



MATTHEW

THE KINGDOM COME

Which Will You Choose?
Matthew 7:13-27

Feb 13, 2022

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I. Introduction

Prayer

Let's pray... *Our Father in heaven, your word is sweeter than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Your word is perfect and true. Your word is precious to us because in it you reveal your character to us. So I ask, Lord, that by your Spirit you would transform our time in the word into a window. That looking through the window of your word together, we would see your real majesty and glory. And I ask, Holy Spirit, that you would be piling up kindling around our hearts and that the words of Christ would be a spark to that kindling, so that as we come to the end of the Sermon on the Mount, we would leave it with hearts blazing with a passion for you! Help us, Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Welcome

Good morning! If you have your bibles, why don't you turn to Matthew 7. We just heard Jason, Stacey, and family read verses 13-27 and that's where we're going to be today. If you don't have a bible, you can grab a hard-back black one from the connection station in the back. I always want to encourage you to have your eyes on the text so that you can see I'm not pulling this out of thin air, but that we're letting the scriptures be our source and our authority, And while you're turning there, my name is Ethan. I'm one of the pastors here at Union and if this is your first Sunday with us, I'm especially eager to meet you! I'm grateful and humbled that you're here.

Where We're At

Well today is a bit of a milestone, because as a church, we've been studying the book of Matthew on Sundays and we will continue to be studying Matthew for the next couple of months, but today we're reaching the end of a really significant section of the book that's famously known as the Sermon on the Mount. We've been in the Sermon on the Mount for six weeks now, but I think we could easily have spent six months here. There is such a depth to it. Jesus really is the wisest person who ever lived. He's the best teacher and preacher there ever was. Here is a man who often taught for so long that the crowds listening would need to be fed. They missed meals! The Sunday roast was at home, in the oven, burnt up, and long forgotten. The crowds hung on his words! The end of chapter 7 says he astonished them with his teaching. He didn't teach like anyone else. And he comes to the end of his teaching on the mountain and he doesn't finish with a word of encouragement or an eruption of praise. He ends by driving his hearers toward a decision.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has been painting a picture of life in the Kingdom of Heaven - a life that is radically counter-cultural, but that leads to the blessing of the whole world. He teaches that this life in the kingdom is marked by a way of living righteously that is greater than that of the scribes and the Pharisees. The righteousness that Jesus calls his disciples toward is of such an impossible standard that it drives us to dependence and reliance on Christ and Christ alone. So after teaching about the truly blessed life, after calling his hearers to a righteousness that exceeds the Pharisees, after teaching us how to pray, after teaching about true treasure... After all of this (and much more that we didn't cover in our preaching), Jesus spends the last part of his Sermon on the Mount saying in a few different ways, "There are two ways to respond to me. Which will you choose?" And the choice that he puts before his hearers on the mountainside, is the choice that's before you today.

There are two ways to respond to Jesus. Which will you choose?

II. In Defense Of the Main Point

You know, I've been struck by how much of the Sermon on the Mount has leaked into everyday ways of thinking and of speaking in our world. This portion of scripture has been incredibly influential. It's kind of like reading Shakespeare. Like, if you go back and read Shakespeare you realize this is one of the primary sources that shaped the English language. Even more so with the Bible. And as we've studied the sermon on the mount, I've been reminded just how much the ethics of Christianity which Jesus taught here undergird the world we live in today. Even though our culture has often twisted and perverted these ideals, many of the things regarded as moral and right and good in the world today exist downstream from the Bible. So this sermon has been incredibly influential. And because of that, when we read it many of the ideas and teachings here feel familiar, even if you aren't familiar with the Bible. And the danger in that familiarity is that we would spend this time in the Sermon on the Mount and let our familiarity shape our take away to be, "Jesus said some really good things," "Jesus is a great moral teacher," "I really like what he said about loving our enemies," "some of his teaching about anxiety was really helpful." Those things are true, but if we miss the main point of Jesus' teaching, everything else we might pick up on from his Sermon will be worthless in comparison!

Jesus ends the Sermon on the Mount in a very stark, heavy, challenging way because he is jealous for us not to come away from his teaching having missed the point. The aim of the Sermon on the Mount isn't that we would see Jesus as a helpful moral philosopher or see his teachings as a masterful collection of wisdom. As one commentator said, "Jesus' teaching isn't meant to be admired. It's meant to be obeyed." R. Kent Hughes wrote, "The Savior refuses to let his listeners bask in the grandeur of the sermon's thought. He knows that admiration without action is deadly. That conviction without commitment will dull one's spirituality."

The point of Jesus' Sermon is to lead us to see Jesus as king, to lead us to look to him, find life in him, depend on him, see him as the one who has all authority, as the only righteous judge, as our source for what is good and hopeful and redemptive in the world, and to build our lives around him, to live righteously because of him, to offer our whole life as worship to him... So here at the end of the Sermon, Jesus cares deeply that we understand the weight of his words. He wants us to see that the choice before us is a choice between life and destruction. Life in the kingdom or no life at all. Listen to truth and find health or listen to lies and be poisoned. Know Jesus or be rejected by him. Life on the

rock or life on the sand. Our world hates stark options, but stark options are all that Jesus offers us.

There are two ways to respond to Jesus. Which will you choose?

And even though our world has such a negative reaction to exclusive options, I want to invite you to discipline your heart not to recoil from these stark options. This is Jesus' love for us. He is giving us weighty, serious words, because the deep danger is that we would underreact to this message. And in order to make the heaviness of this message clear for us, Jesus gives us four sketches that highlight the choice we need to make. So let's look at the choice Jesus gives us:

III. The Narrow Gate & The Wide Gate (v. 13-14)

Look at verse 13 and 14: "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."(7:13-14).

Jesus comes out strong with a command! "Enter by the narrow gate." Everything that Jesus has taught in the Sermon on the Mount - the way of Jesus, the good life in the kingdom - is the narrow gate. Now maybe you here "narrow" and connect that word to negative things. In our world we might use that word to talk about someone who is very uptight rigid, no fun. Or maybe stunted in some way? Or "holier than thou"? And, in a sense we Christians don't want to be narrow, self-righteous, inflexibly attached to tradition or what have you. But that's not the narrowness that Christ is calling us to choose. Jesus is telling us that there are only two paths you can take. The one that leads to destruction and the one that leads to life. There is no third way! There is no middle ground! The worst thing that could happen after working through the Sermon on the Mount is that you would hear Jesus' teaching and think, "I'm going to take some of these ideas with me as I follow my own path" and never give yourself wholly to life in submission to his kingdom.

The wide road is easy. It's easy to find, it's easy to stay on, it doesn't limit you or cramp your style in any way. You can carry with you anything that you'd like. You don't have to leave anything behind. The wide road doesn't demand anything from you. So of course it's the road more traveled. But Jesus' says that road ends in death. The narrow path on the other hand is difficult. It is much less trafficked because it is not so glamorous. It's narrowness forces us into discomfort. It's hard going makes our muscles burn. It's narrowness means we have to leave things behind and change the way we walk on it.

Do you remember the beatitudes? Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn... we said that to be poor in spirit means to know our deep need for God; and to mourn means to grieve over our sin. This is the beginning of the journey through narrow gate. Blessed are the meek, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted... this is the narrow gate. This is the hard path. Jesus isn't a slick salesman. He is not promising ease and comfort to those who follow him. In fact in another part of scripture he tells us that to follow him is like taking up your own cross (Mark 8:34).

And so you say, then why would I follow him! This sounds repressive and toxic! But I promise you, it is not! Has anybody ever done an intense workout plan? I know it's hard to believe, but at one point in my life I joined a crossfit box. And every time I walked through the doors into that gym, I knew I was in for an hour of torture. There were times when I felt so disoriented and in pain after our workouts that I thought it was dangerous for me to drive home. Multiple days when I got home and ran to the bathroom to puke because the workout had been so hard. But you know what? I miss it now, because being a part of crossfit made me a healthier person! The discomfort of my workouts were forming me into a stronger person. How many of you know that, in my physical fitness, if I embrace the easy way that feels like freedom in the moment, eating everything that sounds good, never forcing my body to be uncomfortable, that I will eventually become unhealthy and severely limited. And in the same way, Jesus tells us the narrow gate will be difficult. The narrow gate will transform you in a way that is not comfortable. The narrow gate is not popular. But that narrow gate leads to freedom, the narrow gate leads to joy. The narrow gate leads to life.

Jesus says, you can't be neutral here. You are either on the broad road that feels like freedom, but leads to destruction or you are on the narrow road that leads to real life. Which will you choose?

IV. Good Fruit & The Bad Fruit (v. 15-20)

Will you choose the narrow gate of the kingdom or the wide gate of the world? And then Jesus lays out the choice in a different way. Will you follow false teaching or the truth? Lets look at the next few verses:

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. **18** A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. **19** Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **20** Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

As you stand at the fork in the road between the wide gate and the narrow gate, Jesus is warning you: watch out for false prophets! In the Bible "prophets" aren't so much people who tell the future as much as they are people who speak on behalf of God to the people. "Watch out for people who claim to be speaking for God," Jesus warns. They're going to come, he says. And when they come they're going to look just like a member of Jesus' Church.

I don't know about you, but when I hear "false prophets" I'm automatically thinking about some TV preacher who is obviously using religious jargon and overblown promises of material blessing to line his pockets or build his influence. What I don't jump to are those voices who are winsome and compelling, those teachers who are easy to like, who talk about the things of God with familiarity and a tone of authority, who are truly gifted and seem to have, what some people might call an anointing... Jesus is telling us to watch out for the wolves who look a lot like sheep who are coming to devour the church!

Let me just tell you, as your pastor, I feel very protective over you. I really want you to be on guard. Not everything that gets published by a Christian publisher is faithful to Christ. Not every influencer who posts about Jesus is a healthy tree. Some pastors and thought leaders aren't really sheep. They are ravenous wolves. Some resources that get marketed to a Christian audience are really going to poison the church! Now I'm not telling you that the church down the road that has different theology or a different way of doing ministry than us is full of false prophets. In fact, we try to be really intentional about practicing charity and kingdom-mindedness with other Christian churches. What I am calling you to do is to carefully test the messengers that you listen to. Jesus says two times, in verse 16 and verse 20, "You will recognize them by their fruits." You can tell an apple tree is an apple tree because apples grow on it every fall, right? In the same way, let the fruit of a leader or teacher reveal whether or not they are false or true. And we can see the fruit in the life of a preacher or teacher in two ways: In what they teach and in how they live.

So, friends, if someone you are listening to talks about Jesus and faith, but avoids preaching about things that the scriptures make clear, things like our fallen nature and depravity because of sin... God's holiness and justice and righteousness and wrath for sin...the reality that Jesus death on the cross is a death that we deserve... if a teacher's message is only about therapeutic self-betterment... these are major red flags. But these only scratch the surface! The real thing I want to encourage you toward is to know your bibles so that you can tell the counterfeit by knowing the original so well! This is why we are serious about studying the scriptures! This is why we are eager for you to study the word in community in our mens and women's Bible Studies.

And beyond the test for what they say, there's also the test for how they live. It's possible to dress a thornbush up to look like a grape vine, but eventually those grapes will wither and the false fruit will reveal itself. True followers of Jesus, though they are far from perfection, are being transformed to manifest the heart of Christ and the character of his Kingdom in the world. We don't want to be a people on a witch hunt, but we want to be carefully, patiently watching the lives of those who preach and teach God's word to us. And this is true for how you observe my life and pastor kyle's life. And the advantage you have with sitting under preaching in a local church is that you have access to our lives to some degree! This is the great danger when we get all of our teaching from podcasts and online services and tik tok videos... so much of the fruit of our lives can be hidden and dressed up.

So much to say here, but the choice that Jesus putting before is, will you be someone who follows the false prophets who will lead you down the wide path to destruction or will you carefully, watchfully test those who preach and teach and speak for God to make sure that they are leading you down the narrow path of life? Again, friends, **there are two ways to respond to Jesus. Which will you choose?**

V. The Plea of Works & The Plea of Relationship (v. 21-23)

Ok, we've got to speed up here. Look at verses 21-23:

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven,

Stop there. Jesus is saying, it is possible for those who are outwardly a part of God's people to not truly be members of the kingdom. He's warned us of the choice we need to make between the kingdom and the outward threat of false teaching. Now he is warning us of the dangers that come from our own hearts. Look at 22...

...**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.'

Now, if you're anything like me these verses can stir up a fair amount of discomfort because I look at the people who Jesus says he never knew, and at first glance they look like me! Maybe you feel like they look like you! They say to Jesus, "Lord, Lord." Whenever you see words repeated in scripture, it's communicating emotion (like when Jesus said, "*My God, My God* why have you forsaken me?"). So these people aren't apathetic church people, they are emotionally invested in their faith. They say, "Lord, Lord!" to Jesus. And then they tell Jesus, "Lord, we did all these things in your name." They have quite the religious resume. They are doing ministry in the name of Jesus! And so on first read, it's hard not to see myself in this passage and I'm struck with fear. Like, God is there just some sort of spiritual jiu jitsu that I haven't done for me to really know you? Is there a test I haven't passed? Is my faith not enough? Do you have questions like that after reading this passage?

But let's take a second look, because I think there is both a real challenge for us here and deep assurance. Look again at verse 22. "On that day..." that's shorthand in scripture for the day of judgment. On the day of judgment, these people will stand before Jesus the judge. And the judge has said, how do you plea? And it's then that Jesus says these people cry out, "Lord, Lord!" and then their plea before God is a list of everything they have done for him. We prophesied, we cast out demons, we did many mighty works in your name, Jesus. And look at what Jesus says to them in verse 23: "I never knew you..."

Now that word, "knew" is a biblically pregnant word. The bible will use this word to describe more than just head knowledge. This is like when the Old Testament says, "Adam *knew* his wife and she conceived and bore a son..." For Jesus to say I never knew you, means that there was no relationship between you and I. Jesus is saying to these people on the day of judgment, you have piled up all of this lip service, all of this outward expression, religious activity, but you never knew me in your heart. Romans 10 says, "if you *confess with your mouth* that Jesus is Lord and *believe in your heart* that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." And Jesus is saying, you've done a whole lot of outward confessing, but you've never believed in your heart! So if you confess with your mouth and believe in your heart, friends be assured that Christ says of you, I know them.

But here's the challenge Jesus is giving: intellectual assent to the way of Jesus will not give us eternal life. Passion and zeal won't bring eternal life. Mighty, supernatural, spiritually powerful deeds won't bring eternal life. What will give you eternal life? Utter dependence upon Christ and the forgiveness he has purchased for you in the cross!

Listen to me! You can respond to Jesus in two ways: The choice is to rely on your religious activity and in the end have Jesus declare, "Depart from me. I never knew you" Or wholly cling to Christ and let his love for you conform your heart to the character of his kingdom. Let me be clear, the choice isn't between activity and inactivity. Its between self-driven effort, and grace driven effort that flows from a real relationship with Christ.

VI. The House on the Rock & The House on the Sand (v. 24-27)

Ok, here's where we need to end. Jesus has been impressing upon us the weightiness of his teaching about life in the kingdom of heaven. Here at the end of his Sermon, Jesus wants us to see that there is a choice before us. It's a choice between life and destruction. What will you choose? Will you choose death through the wide gate or life through the narrow? Will you listen to false teachers who tickle your itching ears and lead you astray or truth-speakers who will lead you to health. Will you seek to justify yourself with religious activity and be rejected by Christ, or will you let your union with Jesus be your only plea before the judge? Will you hear and do the words of Christ or will you merely hear and not do the words of Jesus? The last way Jesus sketches this choice is through the house built on the rock and the house built on the sand. "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will..." have a house that stands through the storm. And "everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will..." have a house that crumbles.

Friends, we've spent six weeks here in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is calling you to the good life in his kingdom - a life of deep dependence on him. And here at the end of the sermon the loud warning from Christ is that there is no middle way. There is no worth in mere admiration of Jesus teaching. You are either against him or you are with him. You are either walking toward life, or marching toward death. You are building your life on the shifting, sinking sands or you are building it on the solid rock of Christ.

In just a few moments, after we sing we're going to celebrate communion. We do that every week and one of the things I love about coming to the table weekly is that just in case we've somehow made the gospel fuzzy for the rest of the service, this makes the gospel explicit! Christ's body was broken on your behalf, because you deserved to be crushed for your sin. Christ's blood was poured out that you might be washed from your iniquity. He is our substitute. He is our peace with God. In the broken body and the shed blood of Jesus, we remember that His broken body is our narrow gateway to the kingdom. By dying for us, he shows himself as the way and the truth. He has done every righteous deed and on his cross our filthy works were exchanged for his perfect life. His sacrifice is the solid foundation of our life in him. I want you to take the next few moments as we sing, and then as we celebrate the Lord's Supper to consider your own heart. Which way have you chosen? Which way are you choosing each day? Which way will you choose?