

The Messiah Has Come
Week 30
Matthew 7:13-20
“The Invitation”

Introduction

I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, love The LORD your God, obey Him, and remain faithful to Him. For He is your life, and He will prolong your days as you live in the land The LORD swore to give to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. **Deuteronomy 30:19-20**

Many years ago, a wise old pastor gave me sound advice, telling me that every time I preach a message from God's Word, there should be an invitation given at the end, for God's Word always demands that we make a choice. Either we will choose to follow God or to go our own way. This is the most basic truth in all of Scripture; whether we will obey... or not. God doesn't force us to follow Him, but He clearly warns that there will be horrific consequences to face, if we choose not to obey.

As Christ came to the end of His famous *Sermon On The Mount*, He too offered the listeners an invitation, a choice as to whether they would receive His message or not. I am certain that many that day decided to follow Him, while even more made the choice to return to their homes just as lost and undone as they were when they sat down on the grassy slopes of the mountainside. This is just the way of things. Some will hear and be transformed, while others will weigh the cost and decide to continue in their sins. Never let it be said that there isn't a price to pay in order to follow Jesus. It has been said that, "Salvation is a free gift, that will cost you everything." And I believe this is the absolute *truth*, for you cannot stay where you are and go with God.

For every path of righteousness that our God sets before us, the devil offers a thousand winding roads that lead to destruction. How can a person truly discern between what is good and what is false? By relying on the character and faithfulness of Almighty God! I can personally testify that every time I decided to "do my own thing" rather than seek the counsel of Scripture, I ended up in shame and regret. Can I get a witness? When Christ beckons us to choose the narrow path at the close of this wonderful sermon, we would do well to make the necessary adjustments in order to set our course upon it. We must do as Joshua declared so many centuries ago:

Therefore, fear The LORD and worship Him in sincerity and truth. Get rid of the gods your ancestors worshipped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and worship The LORD. But if it doesn't please you to worship The LORD, choose for yourselves today: Which will you worship — the gods your ancestors worshipped beyond the Euphrates River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living? As for me and my family, we will worship The LORD. **Joshua 24:14-15**

Once again, the choice is yours, and yours alone, to make. God will neither force you to do that which is right, nor will anyone else be able to choose on your behalf. This is why Jesus said over and over again when He walked upon this earth: **"He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"** (**Matthew 11:15 NKJV**).

As we look at the invitation given in the closing portion of The Sermon On The Mount, let us examine our own hearts, and see if we truly have made the decision to follow Christ, or not. As we discussed last week, Christianity is not for the *peripheral* follower, nor the *Pharisee*, but rather, it is offered to those of us who realize that apart from Christ, we are desperate paupers in need of a Savior, and Jesus is our only hope.

There are three distinct things I would like for you to see in this particular passage today. Jesus clearly tells us that we each have a choice to make, and that many of the devil's very own are standing at the ready to lead us astray. Let us, with eyes wide open, as it were, have the discernment to carefully choose the right as we see before us *Two Gates, Two Paths, and Two Types of Gatekeepers*. Please allow me to explain.

Two Gates (vs. 13)

Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who go through it. **Matthew 7:13**

According to Jesus, there are two gates, entryways if you will, that a person may choose to enter. There is a narrow gate, and then a wide gate. The narrow gate leads to eternal life, while the wide one leads to destruction. Just what do these gates represent? Well, first of all, it is important for us to understand some of the ways in which Jesus identified Himself to his followers. For example, listen to what He says about Himself in **John 10**:

Jesus said again. "Truly I tell you, I AM the gate for the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep didn't listen to them. I AM the gate. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance. **John 10:7-10**

There we see in one of Jesus' own "seven I AM statements" recorded in John's gospel, that He is indeed the gateway to enter into to life everlasting. Now that we know Who it is exactly that He is talking about in regards to the "gate" that leads to the path of righteousness, then why does He describe it as "narrow"? The answer is simple. It is because He is the only way for sinners to be declared as righteous before a Holy God. There is no other way to God except through Christ Jesus. This world may find this truth to be unreasonably restrictive, but God has chosen that there is only one way to heaven. Jesus Himself has declared it:

Jesus told him, "I AM the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to The Father except through me." **John 14:6**

This world would like to believe that there are many ways to God. Some would teach that it is by virtuous living that we earn our way to heaven. While others would teach that we must believe in one of the "many ways" that lead to God. They believe that as long as we are "sincere" in our belief system that heaven will be ours for the taking. But just because someone is sincere does not mean that they cannot be sincerely wrong! The reason that the gate is described as narrow is because few are willing to accept that unless they repent and surrender themselves to Jesus' Lordship, they can never be saved.

Another reason that the gate is narrow is because there is only room for one person at a time to enter there. *The Bible* does not teach that someone is saved simply because their parents were, or that they attended church as a child. God doesn't have any grandchildren, only children, and each of us must choose to enter through the narrow gate. Each of us must answer the question that Jesus posed to His disciples:

"But you," He asked them, "Who do you say that I AM?" **Matthew 16:15**

And in addition to the gate being narrow only allowing one person at a time to enter in, it is also critically important to understand that there is no room for our excess baggage, if you will, to enter with us. We have to be willing to leave everything behind in order to enter through the narrow gateway. In other words, you must be willing to leave your sin behind. Whether this world likes it or not, repentance is required in order to receive God's forgiveness. So many these days would like to believe that God will forgive, regardless of what we do. We can just keep on the way that we are and God, who is like a doting old grandfather, will look over our sins and welcome us.

I am here to tell you this morning that this is not the case. God requires us to leave our sin at the door, if we are to enter into His household. Just as your mom used to make you wipe your feet before you came into her clean house, God expects us to turn away from our sin in order to enter His holy presence. The Holy Spirit will cleanse you, if you are willing. However, you cannot drag your sins along with you through the narrow gate. There simply is no room for them.

What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of The Father, so we too may walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:1-4

Simply put, you cannot take your sin with you through the narrow gate. You must be willing to leave it all behind, if you choose to follow Christ. For you cannot stay where you are... and go with God.

Two Paths (vs. 14)

How narrow is the gate and difficult the road that leads to life, and few find it.

Matthew 7:14

The intention of these distinct differences between the two roads are obvious. When Jesus speaks of these two separate ways, He is referring to the choice we must make between life and death, between the road that leads to heaven and the one that leads to eternal damnation. By His own description, we can see that more people will choose the path to hell than that which leads to everlasting life. This is why He calls the devil's path a "broad road", and His own righteous path a "narrow gate and difficult road".

So why would people ever choose to take a road to their own demise? The answer is simple. They love their own sin more than they love God. In his book "Experiencing God", Henry Blackaby says, "If you have an obedience problem, then you have a love problem." This is a very true statement, for Christ has told us that if we love Him then we will obey His commands (**John 14:15**). So we must each choose whether or not following Jesus is worth the cost to us. He described the kingdom of heaven in this way:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he found one priceless pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it.

Matthew 13:45-46

But sadly, in reality, most people are unwilling to give up the here and now, for a promised land that they cannot see. Therefore, they do not consider the eternal when choosing to live only for the here and now. It is a wise person who understands that there is far more to life than our short time here on this earth. If we could only get a glimpse of the eternal, the right choice would be so obvious, but so many are nearsighted and blind, when it comes to visions of that far and distant country.

Jim Elliot was a missionary to Ecuador in the 1950's. At the age of twenty-eight, he lost his life at the hands of the very natives that he had tried to win to Christ. While he was still studying at Wheaton College, he was quoted as saying, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." You see, following Christ along the narrow path was worth everything to him, even his very life. This is the kind of real commitment that Christ demands from each of us. For He says:

The one who loves a father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; the one who loves a son or daughter more than me is not worthy of Me. And whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Anyone who finds his life will lose it, and anyone who loses his life because of Me will find it.

Matthew 10:37-39

With terms and conditions such as these, is it any wonder the narrow way is described as difficult with few ever finding it? This kind of radical, sold-out-for-Jesus commitment is a far cry from what the televangelists are selling these days. It calls for an all or nothing kind of faith, rather than the so-called "prosperity gospel" proclaimed from the luxurious temples erected by the *Word of Faith* movement.

Two Types of Gatekeepers (vs. 15-20)

Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves. You'll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So you'll recognize them by their fruit. Matthew 7:15-20

In addition to every "broad path doctrine", there needs be a carnival barker, a gatekeeper, if you will, who draws the unsuspecting and gullible crowd into its gaping jaws. Enter the false prophet/teacher who knows how to season his message of damnation with just enough Biblical truth to make it seem palatable. I once heard a Mormon missionary say that their favorite prey (he didn't use that word exactly) was people who were brought up in Christian churches but had for whatever reason "fallen away" from the faith. This group is usually made up of the "peripheral believers" that I mentioned earlier.

The Mormons would look for folks who have a "churchy background", but would rather stay home on Sundays. So guess when these false teachers would come calling? You guessed it. They visit homes on Sundays, looking for people who aren't committed enough to actually attend church regularly. And when they present their doctrine, to those who aren't spiritually grounded in the faith, it sounds plausible enough. You see, if you're not a student of the real thing, you'll have a lot more difficulty with spotting the counterfeit!

Of course, the Mormons are only one group of false prophets. There are plenty to go around. I once heard an old preacher say, "For every preacher that God calls, the devil probably calls ten or so." And why wouldn't he? After all, he has a much bigger crowd to recruit from (the broad road, remember?). The false prophets would lead you to believe that they have the lock upon truth. Jesus called them "*wolves in sheep's clothing*". In those days, shepherds often wore clothes made from the wool of their flock. In essence, what Jesus was saying is that these phonies dress like a "shepherd" on the outside, but they are actually filled with dangerous poison on the inside. They may look and sound like a real, and spiritual shepherd, but their motivation is completely demonic.

Now The Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will depart from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared. 1 Timothy 4:1-2

Sounds ominous, does it not? Make no mistake. The demonic preachers are out in force, and they, like the one they serve, are looking for someone to devour (**1 Peter 5:8**). So take the advice of The Savior and watch out for them. He tells us to become certified "*fruit inspectors*". This is very sage advice. For a person can very well disguise his message, but his actions will be far more telling. A careful examination of what people do, as opposed to what they say, will often reveal the motives of their hearts.

Just as a Christian who abides in Christ will automatically produce the fruit of The Spirit (**John 15**), those with demonic doctrines will produce the fruit of the unholy spirit! Just remember this one thing. Any doctrine that appeals to the flesh, rather than submission and self-sacrifice, is not of God. If you really understand this, then your discernment will increase exponentially. Watch closely, and you will see the motive behind the message, and this will reveal the heart of the messenger.

So as we have repeatedly seen in this powerful sermon of Christ, it is the heart that is the driving force behind everything. If your heart is pure, then you are indeed a follower of Christ, but if your heart is evil and your eyes are "*bad*", then you are motivated by the lusts of this world (**Matthew 6:22-24**). And the fruit that is produced from the desires of your heart will reveal what you are on the inside.

Christ has offered the same invitation to us all: Choose the narrow gate and the narrow path, the road less traveled, if you will. It will be difficult, and you will most definitely be in the minority, but the way leads to everlasting joy in the house of The Everlasting God. The broad path leads only to death. So determine which way you should go, and allow The Spirit to guide you into all truth and to cleanse your heart. For He is the only *true gatekeeper*. So Come to Jesus. Come to Jesus... and live, for:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Matthew 5:8

TRUTH!!!