and consider the broad path. What does it accommodate? What do all of the systems of beliefs on this road have in common?

The comparison is between an easy path and a hard path. The broad path is comparable to a modern super highway. There are many smooth paved lanes all going the same direction. The narrow path is more like path through the woods that is not always easy to find, much less follow, and is pressed in by branches and thorns sometimes.

The Destinations: Life and Destruction

The two roads lead to two different destinations: life or destruction. Each of the four parts of the conclusion to this sermon address the eternal destiny of those who choose the wrong path (see Matthew 7:19, 23, and 27). There is no room for error. Jesus does not make allowance for other paths that lead to the same place. There are two paths and two separate destinations.

Destruction –

Life –

Consider John 14:6, Jesus is the Gate(truth), the Road (way), and the Destination (life).

The Travelers: Few and Many

Jesus concludes both verses by comparing those traveling the two roads: few on the narrow and many on the broad. The many are not on the broad because they cannot be accommodated on the narrow,

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but because they choose the broad over the narrow. Proverbs 16:25 says, “ There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”

How did this fact impact Jesus’ ministry? Read Luke 17:11-19, John 6:60-68, and 16:28-33.

Why is it that few find and travel the narrow path? Read Luke 13:22-30, 14:33 and Matthew 16:24.

“Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.”

John 15:20

Two Trees (7:15-20)

Jesus begins these verses with a warning: beware! This means to wake up and be watchful. False prophets are very dangerous. A.T. Robertson said in his book, A.T. Robertson’s Word Pictures, “Wolves are more dangerous than dogs and hogs” (in reference to Matthew 7:6). Much is said in Scriptures about the dangers of false prophets and how to recognize them. This isn’t only a warning for first century Christians. Read Matthew 24:1-14, 24, Acts 20:28-31, and 2 Timothy 3:13. What is the forecast for false prophets in and around the Lord’s churches?

If there is any time in church history these words should ring in our ears, that time is now!

What is the potential danger of false prophets? Read Jeremiah 14:14-16, Ezekiel 13:22, Matthew 23:15, and 2 Peter 1:1-2.

By attacking from the inside (the Trojan horse), they prove to be more deadly than obvious enemies.

If we were to try and describe the teachings of a false prophet, it would be best to use the words of Peter. They will bring in, “damnable heresies” (2 Peter 2:1). Damnable means destructive. A heresy is a belief contrary to the doctrines of Scripture, the only rule of faith and practice. Therefore a “damnable heresy” is a destructive teaching contrary to Scripture. These teachings often lead men to hell.

Each generation has its own false prophets. It is easy to look to the past and identify false prophets who were unmasked. Recognizing them in your own day is more challenging. One of the most common destructive doctrines of false prophets today is the perversion of the gospel. Arthur Pink, a noted early 20th century Christian Scholar wrote, “Any preacher who rejects God’s law, who denies repentance to be a condition of salvation, who assures the giddy and godless that they are loved by God, who declares that saving faith is nothing more than an act of the will which every person has the power to perform is a false prophet and should be shunned as a deadly plague.”¹ Does such a perversion of the gospel count as a damnable heresy? I would answer in the affirmative... yes. This false doctrine leads many to hell because they do not come to Christ on His terms and experience a genuine conversion.

The effectiveness of a false prophet is largely determined by whether his disguise is convincing. False prophets are not true believers. They are unregenerate (unsaved) liars. They must cover up their true nature with a good disguise. This has been the method of operation for false prophets for years. Read Zechariah 13:4, Mark 12:38-40 and 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 and discuss how false prophets disguise themselves. What do the disguises have in common?

Why would the wolf disguise himself as a sheep if he is really trying to be a shepherd? Consider John MacArthur’s explanation of, “sheep’s clothing”.

SHEEP’S CLOTHING?

... shepherds invariably wore woolen clothing, made from the wool of the sheep they tended. That is the sheep’s clothing of which Jesus here speaks. False prophets do not deceive the flock by impersonating sheep but by impersonating the shepherd, who wears sheep’s clothing in the form of his wool garments. Just as the ancient false prophets often wore the garments of the true prophet, so false shepherds often disguise themselves as true shepherds. Satan’s man goes under the guise of God’s man, claiming to teach the truth in order to deceive, mislead, and if possible, destroy God’s people.

The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7, p. 465

¹ *Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, Arthur Pink, p. 362

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Under the sheep's (or shepherd's) clothing, the false prophet is described as a ravening (devouring) wolf. Read Ezekiel 22:23-27, Acts 20:29-31, Philippians 3:18-19, and Revelation 17:1-6. What feeds the appetite of the false prophet?

True prophets of God are driven by a Spirit-fueled fire in their heart for the glory of God; false prophets are driven by a flesh-fueled fire in their belly for the gain they can exploit from others.

This is why it is essential for Christians to be grounded in the Word! The false prophet will also use Scripture (wrongly interpreted) for validation. The true man of God will rightly interpret the Word of God and teach others how to grow in the Word so they may become rooted in truth (Colossians 2:7).

Like the roots of a tree, doctrine both nourishes us and promotes spiritual stability.

Beyond being able to recognize their false doctrine, a false prophet can also be distinguished by their manner of life. Jesus said, "ye shall know them by their fruits." Read Galatians 5:19-21. What are the bad fruits we should expect to find in false prophets?

What are spiritual fruits? Read Galatians 5:22-23?

Jesus makes an emphatic statement about fruit-bearing when He says, "every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." On the surface it sounds like Jesus is saying that Christians can't sin and false prophets can do nothing good. On a spiritual level, considering only the inner man, that is actually true (see Romans 3:10-12 and 1 John 3:6). As we consider the whole man, we realize that Christians do sin (1 John 1:8). We also know that the lost can do things that at least on the surface appear to be righteous (Matthew 23:28). What is Jesus saying?

Why is it that a false prophet will always bring forth bad fruit? Read Jeremiah 23:13-14, Acts 19:13-17, and 2 Peter 2:10-22.

This is why it is essential that we uphold the Biblical qualifications for leaders in the church (see 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9). They are meant to be a deterrent to having false prophets infiltrate leadership roles in the Lord's churches. As soon as we begin to soften this standard we leave ourselves wide open to the dangers of false prophets.

The destiny of false prophets is eternal judgment. The trees that do not bear fruit are cut down and thrown in to the fire (the lake of fire). This is a consistent theme throughout Scriptures (Matthew 3:10 and 21:19-20). The judgment for false prophets appears to be especially harsh, in accordance with their sins (James 3:1). Read Jude 1:3-13, a strong condemnation on the character of false prophets and discuss the character, fruitfulness, and destiny of false prophets.

Two Destinies (7:21-23)

Let's begin by nailing down who Jesus is talking to. Jesus distinguishes between those who enter the kingdom and those who do not enter by whether they do the will of His Father. Is He speaking to unbelievers or backslidden Christians? See also John 10:14, 27-30 and 2 Timothy 2:19.

This section of scripture appears to be a continuation or further elaboration on the false prophets we just studied. We have learned that false prophets appear to be true representatives of God, but are really just wearing a disguise. They mislead many and can be recognized by their unprincipled and ungodly lives. The scene in verses 21 through 23 appears to be the judgment seat of God, where He is casting professing believers into hell. I say professing because that is the substance of their relationship with God, merely a profession.

Is Jesus preaching a salvation by works? He says that those who enter are they that do the will of His Father. Consider this whole passage, review Matthew 7:16-18 and read James 2:18.

This begs a really good question. Can unbelievers actually prophesy/preach in the name of Jesus? Assuming that these people weren't mistaken, is it possible? Read Numbers 24:1-5, 2 Peter 2:15-17, and John 11:49-51.

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What about casting out demons? Is it possible for an unbeliever to do that? Read Mark 6:7-8, 9:38-40 and Acts 19:13-16.

What about the wonderful works? The phrase “wonderful works” actually implies miracles or works of great power. Could unbelievers do that apart from the empowerment of the Spirit of God? Read Matthew 24:24, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, and 2 Thessalonians 2:8-10.

What is the end of these prophets, exorcists, and miracle workers?

There are two lessons to take away from this text:

- 1) Your hope of heaven cannot stand upon what you have _____, or what has been done _____ you. It must be based upon a real _____ with Jesus Christ, wrought by repentance and faith.
- 2) We cannot distinguish true and false prophets by apparent _____ or ability (even if they appear to do the miraculous). We must discern them by their _____ and their _____.

Two Foundations (7:24-27)

These two men could be neighbors, perhaps co-workers, friends, and even fellow church members. They have a lot in common but their one difference made all the difference in the end.

What did they have in common?

- They both built a _____.
- Their houses probably _____ the _____ (from the outside anyway).
- They both _____ the words of the Lord.
- They both had the _____ life experiences (wind, flood, rain).

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The world has diluted the meaning of wisdom and folly over the years to equate wisdom with intelligence. While wisdom does require some knowledge, the presence of knowledge does not necessarily imply wisdom. In fact, some of the most intelligent men and women in the world may be judged as complete fools when they stand before God in judgment.

The Gospel of Luke records the same parable by Jesus with additional detail that helps us to better understand the distinction between the two builders. Read Luke 6:46-49. What do we learn from Luke that we don't see as clearly in Matthew?

The difference wasn't the location (the beach versus the mountain) but the foundation. The Lord can sustain anyone in any situation if they are founded upon Him.

Wisdom, generally, is the application of truth to life. How does the Scripture describe the pursuit of wisdom and how does this relate to the two builders? Read Ezra 7:10, Proverbs 4:7, 1 Timothy 5:17, and 2 Timothy 2:15.

James 1:21-25 is a great parallel passage that describes the difference between those who are only hearers of the word and those who are doers. Read this passage and describe the mindset of the hearer. Compare this with the context of Matthew 7:24-27 (go back and read 21-23). Are they consistent?

What are the wind, rains, and floods?

Why isn't there a distinction in the wind, rain, and floods on the two builders? Read Matthew 5:45, 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, and 2 Corinthians 4:7-11.

What was the end of the foolish man and his house?

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A Teacher with Authority (7:28-29)

At the conclusion of this message, the audience was not only astonished at what He said, but how He said it. They were unaccustomed to such clear and confident teaching. The scribes of the day used the Old Testament, the Jewish traditions, and the teachings of prominent rabbis as their authority. While the Old Testament was from God, the other sources were of men and only served to confuse the true meaning of the Divine text. Thus, they were used to confusing and conflicting teachings.

Review the Sermon on the Mount. What are some examples of Jesus teaching with unusual authority?

What does the wording of Jesus' teaching imply about His identity?

As we conclude the Sermon on the Mount, consider what the Lord has taught you. How has He challenged your heart? The preacher of this sermon is none other than your Lord and Savior and judge. He will hold us all accountable for what we have learned. Will you build on the rock or play in the sand?