

Two Ways to Live

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Date: 02 June 2013

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- [0 : 00] Please take a seat. Well, keep your Bibles open to that Gospel reading in Matthew, and there are outlines to follow as well, although it's quite simple tonight.
- Well, let me pray for us before we get stuck into it. Father, we've just heard through your Word you speaking, and so we pray that as we hear it, we might also do it and do your will.
- We pray this, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we come to our last sermon tonight on the Sermon on the Mount. And before I start, I just wanted to say that we're only going to look at verses 13 to 27 tonight.
- For some of you, that might be a relief, others a disappointment. But if we had an extra week, we would have covered the whole chapter, but unfortunately, we don't have the time to do that.
- So this section that we're going to look at is actually the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus reiterates or summarizes the main point of the sermon. And so if you've been following, you would have maybe noticed that the structure of the sermon is quite clear.
- [1 : 23] So we've had the Beatitudes with a small little add-on section about the salt and light up to, from chapter 5, verses 1 to 16. That was the introduction. And then we had the main body of the sermon, which was bookended by the references to the law and the prophets.
- So if you look at the slide, verse 17 of chapter 5 says, Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. And then right at the end of, in chapter 7 and verse 12, he says again, So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets.
- And so that forms the body of the sermon. And so finally we come to this last 13 or 14 verses, the conclusion where Jesus presents three or four vivid images about what it means to be in the kingdom.
- And with each image, Jesus presents two ways to live, hence the title. Many of you would have recognized the poem that Richard read tonight, just earlier.
- It's quite famous. It's by Robert Frost. And it's on the back of your outline. And it's entitled, The Road Not Taken, or sometimes more popularly known, The Road Less Traveled. I encourage you not to read it just yet.
- [2 : 41] But it's popular because it speaks to our need to make choices all the time. But choices, once made, also carry the cost of opportunities for God.
- And so for some people, that's really paralyzing because they're afraid of making wrong choices. And some choices, like marriage, are actually very hard to reverse.
- And so we often look back on our choices, some of us who are slightly older, and we have regrets. If only we had our time again. But of course, we don't.
- And we can't. We only get one shot in life. Well, tonight's passage is all about choice. But it is about the big choice, or what I call the meta choice, which determines how you make all the other choices in life.

It is the thing by which your other choices are measured against. And so its impact is huge. And the stakes are also high. Because if you choose rightly, it will lead to life.

[3 : 47] It will lead to life. And if you choose wrongly, it would lead to destruction or death. So how do we tell that we've made the right choices, or the right choice?

Well, Jesus gives us three sets of images to help us tonight. So in verses 13 and 14, we have gates and roads. Then from verses 15 to 20, we have trees and fruit.

And then thirdly, in verses 21 to 27, the images of houses and foundations. And that's sort of the structure that we'll follow tonight. So let's look at the passage in verse 13.

Enter through the narrow gate, Jesus says, for wide is the gate, and broad is the road that leads to destruction. And many enter through it. But small is the gate, and narrow the road that leads to life.

And only a few find it. Well, friends, I think from reading this, you would gather that the Christian life was never meant to be easy. The gate you enter is narrow, but so is the road beyond it.

[4 : 48] For it requires, firstly, for us to see our own failings and sin, to have a poverty of spirit and a hunger before God. And then it requires us to trust the word of an unseen God, and to reject other offers of perhaps more instant rewards in order to gain God's eternal reward.

And because it's not easy, it isn't popular either. Often you may be mocked for living like that, and others would entice you to join their way, the easier way.

But for those of us who stay true to this road, the rewards are immense, because this is the road, Jesus says, that leads to life. Well, the question for us tonight is this.

Knowing this great reward that awaits us, are we prepared to stay the course? That is, are we willing to swim against the tide in life when everyone else may be going the other way?

To remain firm, even if it may cost you friendships or opportunities in life? To stay the course, even when it feels like the world is leaving us behind?

[6 : 05] Because I think if you can't say yes to that answer, to those questions, I'm afraid then you will find that staying on this narrow road will be incredibly difficult.

For what will happen is that you will always be tempted to do what the world has to offer you. There will always be an easier way to happiness, so it seems. A less painful option for security.

A quicker way to satisfy your desires. And on top of that, everyone else is doing it. But this is the road, Jesus says, that is broad and popular, but ultimately leads to destruction.

And many travel on it thinking that they are going to make it in life. But I actually totally unaware of the coming judgment. And so actually on reflection, my title tonight for the sermon is not quite right, is it?

There is only one way to live, not two. One way to life, that is, and the other is to death. And so this is the first thing I think we need to come to grips with when we think about our Christian life.

[7 : 16] And it is that we are to travel a narrow road, which is shunned by many. Are we willing, before we even start on it, to contemplate and be prepared to go the narrow way?

Of course, one of the surprising things is that if we are, if we are willing to stay the course, if we are willing to stand firm in spite of the temptation, then what we will find actually is that once we start traveling on this road, it is actually less narrow than we think it is.

that is, we will actually find a deep joy and peace and comfort that comes from knowing God and knowing that God is with us, that he is walking this narrow road with us to eternal life.

But we need to start being prepared to travel in the narrow road before we can find this deeper joy and peace and comfort. So that's the first point. Well, let's turn to the second, the second thing that Jesus says, which is that he warns us to avoid the false prophets.

For said to say, it is not just the world that is enticing us to go down this road of destruction. There are also many in church who do the same. So verse 15, watch out for false prophets.

[8 : 36] They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. But by their fruit, you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?

Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Thus, by their fruit, you will recognize them. See, the false prophets here that Jesus talks about are not actually outsiders of the church. But they are actually those within.

And they are actually shepherds or meant to be shepherds of God's people. So here lies the problem because outwardly they look a bit like this. Sheep, drawn, gentle, fun, harmless, caring, non-threatening.

But Jesus says that inwardly they are actually ferocious wolves. Threatening our very lives. And so Jesus is saying, watch out. You need to be alert for they are not easy to spot at first.

[9 : 53] And why is that the case? Well, because the words of the false prophets are actually very attractive. They tell people what they want to hear but not necessarily what we need to hear.

They come with words of comfort and peace but then they avoid challenging us. they avoid rebuking us and warning us of our pride and our sin and our idols.

They will assure you that God's on your side, Jesus is here to solve all your problems and the Holy Spirit will enable you to be the person that you always dreamt you wanted to be. But when you boil down to it, what they're doing is leading you down the broad road which is the road to destruction.

And so Jesus says that the only way to identify them is by their fruit. Jesus says it twice both at the start and at the end of this section. By their fruit you will recognize them.

And he uses this imagery of grapes and thorn bushes and as I understand it thorn bushes actually have berries that look a bit like that. So initially it can be quite difficult to differentiate them from grapes.

[11 : 02] Similarly, the flower of the fig and the thistle are similar. I think it's the fig at the bottom. Some of you may be able to tell me after.

The fig's at the bottom and the thistle's at the top. But initially again these two flowers look the same and by just looking at the flowers you might mistake the fig from the thistle. But over time what Jesus says is that when they bear fruit we will be able to tell what kind of tree it is.

And so it is with true and false prophets. Sooner or later the prophets' lives will reflect what kind of person they are. And in our psalm reading tonight Psalm 1 the Bible gives us a picture of the true prophet.

It gives us a picture of the righteous person. And so in verse 3 the psalmist says the righteous person is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.

Whatever they do prospers. And so a godly leader will be one that consistently bears and shows good fruit whatever the circumstances of their lives.

[12 : 12] On the other hand the wicked in verse 4 are like chaff blown about by the wind or here in Jesus' words eventually they'll be cut down and thrown into the fire destroyed by God's judgment.

Now I don't think Jesus is saying that we just look to character in that if people don't profess that they're Christians we continue to follow them.

There are a lot of non-Christians who live saintly lives as well. But what Jesus is saying is that if a person presents himself or herself as a Christian leader then we need to go beyond what they say and look at how they live their lives too.

And I have to say that I have to include myself in this test. But practically I think here are some suggestions on how we can apply this.

So I think in practice don't be too quick to jump on the bandwagon of this or that other leader. And this is particularly true in the age of internet where you're always being asked to check out the sermon of this or that other leader.

[13 : 20] And be careful particularly when people start promoting these leaders as charismatic and highly sought after. They may indeed be charismatic and popular but if that's what they're focusing on to promote themselves then it should really be ringing alarm bells in our minds.

Always check what they say against what God says and also always check what they don't say against what we know God is clearly teaching in the Bible.

The other thing of course is that instead of following leaders that are out there it's always good actually to trust and follow the leaders that you can see in action week in and week out so that you can test whether their everyday actions reflect God's teaching or not.

So this is the second point from Jesus and I think it's an important one because the type of leaders we follow determine the type of persons that we become. So therefore verses 21 to 23 are a judgment both on leaders as well as on their followers.

So I think it's a short section there between the two sections that joins the one before and the ones after. So here's what verses 21 to 23 says. Not everyone who says to me Lord Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven but only the one who does the will of my father who is in heaven.

[14 : 50] Many will say to me on that day Lord Lord did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform miracles? Then I will tell them plainly I never knew you away from me you evil doers.

And so here Jesus expands on what producing good fruit means and he says in verse 21 that it is to do the will of my father in heaven. So even as we pray thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven in the Lord's prayer Jesus wants us not just to pray but to do it.

The other thing to notice is that Jesus says that many will say these things. Again it's like verse 13 many choose the broad road and again here many will say these things.

But notice who are the ones who are saying these things. They are the ones who call on the name of Jesus who call him Lord, Lord and cast out demons and perform miracles.

In other words, they are people just like us, churchgoers, followers of Jesus. And what's more, these people can even, and I don't think any of, well tell me if you can, most of them can perform miracles and exorcisms as well, which I don't think many of us can.

[16 : 09] But Jesus says that's not enough. These are the ones that think that they are sure to enter heaven only to face Jesus on the last day and be told, away from me, you evildoers.

I mean, that's, I don't know what you think, but that's a really scary thought, isn't it? Now, again, don't get Jesus wrong. He's not saying that you have to be morally perfect, and I'll come back to this again shortly.

We don't enter heaven by good works, but here Jesus is warning against just paying lip service to Jesus' lordship. That is, coming here every week, singing the songs we sing, praying the prayers we pray, but not having any change in your life.

Talk is cheap, action is what counts. And so Jesus drives this home with the very last image, and that's from verses 24 onwards.

And he says, therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house.

[17 : 18] Yet it did not fall because it had its foundations on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with the great crash. So what's the true test of a Christian?

Again, Jesus says, it is to hear his words and put it into practice. It is the same thing as doing God's will. Again, notice who Jesus is talking about.

The fool is not the one who does not hear the words of Jesus. No, he's the one who hears the words of Jesus but does not put them into practice. So again, he's talking about us.

He's talking about the people that come each Sunday, listen to sermons, go to Bible studies, listen to sermon podcasts, and yet not put it into practice. And here, the rains and the winds that Jesus is talking about, I don't think are the storms of life.

[18 : 21] No, I think what he's talking about is the righteous judgment of God, when God actually tests whether the house is built on solid foundation or not. And so the test for us is this.

do we practice what Jesus is? And so I ask you this question, when was the last time you actually heard God's word, whether it's reading the Bible or listening to the sermon, and then made a change in your life as a result?

When was the last time you heard Jesus' words and put them into practice? grace? Now, some of you may be wondering, yep, this all sounds good, but it sounds very much like we're working for our salvation.

And, you know, I thought the gospel was all about grace. So why are we talking about doing God's will and putting Jesus' words into practice before we can get into heaven? I want to say two things about that.

Well, the first one is to say that Jesus here is speaking before his own death and resurrection. So there is a sense in which he couldn't talk about the gospel explicitly because his audience would not have really understood what he was talking about.

[19 : 38] So his words are couched in kingdom language instead of gospel language, so to speak. But secondly, if we read through the sermon carefully, I think you will notice that what Jesus wants us to do, even though he doesn't use those words, is to put into practice the gospel of grace.

That is, kingdom living is living under the grace of God in Christ, trusting in what Jesus has done on the cross for us. Because everywhere in the sermon, as you read it, Jesus is calling us to live a life of trust and dependence in God.

So a person who is poor in spirit and who is meek is the one that trusts God. A person who prays the Lord's prayer and means it and practices it, is the one who trusts God.

The one who gives and fasts and prays in secret is the one who trusts that God will reward him in eternity. And the person who rejects, as we looked at last week, earthly treasures, is the one who is trusting God for his eternal treasures.

But the thing is that trust must be backed up with action. So let's say, for example, my wife and I decided that we need to buy a fridge, a new fridge, which I think we do, but we haven't got around to it.

[21 : 00] But let's say I'm too busy to do the shopping with her. So I say to her, dear, let's set a budget, \$1,500. I don't know whether that's too much or too little. But I trust you, Alyssa, to go and find the right model, and you can go and buy it for us.

Then what do you think she would think if I then said, but make sure you take down all the specifications on the models and check it back with me before you buy it. And make sure you also show me all the prices that you've checked with all the stores around Melbourne before you go ahead and buy it.

And then when she does all that, being a good wife that she is, I then go up and call each of the stores just to check those prices again. What do you think she would say then?

Would she think that I actually trusted her? Well, likewise, if we say we trust God, we need to act on it as well and put Jesus' words into practice.

No, it doesn't earn our salvation, but it shows, our actions shows, that we understand that we are depending on God for it. That is the way our righteousness will exceed that of the Pharisees.

[22 : 18] It is the righteousness that shows our wholehearted dependence and trust in God. Well, that's, friends, that's what Jesus says to end his Sermon on the Mount.

God, the thing is that you probably not hear many people talking about this and living this way in churches today. And you wouldn't find many people actually living it out.

But the truth is, this is the only way to live. This is the narrow life, narrow road that leads to life. So I want to encourage you. Ask God today to help you to live this way.

Encourage one another each and every week to continue to live this way. Hear the words of Jesus and put it into practice. Let's pray. Father, we often seek security in numbers.

We often live by sight and not by faith. And so we know that when we hear these words, they can be difficult. And yet, Lord, we ask that you give us that faith so that we will see that it is the narrow way that leads to life.

[23 : 36] Help us to hear your words and put into practice and give us your spirit to help us to persevere in this life.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.