

Matthew 7:13-27

TWO PATHS / TWO GATES (7:13, 14)

13 "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it.
14 "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

The metaphors in Matthew 7:13-14 are easy to understand. There are two roads. One is broad that leads to destruction; one is narrow that leads to life (the Kingdom). The same picture is presented in Psalm 1 which also sets forth two choices, the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. The former bears fruit and prospers; the latter is like the chaff that the wind blows away.

The broad road has no curbs, no boundaries, and no curves. It is level and smooth, so no effort is needed to follow it. Keeping all the desires of the fallen heart (self-will, self-gratification, self-indulgence) is fine. People can walk the broad road without any cost at all. The narrow road has boundaries and restrictions. Those who walk it are told what they are to think and how they are to act. They are not free to be their own. In that sense the road is very hard.

There are also two gates. One has no limits on what can pass through it. Nothing needs to be left behind—whether it is sin, pride or arrogance – everything is welcomed. The other gate is narrow. One must look hard to find it. It is easy to miss. As Jesus said in another illustration, it is as small as the eye of a needle (Matt. 19:24). It is only wide enough to let us in; everything else must be left behind (sin, selfishness, pride, possessions, even family and friends, if necessary). Entering the narrow gate involves a total abandonment of self (Stott, 194-195).

At least three deductions can be made from these verses:

1) God's way is not spacious, but confining.

Poverty of spirit is not easy, righteousness is not easy, prayer is not easy, transformed god-centered attitudes do not come easily. There is no room in the Kingdom to set my opinion against God's word. I do not have the freedom to set goals that do not conform to His purposes.

The more hesitation there is about following Christ's way wholeheartedly without reserve, the more confining His way seems. However, the more enthusiasm there is in following Him, the more liberating His way becomes (Carson, Sermon on the Mount, 124).

2) It can also be deducted that God's way cannot be found by consulting the majority opinion, for the majority is traveling down the broad road. It also follows that someone cannot follow the narrow road if he desires to please the majority of people. God's approval alone is of ultimate importance (Gal. 1:10).

3) The most important aspect of the roads are not the roads themselves, but the destination to which they lead. Unfortunately, most people are so enamored with the spaciousness of the broad road that they give little thought of its destination. It's easy to walk the wide road until the destination is reached, but then it's too late to turn back.

4) There are only two roads.

There is no other way to gain life and avoid destruction than traveling the narrow road.

TWO TREES (7:15-20)

Jesus' teachings are difficult to accept and there is no question that people will arise who will try to soften His message. They will try to convince His followers that the narrow way is much broader than He implied, and the walk requires little restriction of one's belief and behavior. Others more blatantly oppose Christ saying that the broad road does not lead to destruction, but that all roads lead to God (Stott, 199). Because of this Jesus warns about false prophets.

- 15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.
 16 "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?
 17 "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.
 18 "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.
 19 "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.
 20 "So then, you will know them by their fruits.

Jesus gives two tests in recognizing a false prophet (although other tests are also found in the Bible).

1) First, false prophets are known by their teaching.

Disciples of Christ are not very apt to follow leaders who openly ask them to sin. The greater danger in Christianity today, however, is if a leader acts and talks like a Christian, many unquestioningly accept what he says. Yet false prophets are wolves in sheep's clothing.

Current studies have shown that as the two younger generations become the dominant people in churches across the nation, biblical literacy is likely to decline significantly. "The theological free-for-all that is encroaching in Protestant churches nationwide suggests the coming decade will be a time of unparalleled theological diversity and inconsistency." . . . This is fertile soil for false prophets who feed on the ignorance and confusion that has already been absorbed into the church. Therefore, the need to warn about the danger false prophets pose is just as relevant today (Matt. 24:11; Acts 20:29-31; II Cor. 11:13-15; II Pet. 2:1-3, 17-22).

2) Secondly, false prophets are known by their behavior (7:16-20).

By changing the metaphor from wolves in sheep's clothing to a tree and its fruit, Jesus moves from the risk of non-recognition to the means of recognition; a wolf may disguise itself, but a tree cannot. Sooner or later its identity will be revealed in its fruit (Stott, 200).

The fruit that Jesus looks for is a life that is being conformed to the norms of the Kingdom. Or, to state it differently, a person who is absorbing the teaching of Jesus and growing in humility, righteousness, love, and a passion for God demonstrates the reality of his profession of faith

Jesus now turns from unsound teachers to unsound recipients of His message. He presents us with two groups – one that merely has a verbal profession of faith (7:21-23) and one that only has intellectual knowledge (7:24-27). Neither profession of faith nor knowledge can substitute for obedience, though both can be a camouflage for it.

TWO CLAIMS (7:21-23)

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.

22 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'

23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

Verbal confession is important (Ro. 10:9-10; I Cor. 12:3). Here the people are professing Christ with enthusiasm, but they are rejected because their profession was only verbal, without any moral changes to their behavior. They called Jesus "Lord", but they never submitted to His Lordship. Luke's version is clearer- "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' *and do not do what I tell you?*" (Lk. 6:46) The vital difference is between just "saying" and "saying and doing." The reason they will be banished is because they are *evildoers*.

The second group trusts in their religious experience; they even performed miracles, casted out demons, and prophesied in His name. Self-delusion can come from enjoying some spiritual experience and live in its glow without seeing the weightier issues of practical obedience. Because he sees spiritual activity, he feels that he must be pleasing God (Carson, Sermon on the Mount, 131).

Yet Jesus disowned both groups. He states that He never knew them. He casts them from His presence forever: "Depart from Me." He addresses them as evildoers. They were self-deluded about spiritual things. They thought that their spiritual experiences or verbal professions, rather than obedience proved that they were truly saved. In shock, they will stand before Christ, fully aware of their self-deception.

The themes of internal and external righteousness have been advanced throughout the Sermon:

- Matthew 5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."
- Matthew 5:10 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
- Matthew 5:20 "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."
- Matthew 6:1 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven."
- Matthew 6:33 "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Righteousness is the test to determine if one enters the kingdom. Lawlessness keeps people out.

We who profess to know Christ may have a private confession of faith, or we may publicly confess Him in baptism. We might appear to honor Him by calling Him Lord. We sing the songs which are expressive of devotion to Christ. We even exercise a variety of ministries in His name. But He isn't impressed by our pious words. He still asks for evidence of our professions in simple obedience (Stott, 207-208).

TWO FOUNDATIONS (7:24-27)

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell-- and great was its fall."

The Sermon ends on a solemn note. Jesus pictures two houses. To the casual observer, the houses may look similar. But there is a difference in their foundations. One is sand and the other is rock. Only when the storm broke and battered both houses was the fundamental and fatal difference revealed. The same is true with

professing Christians (both genuine and spurious). The believing and the unbelieving often look alike on the outside. Both go to church, both read the Bible, both listen to sermons and buy Christian literature. Both call Jesus "Lord." Both have religious experiences. But the difference is in the foundations of their Christian lives which are hidden from view. The real issue isn't whether they hear Christ's teaching, but whether they do what they hear (cf. Matt. 28:19-20: "teaching them to OBSERVE all that I commanded you") (Stott, 209). *It's what you do with the sayings of the Lord that gives evidence of your genuine conversion and only a storm will reveal the truth. Calamity betrays what kind of person we are.*