

## **Adam Smith: Blessed Assurance**

Matthew 7, 13 to 27 says this, Enter 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. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few. Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? So every healthy tree bears good fruit but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.

For every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. Not 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.

On 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? And I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock and the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock.

And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand and the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house and it fell and great was the fall of it. Let's pray together. Father, we come to your word in confident expectation that by your spirit through your word you speak to your people.

And so Lord right now there may already be thoughts and feelings, things being stirred up in us, maybe things that we are hoping that we hear, maybe things that we're dreading that we hear today. But Lord you are good and you love your people and your word even when hard is for our good. And so Lord give us courage to hear your words, give us courage to respond to your words Lord.

By the power of your Holy Spirit would you transform us today and cause our lives to look more like your word. We trust you in Jesus name. Amen.

You may be seated. Well in 1912 the Titanic set sail with enormous confidence. It was the unsinkable ship, the marvel of modern technology.

It was the safest thing on the sea and as it traveled across the North Atlantic warnings began to come to the Titanic of dangers ahead, ice ahead. But confidence has a way of dismissing caution. They believed that they were safe.

They believed that they were untouchable, unsinkable. They believed that the ship could handle anything. And then as you know moments later it struck an iceberg and the rest is history.

More than 1500 people died in the icy waters. People who boarded that ship with confidence and people who went to bed that night in security. And this is a terrifying picture for us because false assurance can also apply to the life of faith.

There are people who are absolutely convinced that they belong to Jesus who Jesus says will not stand in the day of judgment. Dang Jesus what a way to end a sermon. Since the beginning of the year we've been listening as Jesus has been describing the good life in the Sermon on the Mount.

The life in the kingdom of God. And from the very beginning Jesus has been challenging our assumptions. Because according to the world outside of Christ the good life is obvious.

It's prosperity. It's influence. It's power and popularity.

It's having enough. Either having enough money or having enough freedom or enough pleasure. The good life is the ability to build your life according to your terms.

But then Jesus opens up his sermon by turning the whole thing upside down. He said that the good life is not evidenced by power and prosperity and popularity. Rather by poverty and spirit.

By those who mourn. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. It's the powerless and those who are persecuted.

From the very beginning Jesus says the good life. Life in the kingdom of God is not the life that we expect or the life that we naturally desire. And so now at the end of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus brings all of this to a point by putting before each of us today a choice.

Everything that Jesus has been teaching leads us all to one burning question. What life will you choose? He says enter 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. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life. And those who find it are few.

So in the ancient world gates were entry points into cities. And they were the travelers first experience with the life inside the walls of that city. And so they reflected the life inside the walls.

And so great and wealthy cities would have massive decorative very ornate and glorious gates that would appeal to travelers even from a distance. They could see them and see what kind of city they were approaching and the life that was possible inside that city. They were designed to impress.

And a small insignificant city would have less remarkable entrances. So these two gates that Jesus describes are two entry points into completely different lives. The first gate he describes is broad.

It's wide. It's obvious. It opens up to a path that is easy.

It's a pleasant stroll, right? It's not scrambling over rocks or trying to wedge your way through these slot canyons. It's comfortable. It feels natural, well-traveled.

It's attractive. So this is the path of living by instinct or appetite. It's the path of doing what feels right in the moment.

It's the path of public opinion where people may even praise you for walking the path because you don't disrupt the status quo. It's the path you naturally find yourself on if you never allow anything to challenge your assumptions. And then Jesus describes a different gate, a narrow gate.

It's small and unobtrusive. It's not obvious. It's easy to miss.

It's not flashy. It seems hidden. It's not designed to impress anyone from a distance.

And on the other side of that narrow gate is a hard path. It's a rough road. This isn't just like an intense hike, right? Because someone tells you about this gnarly hike, and I know some of you, you guys are all outdoorsmen people, and you're like, challenge accepted.

Like I will do that hike and I will do it faster than anyone else who has ever gone before me. This isn't just an intense hike. This word hard, the hard road, is not just a reference to difficulty, but it can actually mean, it's used in other places in the New Testament for constricted or oppressed.

It's an afflicted road. I was trying to think about a word that would make sense emotionally with what Jesus is doing here. And the only word that came to mind was that this way is claustrophobic.

Some of you who have experienced those feelings of claustrophobia, like your world closing in, sometimes that's the way people outside of faith look at the Christian faith. Maybe you're here and you've never put your faith in Jesus, and you're standing outside and you're looking in, and these are thoughts that you've had about the Christian life. It feels restrictive.

It feels claustrophobic. It feels like I have to give up too much. Like if I follow Jesus, what am I going to have to give up? If I really walk with him, what freedoms in my life that I'm enjoying are going to disappear? And that's the emotional reaction you have when you think about possibly stepping foot on the path of faith.

But this is the great reversal of the Sermon on the Mount. The easy road, the pleasant road,

leads to ruin and destruction. And the hard road leads to life.

And everything that Jesus has been saying throughout the Sermon on the Mount leads here. The narrow path. The narrow path is a different kind of life than what comes naturally.

The narrow path pursues reconciliation over anger. It pursues purity over lust. It pursues love over retaliation.

These are things that Jesus has been teaching us. It's a life in intimacy with our Father in heaven. It's not a life lived for applause from others.

It's a life that's lived for him. It's not storing up treasures on earth, but seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness. It's a life that's not ruled by anxiety, but rooted in trust in the Father.

The Sermon on the Mount is not describing life reserved for some spiritual, special forces of Jesus' followers. It's not reserved for those who really take Jesus seriously. Like, oh, I'm saved.

But the Sermon on the Mount stuff, that's for the hyper-Christian. No, Jesus says that this is the life of faith. It's hard, but it's good.

It's costly, but it's the only path that leads to true life. It's the only path that leads to the life that we were made for. And so let me say this clearly.

Let's take metaphors and symbolism out of the equation and just say it explicitly. The narrow gate is faith in Christ. And the hard path is a life shaped by obedience to Christ.

And those two things are inseparable. Those two things belong together. Grace through faith in Jesus brings you into the kingdom.

And obedience to Jesus is the result of receiving that grace. Obedience is evidence of the grace in your life. Not perfect obedience, but real, authentic, heart-level desire to obey our Savior and our King.

Many people want to separate what Jesus holds together. They want grace without obedience. They want salvation without surrender.

They want forgiveness without transformation. They want Jesus as a Savior, but not as a King, Lord, and Master. Others will go the other direction.

They want to be deserving. They want to be able to be worthy. They want to be able to muster up enough religious performance to merit their standing before God.

And so they strive for obedience and forget to rest in grace or believe for some reason that grace is not for them, that they have to prove themselves. It's nice for everyone else to just believe, but I'm different. God holds me to a different standard.

And they're exhausted and haunted by the question, am I doing enough? Will I ever be enough for God? And Jesus has both of those paths, both of those ways. They're two different directions on the same path. They're just looping back around to destruction.

They're the way that we naturally want to live. And they end in death. Because the life of the kingdom of God is neither cheap grace, nor is it graceless striving.

It is grace that leads to obedience. It's a real relationship with Jesus that transforms our lives. And see, this is where it needs to get real personal.

Church, we've got to get really personal with this because you may not be on the path you think you're on. Jesus says that not everyone who thinks that they're on the narrow path actually is on the path. There are false prophets, false disciples living with false assurance.

Let's use the hike analogy, right? And continue with that. Imagine meeting someone who's a part of a hiking group, right? They're a part of this group that goes on hikes. And they're telling you about this fascinating hike, this beautiful hike.

It's incredible. You've never been on a hike like this before. It's gorgeous.

And there's the flowers, and the plant life, and the animals, and everything that you see. And every twist and turn, there's a new vista. There's a new glorious panoramic picture of the landscape below.

And you get all the way up to the top. And there's this beautiful, crystal clear, breathtaking waterfall. It's the most amazing hike you could possibly imagine.

And you're like, all right, I'm sold. Like, let's go on this hike. When are you going? And they're like, I don't know.

I've never been. What do you mean you've never been? Well, I don't need to go. See, I have a book.

I've got a book about the hike. And it tells me everything. There's pictures.

There's pictures in the book. I don't need to see the views for myself. I have a book that shows me the pictures.

And there's maps in the back of the book. I know every twist and turn. I know the elevation of every landmark.

I know the way. But you've never walked the way? I don't need to walk the way. I get together every week with people who are walking the way.

And we learn about the trail. I know songs about the trail. Would you like to hear a song about the

trail? Listen, I'm not knocking the Bible.

We need to know the way. And there is truth, and life, and knowledge, and wisdom, and power in God's Word. But that power is given to you so that you can go and walk in the way of life.

So that you can take what is just knowledge in your head, and you can work it out through daily living, through your heart, so that your life actually begins to look like the life of Christ described in the Scriptures. Jesus says that there are many people who live like this spiritually. They know about the narrow gate.

They know about the hard path. They know the language, and the doctrine, and the songs, and the culture. But they've never entered.

They've never passed through the gate. They've never set foot on the hard road. That's why he says beware.

There are false prophets who come in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. In other words, not even everyone who guides people in the knowledge of God is actually on the way themselves. Might look right.

Might sound right. They might use the right words in the same language, and they speak of God, and they speak of love, and they speak of truth and freedom. But underneath, they're leading people someplace deadly.

Some will tell you that you don't really have to obey. That God just wants you to be happy. That he just wants you to be authentically you.

He loves you just the way you are, which is true. But love doesn't leave you where you are. Others will tell you that you need to do more, and try harder, and prove yourself, and jump through their hoops in order to become worthy.

And both are absolutely deadly. But Jesus says that there is something that we can see that is unmistakable. There's evidence of legitimate faith.

He says you'll know them by their fruit. So what is that fruit? Well first of all, he tells us what it's not. It's not saying or knowing the right things about Jesus.

Jesus says not everyone who calls him Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven. These people obviously know who Jesus is, and that's not enough. Neither is religious performance.

He says many will prophesy, and cast out demons, and do mighty works in the name of Jesus, and yet still be turned away. So the fruit Jesus said would reveal them is not the right words, and not spectacular feats. They're attractive.

They're even good things. But these are not the things that lead to life. The evidence of legitimate

faith is a life that does the will of God by living in step with Jesus' teaching.

The fruit isn't merely ministry activity. The fruit is Christ-like character. So you can believe true things about Jesus and still not belong to Jesus.

You can do spectacular things in the name of Jesus and still be lost. Jesus says that to both of those people, he says, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

You who live as though there is no law. Those who live as though there are no rules. Because you can know a lot about someone and not actually know them.

You can read biographies. You can learn their teachings. You can learn to quote them.

But check it out. If they don't know who you are, you don't have a relationship. You can be talking about someone and like, oh yeah, this person and that person, and they said this and they said that.

And then you can go to that person and be like, oh, have you ever met so-and-so? And they're like, who? You don't have a relationship with that person. You might know who they are, but if they don't know you, there's no relationship. And Jesus says, I never knew them.

Not because he lacked information, but because there was no covenant relationship, no life surrendered to intimacy with him, no loving allegiance, no real belonging. The journey of their life was not traveled with him. Though they said all the right things and did things that looked amazing, their lives were lived apart from him.

See, the difference between the narrow path and the broad path is not that one group knows the facts or that one group talks about Jesus or one group does religious things. The difference is that one group is known by Christ and their lives are being transformed by walking with him. And this means two things for us today.

First, none of us will stand in the day of judgment by pointing to our own achievements. None of us. You imagine the day of judgment, standing before Christ.

One day when you die or the Lord returns. If you point to anything that you have said or done as a reason for your worthiness to be there, it's over. Only those who point to Christ will stand.

Only those whose lives point to Christ will stand. Not their righteousness, but his righteousness. Not their obedience as the ground of salvation, but his finished work on the cross.

Not our performance, but his death and resurrection. What do we have to point to that is worthy of salvation that Christ did not provide for you? Absolutely nothing. He has done everything for us.

And so first, none of us will stand by pointing to our own achievements. But secondly, it doesn't matter what path you've been on. Salvation is available to you today.

It doesn't matter how you have been living. It doesn't matter if you've been living in outright rebellion or in hypocritical religiosity. It doesn't matter how much or how little you know about the Bible.

It doesn't matter what you have done or what has been done to you. The life of salvation is not received by any measure of your own knowing or doing. It is by being known by Christ.

And it is by what he has done for you. Believing that the creator of the universe actually entered his own world that he made as a man. That he came not to condemn you for your sin, but to save you from your sin.

That he came not to constrict your life, not to just take things away from you, but he came to set you free from the things that are holding you captive. He paid the penalty for your sin on the cross. He purchased new life for you when he conquered the grave and raised from the dead.

And he lives now forever at the right hand of God and his promise that he is going to return for those who believe. See, Jesus uses the illustration of a gate because gates are a starting point. But the true starting point of the life of faith is trust in Jesus.

Because when you trust him, he opens up a completely different life in front of you. But not only that, the greatest part is he opens up a completely new life within you. That the gate that you walk through in faith opens up a gate into your heart where Christ himself comes in to dwell with you.

That he sends his Holy Spirit to live in you. The spirit of Jesus' presence giving you more than just knowledge, but giving you intimacy with Christ. The Holy Spirit is also the power of Jesus transforming your life, enabling you to walk in obedience to him.

Because the grace that saves you does not leave you unchanged. Ephesians 2, 8 says, for by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing.

It is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast. And listen, amen, right? But it doesn't stop there. Paul continues the thought, for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works.

This is the purpose that you have been remade in Christ for good works. Good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Listen, brothers and sisters, grace does not make obedience unnecessary.

Grace makes obedience possible. So where will you go from here? Jesus switches metaphors, all right? He's taken us from a hiking trail to an orchard and talked about good fruit and bad fruit. And now he takes us to a construction site.

He says, everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. When the storm comes, one house will stand and one house will fall.

And notice again, the common factor. Both of these people who build these two different houses, both of them hear. They hear Jesus' teaching.

Both of them know Jesus' teaching. Both of them sit under the words of Jesus. Both of them are exposed to truth.

The difference is not that one has the teaching of Jesus. The difference is that one is doing the teaching of Jesus. James says, don't be hearers of the word only, but be doers of the word.

The difference is that the house that stands was built by someone who did something with what they heard. One builds on the teaching, one doesn't. One receives the words of Jesus as the foundation of their life and one treats them as maybe interesting, possibly moving or even admirable, but not authoritative enough to shape the whole life.

And Jesus says that the storm comes to both. That storm is in this life, trials and tribulations, suffering that comes in this life, but ultimately the storm is the storm of God's judgment that comes to everyone in the next life. And one house stands and the other house falls and its fall is great.

And today you can leave this place with assurance that your house will stand. You can know that you're not deceived. Jesus says, what do you do with my words? Specifically, he says, anyone who hears these words of mine and does them.

So specifically, what are you doing with the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount? Do you hear them and ignore them? Maybe you admire them, but never submit to them. Do we twist the words of Jesus to make them fit our lives or maybe somehow explain them away as no longer relevant? If that's how you live your life, you can claim the name of Jesus and you can have no assurance. Or do you hear them and seek to obey them? Not perfectly, but genuinely.

Do you hear his words and desire that your life come into alignment with them? To hear his words and desire them to be true of your life. Do you repent when you fail? Are you broken over your sin? Are you longing for holiness? That is the evidence of grace. See some of you may have come in here with assurance that you should not have.

And listen, I say that to you not in anger, but in grief. You came in with assurance that you should not have today. Some of you have built your confidence on a prayer that you prayed years ago, but have a life that's remained unchanged, untouched by surrender to Christ.

Listen, someone's got to tell you, you are on dangerous ground. You need to repent and turn to Jesus and receive forgiveness and grace and power for a new life. And then there are others who hear this and all that you feel right now is fear.

You're not ignorant of the sin in your life. You're not ignoring it. You're crushed by it.

You're grieved by the lack of transformation that you hoped to see in your life by now. And you hear this and you're afraid because you keep thinking, what if that's me? What if I'm deceived? What if I'm fooling myself and I'm not truly his and you're stirred up to despair? Listen, I'll just be honest with you. That was me.

There was a period in my life where I was so afraid that somehow I had lost it. Somehow I had missed it. Somehow I was playing all of the games, but not actually living the life that Jesus called me to.

And the worst part was I could point to things in my life and say, this is sin. And the enemy would creep into that and say, no Christian would keep doing that. If you were a Christian, you wouldn't do that.

And I remember listening on my, like an MP3 player to Romans eight on repeat every night. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Just trying to comfort myself with the word of God so fearful that I was not holy enough. And listen, I'm telling you, if I was here in the room right now hearing this message, I would be tempted either to break down and cry or run away screaming. But listen to me, if that's you, if that's what you're feeling today, you have to hear me.

A struggling disciple is not the same as a false disciple. If you're here today and you are crushed by the weight of your sin, if you're here today and maybe you are crushed, that you are not crushed by the weight of your sin. That you should be more impacted by the awareness of sin in your life.

Listen, if that's you, that is not evidence against grace. That is evidence of grace in your life. That's not evidence that God has abandoned you.

That's evidence of the Holy Spirit in you because the word of God says the natural person does not desire the things of God. And if you are here and you hear these things and you hear the truth of scripture and you hear of who Jesus is, and at the very least you say, I want to want that. Listen, it sounds like that gate into that life is cracking open.

And I would invite you to push your way all the way through, to not ignore the conviction, to not ignore what God is doing in your life right now, to not resist the Holy Spirit, but in faith, take that

step through the narrow gate, through faith in Jesus and recognize that Christ has walked the hard path for you. That Jesus Christ has lived the life that you could never live. That he's died the death that we all deserve to die for our sin.

So that through faith, we can have life in his name forever. But that life that we live is utterly transformed and different. And we are being remade into the image of Christ every day and in every way, little by little as we receive his word, as we believe in faith and we live in steps of obedience, even small baby steps of obedience.

You can leave today knowing that you belong to Jesus by simply coming to him and confessing your need for a savior, whether for the first time or the thousandth time, to come to the carpets on your knees and say, yes, Lord, this stuff in my life, it is not good. And I want nothing to do with it. I keep returning to it.

Set me free. Come to Christ for the first time or recommit your life to Christ after having drifted. And for some of us, the call today is to stop asking for forgiveness without asking for power.

The Holy Spirit has been given not merely to comfort you, but to transform you into the image of Christ. He empowers righteousness. He empowers obedience.

He empowers life. And so come and not only lay your sins down before the altar, but pick up power in the Holy Spirit that he has given you through faith in him. And for all of us, listen, the truth is Jesus says there's a storm coming, the storm of trials and tribulations in life.

And the house that is not built on Christ's teaching will not be able to stand the storms of life and the storm that is coming at the end of the age, the judgment of Christ. There is only one foundation that will not fail. His name is Jesus.

Build your lives on him. Amen. Let's pray together.

Father, this is what we so desperately need. As the psalm or as the hymn says, blessed assurance. Jesus is mine.

Oh, what a foretaste of glory, divine air of salvation, purchase of God, born of his spirit, washed in his blood. Lord, I pray that today each and every person in this place, whether they've put their faith in you in the past or today is the first time that I pray that every single person would leave this place today knowing that Jesus is mine, not because of my life, but because of his, not because of my righteousness, but because of the death that he died for sin. Lord, I pray that if there's anybody on the fence who've been resistant and they're hesitant right now, Lord, what we need by your spirit is to give, I ask that you would give them a picture of how beautiful you are, that there is nothing that we could possibly leave behind that isn't worth leaving behind if it means clinging to our greatest treasure.

Come Holy Spirit, do this work in us. We ask in Jesus name. Amen.

