

H.S – Simple Choices

11/20/22

Matthew 7:13-27

Sunday AM

Years ago, if you wanted a pair of shoes, you couldn't just go down to dept. store or order them online – you had to go to a shoe cobbler and have them made. Pres. Ronald Reagan once shared a story of when his aunt took him to a cobbler to have a pair of shoes made. The cobbler asked Reagan if he wanted a square toe or a round toe, but Reagan couldn't decide – so, the cobbler told him to come back the next day w/ his answer. A few days later, the cobbler saw Reagan on the street and asked if he'd decided about the shoes. Reagan said, "I still haven't made up my mind." So, the cobbler said he'd take care of it. When Reagan received his shoes, he was shocked to see that one shoe had a square toe and the other a round toe. Years later Reagan said – *Looking at those shoes every day taught me a lesson. If you don't learn to make your own decisions, somebody else will make them for you!*

As we come to the end of the SOTM – Jesus is bringing his listeners (including you/me) to a point of decision that'll determine whether or not we become and live as citizens of His Kingdom – and it's a decision no one else can make for you.

¹³ You can enter God's Kingdom only thru the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is narrow, and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it. Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. Every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions. Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name?' But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws.' Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse b/c it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and does not obey it – is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse w/ a mighty crash.

As previously shared, in the SOTM, Jesus turned the teachings of the Jews inside-out/right-side-up to free them from *religion* to return them to *intimacy* w/ God.

B/c Jesus was a rabbi w/ ***semikhah***, He had the authority to challenge the traditional, inaccurate teachings of the rank-in-file rabbi in order to offer the people a correct, God-view of the Law/Prophets.

To refresh your memory – to have *semikhah* was a big deal. ***Semikhah*** was a special God-anointing given to a select group of men thru-out Israel's history (*tracing back to Moses*) that empowered them to speak w/ authority on God's behalf.

Of course, when Jesus arrived on the scene, it'd been over 400+ years since the Israelites had seen or heard of such a rabbi. Yet once they heard Him speak, they knew Jesus was different from all the other teachers.

*When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, b/c He taught as one who had **authority**, and not as their teachers of the Law. Matthew 7:28-29*

LWF – the SOTM (like *10 Commandments*) is when Jesus offered the people **God's manifesto** for life in the Kingdom. In fact, in the SOTM, Jesus took the 10-Com. and basically expounded upon them in detail to shred the *letter* of the Law for the *spirit* of the Law.

AAR – His view of the Law/Prophets smacked in the face of the generations of misteaching given by the religious leaders whose *yoke* had led the people away from a *relationship* w/ God to having a *religion*.

REMIND – like the 10-Com., the intent of the SOTM wasn't to offer a pathway of works to earn God's favor; but to establish a standard of truth that no man could attain on his own merit, thus revealing to us our need for God's intervention. **IOW** – the intent of the SOTM was to reveal to us our need for God, and then to point us to God's one/only solution of Jesus.

In Matthew 7:13-23 – after finishing His sermon – w/ no hymn of invitation, Jesus brings His listeners to a point of decision we each must make for ourselves – ***Do you want to live in God's Kingdom?***

I Choose Carefully Your **PATHWAY**

¹³ You can enter God's Kingdom only thru the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is narrow, and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.

In ancient times, there were a number of Roman roads like the Via Maris/Via Egnatia that were wide/heavily traveled. These roads were popular b/c they were lined w/ conveniences and passed thru the cities – much like the exit/rest stops on today's highways.

Problem was, thieves combed these roads looking to take advantage of travelers. So, many travelers would take the secondary, back roads – which were narrower and more challenging to traverse requiring more time.

In making this statement, Jesus was explaining that His Kingdom can only be accessed by taking the road less traveled by faith – which is uniquely different from the way man pursues life/God.

SEE – the narrow way of the Kingdom requires faith and surrender, while the broad road of man is based on self-effort, good works, and religious activity.

As simple as this truth is – it's confounding how the vast majority of people have chosen to believe they have to do something to earn God's favor/forgiveness – whether it's grace + works or works alone. In fact, every religion in the world (and even some sects inside of Christianity) holds to human effort/goodness as the means of salvation – **BUT** Jesus says this is a lie and that true salvation can only come thru putting faith in His finished work on the cross.

God demonstrated His own love for us in this: While we were sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

It reminds me of the agnostic who went to visit a local pastor to ask a question, he said, "I have a deep philosophical question. Where is hell?" Expecting a long theological answer, the pastor replied, "Hell is found at the end of a Christ-less life."

Simple – if there's any other way to have our sins forgiven so we can have a relationship w/ God other than by the cross – then why did Jesus die on the cross?

There is no other name under heaven by which a man can be saved. Act 4:12

REMINDE – You can't walk on both roads at the same time b/c they're always going in opposite directions. You have to make a choice! Your way or God's way.

II Choose Wisely Whom You **FOLLOW**

¹⁵ *Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. Every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions.*

Let me ask – who/what is shaping your beliefs/actions – b/c someone/something is influencing you. Is it ABC or Fox News? Is it the Republican/Democratic Party? Is it a friend, family member, or neighbor? Whomever you follow will shape your attitudes, ambitions, appetites, and actions. ALWAYS!

To be clear – Jesus is teaching that a Kingdom person is to be influenced solely by God's Word/will – as everything is to be held to God's standard of truth.

YET – we're living in a time when good is bad and bad is good. When male is being touted as female, where death is being granted over life, and where woke is being crammed down our throats as acceptable. Lies being told as truths to indoctrinate the masses. And many of these false teachings are being reinforced from pulpits masquerading as truth-tellers.

Question is – *how do we discern truth from untruth?* How can we tell the difference? (1) we have to establish a **credible** standard of truth (God's Word); (2) we have to spend time learning this truth; and (3) we have to become fruit inspectors comparing all ideas and teachings to the standard of God's truth.

LWF – our job is to discern right from wrong, good from evil, what's of God from not of God – as we gently speak and live these truths in love – neither condemning nor condoning, but doing our best to point others to the love, mercy, justice, and grace of God.

III Choose Honestly What You **CONFESS**

²¹ *Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name?' But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws.'*

While there's some debate here on whether Jesus was calling out the Pharisees as religious pretenders – *one thing is certain* – each of us needs to deal honestly w/ ourselves about the veracity of our faith. For there is a difference b/w being a true Jesus follower and being a religious **beach-apple**. (Yes... I listened last week)

Many scholars have called these people the **almost Christian** – people who look and sound the part, but who miss surrender for religious activity.

Sincerity can never be the primary measure of the veracity of one's faith. True faith is measured by one's obedience/commitment to the way of the Kingdom.

James 3 speaks to this idea when it says – *faith w/out good works is dead*. James is saying that while faith has action – action doesn't necessitate faith.

DYK – this is one of the reasons we partake in communion; it's to force us to consider the reality and vitality of our faith. Do I truly know Christ? Am I walking in intimate obedience to His Word/will?

It goes w/out saying, but the scariest place anyone can be in life is almost saved. For this person will miss heaven by 12-18 inches – the distance from their head to their heart. Audit your faith to make sure it's good!

Which brings us to the final decision each of us must make to live as citizens in God's Kingdom.

IV Choose Rightly Your Faith **FOUNDATION**

²⁴ Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse b/c it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and does not obey it – is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse w/ a mighty crash.

Has anyone ever been to the *Leaning Tower of Pisa*? It's one of the most famous *foundational* debacles in history. When work began on the 8-story marble tower in 1173, little did anyone suspect the challenges they'd face to complete the job. Initially, war set the build back for a ½ century – and during that time, due to the mixture of clay, shell, and sand upon which the tower was built, the foundation began to settle unevenly some 5.5 degrees off center (appx. 15 ft). Still, when the build was restarted a ½ century later, instead of tearing it down and starting from scratch, an Italian engineer, Giovanni di Simone, convinced everyone he could fix the problem thru clever feats of engineering – and while the building is still standing today, he didn't really fix the problem as much as he mitigated the concerns. In fact, back in 1990, the Italian government had to spend 11 yrs and \$27 mil. To address foundational concerns to stabilize the tower.

So, why does it lean? (1) Poor soil. (2) Insufficient (too small) footings. (3) And negligence due to ignorance/arrogance – they were too proud and short-sighted to address the issue correctly.

The final decision Jesus calls us to make is in regard to the basis on which we build our lives. We can choose a way that seems right to ourselves that has poor soil, insufficient footings, and relies on our own abilities/ingenuities, or we can choose the way of Jesus has laid out that He says is always sufficient and stable for anyone who will follow.

Needless to say, the foundation of one's faith is the basis of everything in their life – and if Jesus is telling us the truth, then everything in life rises/falls on what we do w/ Jesus and His teachings.

So, as a point of reflection/decision today – I want us to us gather around the Lord's Table to consider the authenticity/surrender of our faith. Do I truly know Christ as Savior? And am I walking in intimate fellowship w/ Him as my Lord?

As we consider His body that was broken and His blood that was spilled – let it allow you to draw closer to the God who loves you and gave His life for you.