



First Baptist Church Selmer

SERMON ON THE MOUNT • THE CHOICE IS YOURS! • MATTHEW 7:13-23 • 11/23/2025

MAIN POINT

The way to discern whether someone is leading you either toward righteousness or away from it is by examining their fruit.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Are you able to read a map, or do you rely on a GPS (or phone) to get you to where you are going?

Is it possible for your phone or GPS to get you lost rather than lead you to your destination? What factors might cause this unwanted result to occur?

How is a pastor's/teacher's role both like and unlike the role of a GPS device for a traveler?

Many Christians can name a Bible teacher or preacher who made a significant impact on their lives. Aware of the critical and fragile role of teachers, James 3:1-2 advises that not many believers should desire to become teachers in the church. James, the half-brother of Jesus, gave two reasons for this caution. First, teachers have strict accountability. Jesus leveled His strongest words of denunciation against the religious teachers of His day because they were misleading the people (Matt. 23:1-7). Second, James warned that all of us—whether teachers or not—are prone to stumble in our use of words. He was referring not to a lack of eloquence, but to the temptation of using our words as weapons.

Long before James's letter, Jesus warned in His Sermon on the Mount about false prophets—teachers who mislead kingdom citizens by their deceptive words and behavior. We have now reached the climax of the Sermon in Matthew 7:13-27, where Jesus outlined

reasons why His followers must diligently recognize and avoid false teachers. There are two choices, two paths, two gates... your choice has eternal consequences.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

One false teaching prevalent in Jesus' day that remains attractive to this day is universalism—the claim that all roads lead to the same place, to the same God. Let's hear what Jesus said regarding life's paths.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 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. 14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." (ESV)

In what ways does the world try to make the road that leads to destruction exciting and attractive?

In what ways are the entrance and the road that leads to eternal life narrow?

Do you think people today are more or less receptive to the exclusive message (one way, not many) of the Christian gospel? Why?

Akin, in the *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary*, states about the two gates (or roads), "Two reasons are given. First, this road leads to a gate called eternal life. Second, because this road is difficult, 'few find it.' There is no universalism in the teachings of the Bible. Not everyone is going to be saved. There are not many roads that lead to heaven."

Unfortunately, many people in Jesus' day, and even today, teach that there are many ways to get to heaven. One illustration is that of a large elephant in a dark room. One man grabs the elephant's tail, and another his ear, while many others grab on to something else. The universalists would say that each man had found his own way to understanding the elephant. "It doesn't matter how you get there as long as you get there," they would say. Whether this is demonic by nature or an innocent grasp of hope for many perishing in this world, the Bible is clear: there is only one way to the Father (John 14:6).

False prophets had been around long before Jesus' day. In Moses' time, God told the people of Israel how to recognize and deal with false prophets (Deut. 13:1-5; 18:15-22), yet false prophets continued to appear and mislead God's people in the Old Testament times (see Jer. 14:14-16; Ezek. 22:28). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned believers that they, too, must be diligent to recognize and avoid the pitfalls of false prophets.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 7:15-20.

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." (ESV)

What do you think Jesus meant when He said false prophets would "come to you in sheep's clothing" (7:15)? What might this look like for believers in today's world?

What test did Jesus give us to identify false teachers? How can we properly apply this test without falling into the judgmental attitude Jesus warned against in Matthew 7:1-5?

What would you include as examples of the "good fruit" to look for in a good teacher's or leader's life?

If Matthew 7:15-20 was about what believers are to look for in testing the genuine nature of those who claim to be teachers, verses 21-23 are about what Christ looks for in judging those who claim to follow Him. False teachers may fool some people about their true nature, but they cannot and do not fool the Lord.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 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.'" (ESV)

How would you explain what it means to do “the will of [the] Father in heaven” (v. 21)?

How is it possible for someone to prophesy, drive out demons, or do miracles in Jesus’ name yet not be a genuine follower of Christ?

Those hearing the Sermon on the Mount would have been quite confused by Jesus' statement here. Jesus tells the people that those who are only outwardly religious are not guaranteed entrance to heaven. Yes, he said, even those who had performed supernatural deeds such as prophesying, driving out demons, and performing miracles. Jesus reaffirmed that outward actions that are not consistent with an inward change are not enough to inherit eternal life.

Don Carson states, "It is true of course, that no man enters the kingdom because of his obedience; but it is equally true that no man enter the kingdom who is not obedient... Cheap grace preaches forgiveness without repentance, church membership without rigorous church discipline, discipleship without obedience, blessing without persecution, joy without righteousness, results without obedience."

An outward action doesn't always equal an inward change, but an inward change demands an outward one. *"You will know them by their fruit."*

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

In living your life, do you tend to walk more on the broad road or the narrow road?

What makes the broad road inviting to you? What makes the narrow road so difficult?

What are you doing to ensure that the “fruit” Jesus talks about in verses 16-20 is growing in your life?

PRAYER

Pray that each group member has a personal, growing relationship with Jesus. Ask the Lord for greater discernment about false teachings. Ask for the strength to resist the broad path of destruction in favor of the narrow path of righteousness.

COMMENTARY

| MATTHEW 7:13-23

7:13. In His first concluding warning—the “two ways”—Jesus talked about the rigors of true discipleship. The narrow gate is the way of personal faith in Christ. This is precisely what the Pharisees missed so badly (Matt. 5:20). The Pharisees used the wide ... gate, which is the normal human tendency toward dependence on self-righteousness. The number of people who would, historically, find the narrow way has by now mounted into the millions, if not billions. But Jesus’ few is a relative term. The true servant of the kingdom will always be in the minority.

7:14. The gate leading to life is narrow, and it leads to a road that is difficult. Difficult translates a word meaning “contracted,” “pressed,” or “troublesome.” The wide gate and the broad road are the “default” position for human beings, and there are many on this pathway toward eternal death. The narrow gate and the difficult road are the “deliberate” positions, and few find them. Yet Jesus urged all who heard Him preach the Sermon on the Mount to enter the narrow gate to eternal life. His gracious invitation to life is open.

7:16. What defenses do believers have? How can we be aware of these deceitful wolves in sheep’s clothing? You’ll recognize them by their fruit. Grammatically, the questions Jesus asked could be translated, “Men don’t gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles, do they?” The answer, of course, is no.

7:17-18. Jesus continued, In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. God’s Word clearly distinguishes between good and evil behavior, godly and ungodly practices, doing good to glorify God, and doing good to glorify self. False teachers thrive on recognition and praise while pretending to be humble. They often explain away sinful behavior as being acceptable or as making no difference because Jesus already died for it. They misuse Scripture, as the Devil did with Jesus during the temptations in the wilderness. They take God’s Word out of context and make it mean what God never intended.

7:19-20. Every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. A gardener who had a fruit tree that didn’t produce would use the tree for firewood. Why should it use up the resources of soil and rain and take up space that could be used for a productive tree? Jesus was probably referring to the judgment coming at the end of the

age, when He will separate the sheep from the wolves. He concluded, *"So you'll recognize them by their fruit."*

Many who profess Christ are pretending, masquerading as Christians, while others who profess Christ are genuine. How can they be distinguished? Jesus pointed to outward behavior as the telltale sign. Like inspecting vegetation, one can look for good fruit or bad fruit. Good fruit refers to actions such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control (see Gal. 5:23). A person who is a true believer will lead others to faith in Christ, will lovingly restore believers who have been overtaken in sin, and will ultimately glorify both Christ and the Father in heaven. Bad fruit refers to actions such as sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry (greed), sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, and carousing (see Gal. 5:19-21).

7:21. Jesus had a strong word for people who pay Him lip service by calling Him Lord when He is not really their Lord at all. The word says could be translated "continuously says," indicating a persistent practice. The one who will enter the kingdom of heaven is not the one who repeatedly says "Lord, Lord!" to Jesus or about Him, but the one who does the will of the Father in heaven.

Jesus was not saying a person is saved by living according to God's will. We are saved by grace through faith. Faith that saves, however, is faith that works to do God's will. We who are saved do good works because we are saved, not to become saved. Good works are a means by which we say "thank you" to God and demonstrate to the world the sincerity of our faith. In other words, good works are useless as a means of salvation, but they are most useful as evidence of salvation. If we attempt to earn our salvation through good works, we are saying in effect that we do not need Christ and implying that He died for nothing.

7:22-23. On that day refers to the day of judgment. Jesus continued, Many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in Your name, drive out demons in Your name, and do many miracles in Your name?' The Greek grammar indicates that each of these questions is to be understood in the sense of "We prophesied, drove out demons, and did miracles in Your name, didn't we?" The questions require affirmative answers. Coming in the context of recognizing false prophets by their fruit, what comes next is surprising. One would think that preaching, driving out demons, and doing miracles would be evidence of faith in Jesus Christ. The ones asking such questions will think they are saved. The

problem is, the Judge won't think so. He will know that they never entered into a personal relationship with Him by faith.

Clearly, those speaking will have been active in religious work. How are we to understand their claims of effective Christian service? Jesus did not dispute their claims, so perhaps God in His grace worked in spite of them rather than through them. Also, we know that signs and wonders can be faked or produced by demonic powers (see Acts 19:13-16; 2 Cor. 11:12-15; Rev. 13:13-14).

The point Jesus made is that He never was the religious workers' Lord. They may have done some good things, but as far as God's law is concerned, they were lawbreakers. As will be true of all who have not accepted Jesus Christ by faith to be their Lord, they will hear Him say I never knew you! Depart from Me. Those words expose the heart of their problem; they didn't have a personal relationship with Jesus, even though they did many things in His name.