

SERMON ON THE MOUNT CONCLUSION CH 7:13-29

2 gates, 2 roads, 2 prophets, 2 disciples 2 foundations. 5 lots of 2. Two is sort of multichoice. It is either one or the other. Jesus ends this sermon on the mount with a series of challenges. You are either one or the other. There is not a middle ground. He is addressing a wide audience. There are his disciples. He also had people who were not quite sure, caught up in the buzz that was going around. There were also the religious leaders who were listening to this new upstart. So he ends this sermon with a series of challenges to each group

To the crowds who have been checking him out he says there is a gate you have to enter. One is wide, other is narrow. Once entered that gate, there is a narrow path or a wide path you have to follow. The order is really important here. One enters the gate first, then goes on the road. The idea is not that you live your life, and at the end of it, depending how you have lived, will decide what gate you go through

The narrow gate is Jesus. John. 10:9 He is the gate. It is narrow because it is exclusive. The wide gate says you can come to God through all kinds of ways. All religions are sort of the same, and if they help you get to God then that is OK. You only have to do a short study of the different religions to see that they are very different, the God they describe is very different and their expectation are very different. But there is a very common view today - it doesn't matter what religion you follow.

But Jesus said. I am the only way to God. People object to this. But God came to earth, fully God and fully human, to show us what God is like, and to make a way for us to connect with God through his death on the cross. In his death, he dealt with our selfishness, sin, rebellion. And if we can accept this, we can come to God.

That is a narrow way. It is exclusive. It is hard. It involves us having the humility to realize we are not that good. We want to be in charge, to make the rules, to be God and do what we want. Coming to Jesus is hard because we have to let all that go and say. I have nothing to bring to you God. I come as sinner in need of your grace. There is no other way to God.

And if we come to God through Jesus, the way beyond this is also narrow. This way is difficult. Following Jesus is not an easy thing to do. It might cost you some relationally, financially, and emotionally. It will cost you because you will have to make difficult choices that are different from the way society is going. No where is this more pronounced today than in the area of sexuality. Society says have sex with who you want, when you want, as long as no one is hurt. It is your right as a human. God says sex is a gift from God to be celebrated in a marriage between a man and a woman.

This challenge is to crowds that are following Jesus. You are going to have to make a choice about me. We cannot

just take the bits we like and leave the rest. Jesus is saying. This is binary. Either you are for me or against me.

The highway to hell (NLT) or the road to destruction is the other way. While the idea of hell might seem fanciful or unloving it is simply saying if you reject God in this life, then you will live without God in the next life. And God is the author and giver of all good things. So hell is the absence of God and of all good things. I don't know what that looks like exactly but it is not good.

The next 2 is the false prophets or the true prophets.

Matthew is not rejecting the gift of prophesy here. What he is saying is we need discernment. False prophets are a key theme of Matthew. (see Matthew 24.) After his death, end times, there will be many who will deceive God's people. Paul also warns against false teachers and prophets. John says we need to test prophetic voice.

The picture is of a wolf with sheep's skin coat on so he can get into the sheep's pen. He looks like a sheep, but he ends up eating the sheep. He also uses two other illustrations. Can you pick grapes from a thorn bush? Actually there is a type of thorn bush that has black berries that look a little like grapes. And there is a thistle that has a flower that from a distance looks like a fig.

The point is that false prophets and teachers come from within the church. They appear to be Christians. It is not obvious to start with that they are false. In the OT false prophets either lead people away from God or made predictions that did not come true.

Jesus says look at the quality of their lives and the fruit of their ministry to see if they are genuine. Jesus says we need to be very careful about the voices we listen to. In the age of the internet so many prophets are declaring things. They seem to be credible. But there is no way to easily examine their lives or hold them to account.

False prophets don't care about anything other than themselves. They want the position of the prestige, or the power to speak their own ideas. They are not interested in the church or God's word. This is Jesus challenge to the religious establishment of the day.

4th number 2. True and false disciples. This was Jesus challenge to the disciples. "Lord" here probably doesn't mean Lord as in God at this early point of ministry but is more a sign of respect. Some of you who profess to be my disciples are actually not. This would have shocked them. We tend to elevate people who perform miracle, cast out demons, and prophesy. Yet Jesus said I never knew you. Signs and wonders can be also performed with demonic power, human power and are not proof of God.



Interesting Jesus says I never knew you. To know in Hebrew is a word of intimacy. What is being said is they were presenting a false front to Jesus

This is like the tax collector and Pharisee in prayer in the temple. (Luke 18:9-14) The Pharisee goes on about how good he was but the tax collector is just brutally honest. I am a sinner. Jesus says it was the tax collector who was accepted because he is bringing to God the real him. He is not pretending to have it all together or justifying himself before God. He just cries out for God's mercies. He allowed God to know his true self.

The Pharisee was not telling God about his struggles with his temper, or his lustful thoughts, or his fear of not having enough. This was the real self but he was keeping that from God and saying what he thought God might want to here.

This is a challenge to the disciples and to those in the church. There will be people who claim to be Christians, who come along to services like this, who appear to be religious and doing all the right things who are not part of the kingdom of God. The picture is on judgment day, there will be a reckoning. Jesus is not saying. Well, unless you have been perfect you will not be in heaven. This is not salvation by works. But equally our commitment to Jesus must be deeper than just mere words. It has to be shown in the outworking of our lives. It is shown in our commitment to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is not just a matter of words. Yes, I believe Jesus is God but that there is evidence in our lives of obeying Christ. Our faith has to be demonstrated in our actions. It is not just mental ascent to a list of beliefs or the creed.

The fifth 2 is the two houses and foundations.

People would have been familiar with this story. Around the sea of Galilee the sand would be baked hard by the sun in the summer. It would appear to be fine to build on. But in the rains, the sand would turn soft and wreck your house Jesus was a builder. He got this. Around Galilee, There was bed rock, beneath the sand, up to about 3 meters deep. You would have to dig down to find it, to create a solid foundation to build on

This final challenge was to everyone listening. Key to this story is to understand the difference between the two stories.

Both have houses. They both have storms that come. Both hear the word of God. House is a metaphor for life. Storms are the challenges we face. Everyone faces. No one is immune from such storms. Sickness, tragedy, disaster.

The only Difference between the two people is that one hears the teaching and follow it. Other hears the teaching and doesn't follow it.

Sermon ends on a big crash with destruction. This was a warning to everyone. There is an irony in what Matthew

writes next. V28-29. The crowds were amazed at his teaching. It is an emotional response. But it was not a commitment of faith. Jesus is calling for something far deeper than this. He is calling for a complete change in direction.

There is a story in the Old Testament about Joshua. Joshua Ch 24. He is at the end of his life and he brings all the people of Israel together. He reminds them of the journey they have been on. But then he says. Now, this is a line in the sand moment. You have to decide if you are going to continue to follow God or not. He says. I have made my decision. Me and my family are going to serve the Lord. But Joshua could not decide for them. They had to make a clear choice. When the people all said they did want to follow God, he warned them that following God was an exclusive thing. They could not have God and have all these other idols sitting in the back of their houses. Again the people said. No, we want to follow God alone. Joshua said. All right then this means you have to turn your hearts towards God and destroy the idols.

I think God presents us at times with key line in the sand moments. They come to us when we are beginning our faith journey. They come to us in key decision moments in life. They come to us when we have strayed from the narrow path moments. Either we are on one side of the line or the other. Can't stand on the line. Either for God or against God. Either following Jesus or your are not.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

- Share when you made a conscious decision to follow Christ. Why did you step over the line at that time?
- Recall another time when you faced a tough decision about whether you would follow Christ's way or go in a different direction. What was pulling you the other way? Which way did you decide? What were the consequences?
- In what areas of society is the contrast between the wide path and the narrow path most obvious at the moment?
- How can we discern the false prophets of our day?
- What is your response to vs 21-23?
- What would you say to someone who is questioning if they are in the kingdom or not?
- What is meant in Jesus parable vs 24-27 by the house collapsing?



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