

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 **two** ways we can walk in this life.

Those on the **narrow** path hear and **obey** the teachings of Christ.

Those on the **broad** path do not **obey** 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 – **means narrow because of obstacles standing close about**

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 **exclusive**; there is **no** other way.

The strait gate is **Christ** 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 – to crowd, afflict, suffer tribulation, and trouble

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. **Mark 3:9 (throng); 2 Corinthians 1:6 (be afflicted); 4:8 (troubled); and 1 Thessalonians 3:2-4 (tribulation). The narrow way is not a simple path. It is not the easy road. There will be troubles, trials, and afflictions, all of which will test our faith and demonstrate to the world that greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4).**

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? **This road can accommodate whatever you want to bring. Just as in Athens, men worshipped any multitude of gods and they were able to live in harmony as long as none proclaimed the One True God! Those on the broad path can follow their desires and whims and stay on course. This path is a perfect picture of our pluralistic society. All false systems of beliefs have one thing in common: they are works/achievement based systems. Remember, you don't have to surrender anything to pass through the wide gate nor do you have to give anything up to walk the path. It is easy from a fleshly perspective!**

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 – ruin, loss, damnation, waste. The Greek work (apoleia) is the root of Apollyon, the name given to Satan in Revelation 9:11.

Life – This is eternal life, found only in Christ. It is freedom from sin and its consequences, eternal vibrant life in the presence of God Himself.

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,

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. **Out of the many who Jesus ministered to and healed, only few truly found salvation and followed Him. Many heard the truths He proclaimed but few listened. While there were spurts of success in the world’s eyes, He ultimately died alone.**

Why is it that few find and travel the narrow path? Read Luke 13:22-30, 14:33 and Matthew 16:24. **Traveling the narrow path requires that we surrender all to pass through the gate. Most are not willing to make such a sacrifice of self, even though by dying, we truly find life. A great example is the rich young ruler. Assuming he never found salvation, he has been tormented in hell for 2,000 years and has all of eternity ahead of him. How significant does the wealth he clutched seem now? It was ultimately stripped from him.**

“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? **We are told that false prophets will exist until the end. In fact, they will become more deceptive and more deadly as we approach the Lord’s return.**

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 2:1-2. **Those who heed the words of false prophets will be led into destruction and damnation with them. Those who follow their wicked ways become even more wrapped up in deceit than the original deceivers. There is a powerful bondage upon the heart of those who have fallen prey to false prophets. False prophets discourage the hearts of the righteous; we do not find relief from them but rather more pain and anguish. Finally, false prophets bring reproach upon the name of Christ, causing Him to be blasphemed or at least misunderstood by the masses.**

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? **False prophets dress as true prophets, or messengers of God. In Old Testament times, it involved wearing the rough clothing associated with a true prophet. In the days of Jesus, the false prophets were the Pharisees who wore the long robes and made the long prayers to appear godly in the eyes of others. In modern church history, they disguise themselves as preachers and pastors, messengers of God that appear to be gifted and called to deliver God’s Word and direction to God’s people. No surprise, Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.**

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

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? **Each of these Scriptures show that false prophets feed on the sheep they tend. They try to divide a flock, taking those that will follow them, and then feed off of them. They want what they can get from them, whether it is money or power or the fulfillment of other ungodly fleshly lusts. They have no concern for their spiritual wellbeing.**

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? **We have a whole list of wickedness that are fruits of the flesh. Although it would be highly unusual to find them all in one person, it is very likely that one or more of these behaviors will be found in false prophets.**

What are spiritual fruits? Read Galatians 5:22-23? **Spiritual fruits are evidence of the Spirit of God living and working in the heart of a saved individual to produce righteousness. Their manner of life gives evidence to One greater than the world and the flesh living inside of them.**

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 superficially appear to be righteous (Matthew 23:28). What is Jesus saying? **He is teaching us to look at the whole manner of life of the proposed prophet. If someone is claiming to speak for God and trying to lead His people and they are caught up in obvious sin without repentance or perhaps even trying to justify it, they are not God's man. They are likely a false prophet.**

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. **Because false prophets do not have Christ, they have no power within them to conquer sin. They are sinners by nature and remain in the grip of vice and wickedness. They may be able to maintain a surface appearance of holiness, but eventually that wickedness will surface, revealing their true nature.**

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. **False prophets are soundly rebuked in this passage and referred to as brute beasts or unreasoning animals, meaning they have no awareness or sensitivity to truth. They appear to be clouds that will bring rain or trees that will bear fruit, but they do not. They are destined for destruction. God will show them no mercy in judgment.**

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. **The Lord knows those that are His sheep. Jesus does not know these who are standing before Him. Therefore we can conclude that they aren't just backslidden Christians, but those who never truly knew the Lord.**

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 passage actually teaches quite the opposite of a salvation by works. Jesus is sending people who have preached in His name, cast out demons, and done many wonderful works into hell. These people had done good works, but they were not born out of faith in Christ. If there is no faith, there is no salvation, no matter how many "good works" you may do.**

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. **Yes, unbelievers can actually speak truth and even be empowered to speak the truth by the Spirit of God. Their good words do not mean they are truly saved. God can use a donkey to speak and can use an unbeliever too. Caiaphas, the high priest of Israel but a wicked man, was used by God to bring a prophecy about Christ.**

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. Judas, vagabond Jews, and perhaps the ones that the apostles found casting out in demons are examples of unbelievers who had some degree of power over demons. Some of this power could have been granted by God (Judas). In other cases it is hard to say. Satan does desire to appear as an angel of light.

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. Satan will appear with lying wonders that will if possible, deceive the very elect. His power will be magnified as we approach the end and he may even appear to do (or actually accomplish) miracles. Don’t underestimate His power.

What is the end of these prophets, exorcists, and miracle workers? They are being cast into hell, a place of eternal separation and torment.

There are two lessons to take away from this text:

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

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 house.
- Their houses probably looked the same (from the outside anyway).
- They both heard the words of the Lord.
- They both had the same life experiences (wind, flood, rain).

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? **We learn that the wise man dug deep to find a solid foundation upon which to build his house. The foolish man didn't want to spend the time digging the foundation but instead rushed to put the house up.**

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. **Seeking wisdom is work. It is not a pursuit for the faint of heart. When we relate this to the builders, we see that the wise man was willing to do the backbreaking work of digging a foundation. They didn't have back hoes back then. This had to be done by hand and probably took a lot of time and money. It wasn't the easy way. Neither is being a doer.**

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? **The one who was a hearer only was self-deceived. They heard the truth and were allowed to see reality, but because they did not act upon it, they lost that perception. They are now unaware of their perilous situation. This is very similar to Matthew 7:21-23, where self-deceived people are caught by surprise at judgment, professing to know the Lord but are unknown by Him.**

What are the wind, rains, and floods? **The difficulties and challenges of life, ultimately even death itself.**

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. **Rather than keeping us from all difficulty, the Lord allows us to endure it with victory. For the lost, difficulties and failures in life will only make you bitter. For the Christian who leans on Christ, difficulties make us better. A good example is the Apostles Peter and Judas Iscariot. Both betrayed Christ (although Peter's betrayal was far less severe). Peter ended up repenting and becoming stronger. Judas ended up dead.**

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

It was a total and complete loss. Nothing of redeeming value was salvaged from it. This is a picture of the lives of those who do not know Christ or build their life upon His teachings.

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? **Matthew 5:11-12 (enduring persecution for His sake nets a reward), 5:20, 22, 26, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44 and 6:25 (I say unto you), 7:21-23 (Jesus as judge), 7:24,26 (these sayings of mine).**

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

He was claiming to be a source of Divine and eternal truth, a person to suffer for, and One who will stand in final judgment over men. He is claiming divinity by the way He teaches. No other man or angel could claim such a thing.

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?