

Sermons on Matthew

Wide Gate, Bad Fruit

Matthew 7:13-20

With Study Questions

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Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. ⁻¹⁴⁻
__ Because narrow *is* the gate and __ difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. ⁻¹⁵⁻ __ Beware of false prophets, __ who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. ⁻¹⁶⁻ __ You will know them by their fruits. __ Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? ⁻¹⁷⁻ Even so, __ every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ⁻¹⁸⁻ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit. ⁻¹⁹⁻ __ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ⁻²⁰⁻ Therefore by their fruits you will know them. (Matthew 7:13-20)

Exclusive Thinking

Vagueness is at an all-time high. People comfort themselves by purposefully or accidentally being obscure or imprecise in their thinking. I was having dinner with three old friends from college—friends I had shared the gospel with, off and on, for over thirty years. They had all become conservatives since college. I was naturally curious as to whether they had become Christians.

One said 'no,' the other held his peace, and the third had an objection. He objected to the exclusive nature of Christianity. He said something like, "The problem with you people is that you think you're right and everybody else is wrong." So the question had to be asked, "Do you think you're right?" "Yes." "Then doesn't it necessarily follow that you think everybody who disagrees with you is wrong?"

I think that was a bit of an epiphany for him. And the only way anyone can avoid being exclusive is by having opinions that are murky or so mutable that they can be altered at a moment's notice—which I think to be pretty standard in our present culture.

This whole notion of Christians being the only ones making exclusive claims is simply preposterous. Any person who has any sincere conviction must hold that those who oppose their conviction are incorrect. This is not to say that people are to be rude or elitist or condescending. But it is to say if you hold a Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Roman Catholic, Buddhist, Secularist, Atheist, Humanist, Materialist, *etc.* world-view, you must believe that everybody else's world-view is incorrect. Again, it is not a matter of being

mean or argumentative or oppressive or browbeating. But we need to quit being politicians.

Now this is not to say that everybody else is wrong about everything. When an atheist says it's wrong to steal, he is just as correct as a Christian who says it's wrong to steal; on this we can agree. But the atheist must believe that my world-view is incorrect—in other words, the reason I think it's wrong to steal is incorrect. The atheist must assert that I am absolutely wrong when I say that God created the world and sent His Son, Jesus, to save sinners. The atheist must say I am wrong when I say it is wrong to steal because God's commandments teach that it is wrong to steal.

Narrow-Minded Answers

I labor this point because of the text before us. Jesus appears to make one of the most narrow-minded statements in history.

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it ¹⁴- __ Because narrow *is* the gate and __difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.
(Matthew 7:13, 14)

Truly this is a narrow-minded statement. But this should not be bothersome. It's simply the way things are. Virtually every test I took in high school and college had one right answer and an infinite number of wrong answers. When my geography teacher marked me off for answering that New York City was the capital of New York rather than Albany, I don't think I would have gained much ground by saying, "You're so narrow-minded."

A few weeks ago I had a math miscalculation in a sermon. I was lovingly accosted regarding my error. Apparently there was one correct, and only one correct, answer to the equation. I guess I could have accused the mathematicians in the congregation of being bigoted and extremist against all other numbers.

The simple and obvious truth is, 'If Jesus is right, everybody else is wrong.'

Many Narrow Gates

One other thing we need to realize about the broad way that leads to destruction is that that broad way is merely a conglomeration of very narrow ways. If we were to interview a thousand people who were taking the broad way, we would likely hear at least five hundred (probably a thousand) different approaches to life. If you wish to fly from LAX to Atlanta, there is only one route that gets you there. But that is not to say that the thousand other flights leaving LAX that same day are headed to the same alternate destination. Every plane has its own unique route...but only one is going to Atlanta. When it gets right down to it there is only one thing all these narrow ways have in common; they all reject the person and work of Christ.

It is not my purpose here to enter into an apologetic regarding the reasonableness of the Christian faith over all other world-views, though I do believe that to be the case. I simply wish to bring to the fore of everyone's attention that everybody's path is a narrow one. Jesus is teaching here is that the wide road made up of this mass of world-views all form one vast road to destruction.

Furthermore it appears that the means by which one is delivered from this path to destruction is by heeding the words of Jesus.

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: ⁻²⁵⁻ and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. ⁻²⁶⁻ " But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: ⁻²⁷⁻ and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall. (Matthew 7:24-27)

My subdued request is to consider the words of Jesus. And if for some reason the choice is made to discard them, take some serious time to consider the consequences and consider whose words and what path you're actually taking.

Narrow and Difficult

So what is this narrow gate and difficult way which leads to life? We might understand the narrow gate to be Jesus Himself and the difficult

way our adherence to His teaching. In John 10, Jesus refers to Himself as a door which must be entered for eternal life.

I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. - (John 10:9)

Having entered everlasting life through Christ, one is to be warned that it is a difficult¹ path or route.²

We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God. (Acts 14:22b)

The eternal life granted Christians is a free gift from God, but the call in the life of the Christian is anything but easy. We are to continually war against all enemies which would seek to dissuade us from following the call of Christ in our lives. So who would tempt us to think that there might be other gates and alternative, perhaps simpler paths?

False Prophets

Beware of false prophets, __ who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. (Matthew 7:15)

The kingdom of God is a kingdom which will grow until it has had its full effect upon the world (1 Corinthians 15:25). It is a never-ending kingdom, and its King will dash to pieces the combined efforts of ungodliness as the world takes rank against Him (Psalm 2). The instrument of this great victory is the preaching of the gospel of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 1:16; 10:17). That Jesus teaches that there are “. . .**few who find it,**” I would argue, was a commentary on the historical condition at the time. It does not necessarily mean that the Christian faith is consigned to perennial spiritual/geo-/political insignificance.

¹ THLIBO_, to suffer affliction, to be troubled, has reference to sufferings due to the pressure of circumstances, or the antagonism of persons, 1 Thess. 3:4; 2 Thess. 1:6, 7; Both the verb and the noun, when used of the present experience of believers, refer almost invariably to that which comes upon them from without.

² *hodos*, path, way, route (Mt 2:12).

Since there is such surety of the advancement of kingdom of God, it is a great strategy of the enemy to seek to make the kingdom of God something other than what it is. The church, therefore, should be mindful of false prophets. The enemy is very close. He wears the clothing of the Christian. He uses Christian vernacular. He is in the church—often up front. He writes books, makes tapes, and is called upon by the secular media to tell the world what Christians think.

Often during Christmas and Easter, the History Channel or National Geographic will do specials on Jesus. The authorities they call upon often have, at best, little respect or, at worst, disdain for the Scriptures. Yet these people are not called upon as mere academicians, they are called upon as the religious leaders.

There are others who hold Bibles in their hands and quote from them merely as a lead-in, or springboard, to their secular or Freudian philosophies. The counterfeits are numerous and we are to be wise.

Bad Fruit

False prophets pose the biggest threat to the advancement of Christ's kingdom and Christians are to beware of them. What is our defense?

__ You will know them by their fruits. _ Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? ⁻¹⁷⁻ Even so, __ every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ⁻¹⁸⁻ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit. ⁻¹⁹⁻ __ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ⁻²⁰⁻ Therefore by their fruits you will know them. (Matthew 7:16-20)

Christians will know these false prophets by their fruit. We are to be fruit inspectors. But just what is this fruit? If you see me lose my temper with my children, are you to put a notch in your Bible toward my fruitlessness? I was once asked how many people were at church on a given Sunday. I gave a rough estimate, after which a lady accused me of numbering my troops. This was a reference to 1 Chronicles 21:1 where Satan moved David to number Israel. I guess she thought I was under Satan's influence because I had a rough estimate of how many people attended our church.

This type of fruit inspecting can become quite bothersome if not ridiculous. I am the first to admit that a thorough fruit inspector will find

sufficient worms in the produce of my heart. Clearly there are certain types of moral behaviors which disqualify Christians from the teaching ministry. So Jesus may very well be speaking of the moral turpitude of false prophets. It would not be unreasonable to conclude that there is some reference to the fruit of the Spirit.

But __the fruit of the Spirit is __love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, __goodness, __faithfulness, ⁻²³⁻ __gentleness, self-control. (Galatians 5:22, 23a)

At the same time some of the most moral and tranquil people I know are fully committed to cults rife with false teachers.

Fruitless Teaching

Over and above fruit referring to displayed serenity or moral success or failure, I take the position that the fruit is what these false teachers say. Observe, in Luke's account of the Sermon on the Mount, the outward manifestation of the 'good fruit, bad fruit' metaphor.

_For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. ⁻⁴⁴⁻ For __every tree is known by its own fruit. For *men* do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. ⁻⁴⁵⁻ __A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil __treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out __of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. (Luke 6:43-45)

It is when the mouth speaks that the fruit becomes observable. Later in Matthew, Jesus will again equate fruit with what proceeds from the mouth.

-Either make the tree good and __its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by *its* fruit. ⁻³⁴⁻ __Brood __of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? _For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ⁻³⁵⁻ A good man out of the good treasure __of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil

treasure brings forth evil things. ⁻³⁶⁻ But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. ⁻³⁷⁻ For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. (Matthew 12:33-37)

All this to say that even though a moral downfall may disqualify one from Christian leadership, there are many who are capable of giving an outward display of morality, humility, gentleness, and even power (Matthew 7:22) who, because of their false representation of God, will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

God is a jealous God (Exodus 20:4) and will not suffer Himself to be misrepresented. As pastors, we are to fearfully guard and accurately present the message once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). As Christians we are to test all things and hold fast to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Jesus presents Himself and His word as the gate and path which leads to life. Will you see it for what it is? Will you trust in Him and in Him alone and build your house upon the unshakable rock?

Questions for Study

1. Are Christians the only ones who claim to be exclusively correct when it comes to a world-view? Explain (pages 2, 3)?
2. Why should it not bother people when they hear Jesus make such a narrow-minded statement such as the one found in Matthew 7:13, 14 (pages 3, 4)?
3. How is one delivered from the path of destruction (page 4)?
4. What is the narrow gate (page 5)?
5. What is the difficult way (page 5)?
6. Who would seek to tempt us to other gates and ways (pages 5, 6)?
7. How do we determine who these false prophets are (pages 6, 7)?

8. What is the fruit of the false prophet (pages 7, 8)?