

Scientists say we make around 35,000 decisions a day. 226 of those are about food alone...which seems high to me. It should take just one. If it's available, eat it! Others could be minor, like choosing what clothes to wear or deciding what lane to drive in traffic (if you're a slow driver, please don't choose the left one!) They could also be major like what job to take or who to marry. Regardless of what it is, though, we are decision-making machines, and we all have a big one to make this morning.

For the past 10 weeks, we have been studying Jesus' treatise on the Kingdom of Heaven; what it is, who is in it, and how they are supposed to live. In light of that, he now calls all of his hearers to a moment of decision. Do we really want to be a part of the Kingdom he offers? Our answer is vital because what we decide will lead to either life, goodness, citizenship, and endurance, or lead to things like destruction, disease, exile, and collapse. Jesus leaves us with no other choice.

I had this decision moment 22 years ago. If you've heard my testimony, you know it includes a deep dive into Matthew's Gospel. While I believe I had come to faith in Jesus at an early age, I found myself at a spiritual crossroads, trying to figure out what I believed about God and knowing this effort was going to lead me to following him or walking away for good. Eventually, it was today's passage that led me to a decision that changed my life and my eternity forever.

This morning Jesus is inviting you to make the same decision with the same significance. He's going to present four scenarios that show where you are in relationship to him and his Kingdom, and he's going to ask you to choose. I pray you open your heart to what he has to say to you. Remember his grace is abundant and sufficient.

There are many paths to take, but only one leads to life. And because all but one lead to the same place, Jesus says there are really only two.

[Matthew 7:13-14] ¹³“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. ¹⁴For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Jesus' teaching brings us to a fork in the road, and the two paths before us are nothing alike. They head in opposite directions and lead to opposite destinations. One path leads to life, the other to destruction. One leads to heaven. The other to hell.

The wide gate and road that follow is easy. It requires no entry fee and there's plenty of room for you to bring all your stuff: your beliefs, appetites, agenda. “You do you” on this path. It is full of people because it asks nothing of you, lets you keep your options open, and it promises fulfillment. But this path is the Kingdom of the world, and it leads away from Jesus and where there is no Jesus, there is no life.

The other option is the narrow gate, but going that way comes at a cost. John 10:9 says “I am the door (gate). If anyone enters by me, he will be saved.” He has paid the admission fee with his life, and we enter through him by putting our faith in him. But as we enter that gate, there's no room to bring anything with us. We have to leave our “stuff” behind: our agenda, desires,

appetites. It's the hard path because it asks us to give our lives to Christ, die to self, and live within the boundaries he sets out for the Christian life. It is counter-cultural and few choose it because few want to live within its limits. But Jesus says this is the true pathway to life because that's the path he's on.

If you've ever been hiking you know that trails are rated Easy, Moderate, or Strenuous. The easy ones are flat, wide, and give you tons of room to run and skip around and stroll through without much effort. The strenuous ones, though, are rocky, elevated, narrow, and require much of you. And I'd pick a strenuous one any day of the week because I come alive through them! Jesus is giving us a trail rating of each path we can take. He knows the easy one is appealing, but its destination is destruction. It's only when we go through the narrow door that we experience life.

What path have you decided on? If you just found out there are two paths and are interested in this one that goes through Jesus, **consider this his invitation**. If you aren't sure, **consider if your faith has come at a cost**? If you have chosen to go through the gate of Jesus but think you can walk on both paths, know that Jesus doesn't give us this option. If you want a faith that asks nothing of you, a Kingdom without the King, the benefits of salvation without the cost of discipleship, you'll miss out. Jesus said "I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly" and even though the path is hard, Jesus promised that through him "you will find rest for your souls." So what path will you decide on this morning?

Your answer to that may be influenced by what voices you listen to. **There are many voices to listen to, but only one produces good.**

[Matthew 7:15-17, 19] ¹⁵ "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit... ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Jesus warns against false prophets, insiders who look the part but teach with deception and destruction. They were around when Jeremiah prophesied God's judgment, but the false prophets were saying "You will have peace. No harm will come to you." They will show up throughout the New Testament, often adding the necessity of works to the gospel, and they are alive and well today. They say all paths lead to God, God's Word is outdated and not relevant today, God's biggest concern is your happiness, or attach various socio-political ideologies to our faith. The greatest false prophet, though, may be ourselves. Self-deception through the gospel of self is something we all have to battle. All those may sound good, but they lead us away from God.

So then how can we tell what is true and false? Look at the fruit. False prophets are tough to spot, but what they produce is not. The substance of their life and their listener's lives is telling. How loving is the person who worships themselves? How joyful is the person who has dismissed God's Word and living their own way? How peaceful is the person who thinks all roads lead to heaven? How united are the churches that bring in ideology other than the gospel? Now look at the fruit in your own life. What does it say about who you've decided to listen to?

[Matthew 7:28-29] ²⁸ And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, ²⁹ for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

There is one, and only one, voice we need to decide to listen to, and the more we listen to him the more our lives will look like his. Struggling to be salt and light? Listen to Jesus. Struggling to be characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control? Listen to Jesus. His are the words of life. His gospel is the power of salvation to everyone who believes. His prescription for our life will yield the most abundant crop of goodness.

But before he can produce that in our life, we must be a citizen of the Kingdom. **[SLIDE] There are many ways to try to approach God, but only one he accepts.**

[Matthew 7:21-23] ²¹ “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. ²² 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?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

This may be the most difficult part of the Sermon on the Mount. It should stop us in our tracks because it shows those who think they are Christians but who really aren't. Jesus references what appears to be the final judgement and some who will be surprised they are not citizens of the Kingdom. It's how they approach Jesus that tells us why. They claim they are in because they verbally assent to him as Lord and do good works in his name. **But this isn't what saves you.** Simply knowing Jesus is the Son of God, Lord, and Messiah is inadequate, even if we say it out loud. Even the demons say who Jesus is in Luke 4. And our works can never make up for our sin or earn God's salvation. **What they are lacking is a relationship with Jesus.** He says, "I never knew you", and that's why they are exiled from him.

While I don't believe Jesus wants us to be insecure in our salvation, he does want us to understand what is necessary to be saved. I believe many who attend church regularly aren't believers because they aren't in a relationship with Jesus. They may call him Lord, they may do things in his name, but they have not entered into a relationship. Righteousness is a relational word. It means to be in a right relationship with God. But the righteousness demanded in the Kingdom is nothing we can produce on our own. It is internal change and union, not external behavior. It is the righteousness of Christ given to us when we believe that puts us in right relationship with God. But if Jesus says "I never knew you", it's because you have never let yourself be known.

How do you get to know someone? They have to open up to you, show you who they are, and ask you to accept them. But our sin keeps us from doing that with Jesus. Think of Adam and Eve. Once they sinned, they covered up their shame and hid. They didn't want God to know them. It isn't until we turn to Jesus and confess all of who we are, let him know us as a sinner desperately in need of grace, and trust that his work takes care of your sin that puts us in a relationship with Jesus and makes you right with God.

I can point to a bicycle all day and say it will hold me, but it's not until I sit on it that I put my faith in it. You can say all day Jesus is Lord, but it's not until I put my faith in him, on him, by showing him and asking him to hold the weight of your sin, that you are saved.

Some of you have been going to church for a lot of years but have never had this moment. You've said the name of Jesus, served in his church, but you've never made the decision to make yourself known to him as a sinner and place your faith in him as your Savior. Let today be that day.

But that need for faith doesn't stop once we're saved. **There are many foundations on which to build your life, but only one that lasts.**

[Matthew 7:24-27] ²⁴“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵And 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. ²⁶And 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. ²⁷And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

The moment of trusting the Lord for salvation is the beginning of a journey of faith that lasts all our lives. We can build our lives on all kinds of things: stuff, image, abundance, looks, smarts, achievement, busyness. But it's all fleeting, all unstable, and it will eventually let you down. I have tried to build my life on reputation, achievement, bank accounts, obviously looks and the approval of man. But the world is fickle, failure comes, bank accounts dwindle. All came crashing down when the storms came.

The only stable foundation is Christ, and we decide to build on that foundation through obedience to his words. **Obedience is the test of our faith.** It doesn't save us. It shows we have been saved. What did the last 18 months show your life was built on? How did that go? I have never met anyone who was disappointed or let down by following the words of Jesus. I have met many who are digging out of the disaster of following their own way. **Obedience is not the mantra of the legalist. It is the faithful response to the one who knows best and who wants his best for you.**

And so it's time to make a decision. 22 years ago I came to that moment. As I took Jesus' sermon to heart, I realized a few things. I was trying to approach God with good works but was nothing more than a Pharisee. I thought I was living right, but I was so far from God. I may have believed, but I wasn't living like a believer. And the more I read Jesus' words the more I realized "I am wretched." In that moment, I was more aware than ever of my sinfulness. But in that moment Jesus made me more aware than ever of his grace. I did the only thing I knew to do. I threw myself on the mercy of God, and he answered. I said, "I'm such a sinner." He said, "I'm such a Savior." I said, "I can't do this." He said, "I'll do it through you." He asked me to trust him, to give him my life, to receive his grace, and to follow him. And I did. I've not regretted it for a moment since.

What is God calling on you to decide today? Some of you have to decide what path to go on. Jesus is inviting you to himself. Today is the day to put your faith in him, to make yourself known to him, and ask him to save you. Some of you have been following the wrong voice. He is the TRUTH. Listen to him and do what he says. Some of you have been saying his name but not letting yourself be known. It's time to turn to him, confess you are a sinner, and receive his grace. We've given all of you a rock and marker. We want to give you an opportunity to declare your commitment to build on the foundation of Christ. Write your name to say you are giving all of yourself to him. Maybe it's a word of confession of what you've been building your life on but don't want to anymore. Write it on there. Put this where you can see it as a reminder of who the Rock is. Make a decision to follow Jesus today. He is good. His ways are best. He's the lover of your soul and wants to be with you now and forever. Today is the day to decide. Come forward to pray with our elders. Go to our prayer rooms. Grab someone next to you. Let today be the day you decide to follow Jesus.