

## "Only Two Kinds of Life"

*Matthew 7:13-24*

When I began this series, I used the illustration of a fighter pilot who has to train for all kinds of conditions in order to be able to successfully complete his missions. One of the biggest problems fighter pilots face is when they go through clouds or when they make a number of quick turns, it can often 'feel' like they are flying upside down. Their body and their brain are telling them 'you are upside down' but their instruments very clearly indicate they are right side up.

Jesus has been pointing out how the Pharisees' teaching caused the people to be theologically upside down. They had been wrongly taught that God only accepts the 'perfect people' [like the Pharisees] people who meticulously keep all God's laws. They said poverty, disease and disabilities were evidence of God's disapproval of you. But Jesus comes along and tells the people, 'No, that's upside down from what God say! It's not about works but grace. It's not about keeping the letter of the Law but understanding the root of God's Word and loving those who hurt you; stopping anger before it gets worse, guarding your eyes, just speaking truthfully and recognizing our spiritual poverty before God.

Now, as Jesus draws things to a close He shows the people there are only two kinds of life; Jesus' way or rejection of God. And now its time to make a choice. He concludes by illustrating this choice four ways; with two paths, two trees, two claims and two houses. Four illustrations showing us we have to choose which way we're going to follow. Are we going to keep living 'upside down' which many people have been telling us this is the way to please God? Or are we going to believe by faith what Jesus says even though the majority of people say Jesus' way is upside down?

Like a typical Jewish Rabbi would do, Jesus uses word pictures to make His point. The first one is two gates that lead to two roads; one wide and well travelled, the other narrow and less travelled. Jesus invites the listener to choose the narrow gate that leads to the narrow road because that road has a better result. Roads take you places. They are built with a goal in mind, a destination at which your journey ends. Choose the narrow road Jesus says because . . .

### **God's Way Results in True Life** **(7:13-24)**

*<sup>13</sup> "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. <sup>14</sup> But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*

When we look at a map or follow our GPS we act on faith that the road drawn on the map or that the information our GPS has is accurate and we will arrive at the destination we desire. The word translated 'road' has more the idea of the journey or the travelling experience; the journey of life. The word for broad has the idea of spacious and pleasant. This is the popular route that the majority prefer.

But Jesus says the more pleasant and popular journey in life leads to destruction while the narrow road leads to life. The word for 'narrow' also means hard, difficult, affliction. Jesus says God's way that results in true life is the narrow, more difficult way and beware that ...

### ***The majority will reject it (v.13)***

The majority of people prefer an easier path but the problem is it's not what leads you to God. All religions do not lead to God. Only one way, faith in Jesus Christ, results in life. The word for 'life' means 'alive, vibrant, exuberant'. The word for 'destruction' means ruin, waste. The majority of people who choose not to follow Jesus Christ are wasting their life, they are not finding a satisfying life and when life is over will find them-selves in eternal separation from God; a ruined life.

While you are still on your journey, Jesus says enter through the narrow gate (7:13) and follow the narrow road of life.

### ***Does involve hardship now (v.14)***

Jesus does not hide that narrow means 'afflicted'. Why does the journey of following Jesus include difficulties? Because the majority reject Jesus and they disagree with and sometimes bring harm to those who do. The majority want everyone to be the same, that way it makes them think that because almost everyone thinks the same as I do, I must be right.

Wrong, Jesus says. Enter through the narrow gate that leads down the narrow road but whose destination gives you a meaningful and vibrant life now and no hardships when its over. And sadly only a few find it.

Even David knew that choosing to follow God meant a better quality of life now followed by an even greater life forever.

*<sup>11</sup> You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

Next, Jesus moves towards warning his readers now:

*<sup>15</sup> "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. <sup>16</sup> By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?" <sup>17</sup> Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.*

Why issue this warning here? Because the majority who reject God will try and dissuade people from following God according to His Word. Notice they pretend to be insiders; they pretend to follow Jesus. There are the more obvious ones like the Jehovah's Witness or the Mormons or mainline churches who call themselves Christian or followers of Jesus but they actually reject Him as Lord and Saviour and as the only way to God. But there are also those right inside the evangelical church who are false prophets not so much because of what they say, but what they don't say. They'll say 'God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.' Absolutely true. But they don't tell you sin has separated you from God and you must come humbly toward God believing by faith that Jesus only paid for your sins. And they don't tell you that this 'narrow' journey involves suffering and rejection.

They promise 'God wants to bless you'. True? Absolutely. But they don't tell you His blessing is more relational than material. That God's blessing is more spiritual than physical. And when you don't get the material and physical blessings from God then obviously there is something wrong with you

The message of the false prophets is like thornbushes and thistles. The thornbush grows a black berry that resembles a grape from a distance. The thistle produces a flower that looks like a fig from a distance. But a close-up view shows you the truth. The false teacher leaves you empty and gives you no benefits whatsoever. Whereas,

## **God's Way is Productive** **(7:15-20)**

How do you know if the messenger is delivering a false message? Jesus said you recognize them by the fruit they produce – if any. How do you do that? You examine what they say with the Scriptures. It may take time because fruit takes time. Initially these people all sound good. But over time they slowly reveal their true colours, their true intentions. That's why Jesus says they are wolves dressed as sheep.

It also means you have to be discerning and (as Jesus pointed out in 7:1-6) you have to 'judge'. See, Jesus didn't say don't judge but make wise assessments on the teaching that you hear to make sure it's God's Word. The false teacher will ultimately leave you high and dry because what he promises isn't true. He produces nothing productive. But following Jesus results in our own growth, producing the fruit of the Holy Spirit. When we walk with God and obey His Word we will gradually become more loving, more joy-filled, more patient, kind, etc. God's way results in a true life now and a pain-free future. God's way actually produces real change and is beneficial for you.

The next illustration contrasts the person who claims they have done all these amazing religious things with the person who does the Father's will. Jesus takes us to judgment day.

*<sup>21</sup> "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. <sup>22</sup> 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 many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"*

While this may seem difficult to understand it is clear that the people who do these things are not doing it according to God's will. Somehow, they are doing amazing religious things without the help of God or Jesus. Jesus points out here that ...

## **God's Way is Not the Do-it-Yourself Way** **(7:21-23)**

They have the right language (calling Jesus Lord) and they had amazing spiritual experiences but Jesus is clear here that He never knew them; He didn't have a relationship with them. That some how they were doing this themselves or by the power of the enemy.

People can get caught up in religious experiences and they ignore Scripture. They ignore faith in Jesus. They only want the next experience. Or, their religious experience is all works. They pour themselves into service and doing things in the church but show no interest in studying God's Word or prayer. Jesus doesn't deny they were busy, nor does He deny they even used His Name for their service. But He is very clear they did not put their faith in Him. Jesus does accept those who do His and the Father's will. They read Scripture and believe it and trust God for their life and daily business of serving Him.

What a sad day it will be when people like this rattle off all the things they did for Jesus only to find out that they did it for themselves; they did it as a way to try and get into the kingdom - which is works – not trusting in Jesus by faith for their salvation.

Jesus concludes with one more illustration; two types of foundations.

*24 "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. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 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. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."*

Jesus concludes,

## **God's Way Gives Us Eternal Stability** **(7:24-27)**

Jesus concludes His message by telling a parable about building a house and compares the two houses being built with two kinds of listeners. Both listen to Jesus' words just as both build houses. But only one way of building gives you stability. So, Jesus concludes, if you want to enter the Kingdom, if you want God's acceptance and peace in your life you can only get it. . .

### ***By faithfully obeying His Word (vv.24, 26)***

Jesus' ministry began after He successfully persevered through Satan's temptations. He began preaching the message "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near." The kingdom of heaven is the rule of God. Jesus came to see if Israel would recognize Him as their true king, the prophesied Messiah. He healed people, as the prophets said. He spoke truth, as the prophets said. But He didn't come to establish God's physical rule (the future kingdom) the first time He came. He needed to die on the cross for our sins first. Those who believe He is the King now experience His spiritual kingdom now because they are willing to do what He says believing His rule will yet come in the future and are assured by Jesus they will be part of it.

When Jesus said "my words" the people would have immediately understood what He was saying was more authoritative than the religious leaders. He spoke God's Words because He's God's Son. The people were astonished at Jesus' authority because He didn't quote any Rabbi. When a Rabbi taught he validated his teaching by quoting other Rabbis, that way you knew where he was getting his teaching from and what line of thinking he was influenced by. But Jesus didn't quote a Rabbi; He got His teaching from God.

Jesus' words are completely trustworthy and only when we obey them will we experience the blessing and satisfaction of His peace and presence in our life. But the thing about obeying Jesus' words, as the parable alludes to, is that doing What Jesus says requires hard work.

The wise man builds his house upon rock whereas the foolish person builds on sand. You have to remember where Jesus is when He said this. He's in Israel and in Israel you don't get much rain. The sand around the sea of Galilee becomes so hard in the dry months it seems like it's solid but it isn't. So, if you want to build a proper foundation you have to dig through this hardened layer

(sometimes 10' thick) before you come across bedrock. How do we know for sure? Listen to Luke's version in Luke 6:48,

*<sup>48</sup> They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built.*

He dug down deep and laid the foundation. That's hard work; and so is following Jesus. It takes the sacrifice of time more than anything. Sometimes we say we don't have time to read and study and pray. How much time do we spend on TV in a day, scrolling through Facebook, Pinterest and news feeds? And yet many Christians are unwilling to read God's Word more than 15 minutes a day, or even read a Christian book or get together with other Christians or attend a Bible study or fellowship event. It's very easy to do nothing and we are experts. It takes sacrifice to become a devoted follower of Jesus, but here's the thing; following Jesus is far more rewarding and satisfying than anything this world has to offer. If we believed that we would do it more. Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him. But if we're not tasting by experience we won't see it.

And if we do invest more time listening to the Word so we can obey the Word, our problems will disappear, right! Wrong! Jesus points out here that trusting God's way gives us eternal stability

### ***Even when storms hit (7:25, 27)***

Israel experiences very specific rainy seasons. You can count on them to come and must be prepared. In the parable the storms are the difficulties life throws at us. When the disappointments, the diseases and the heart aches come – and they will because we live in a sin-stained world – we will be able to stand because we're trusting in Jesus who says in John 16:33

*<sup>33</sup> "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

Jesus is our hope, not this world. Jesus suffered for us, not so that we wouldn't suffer but that we would withstand the sufferings and grow to be like Him. If Jesus taught that following Him results in a pain free and problem free life you would think that His first disciples would have caught that, right? But listen to those who walked with Jesus or saw Him:

*James 1:2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup>because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. <sup>4</sup>Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

*<sup>1</sup> Pet. 4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup>But rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup>If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.*

So, if Jesus' first followers understood Jesus properly so must we. If we don't listen and obey the words of Jesus the storms of life will bring us down because we're trusting ourselves or our bank accounts or our good health or family, etc. We'll have happy moments but we won't have deep, satisfying joy in Jesus. If we're living by Jesus' words we have a solid rock to hang onto. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever; He will never leave us nor forsake us.

Jesus concludes His message by telling people there are only two choices in life: you either listen and obey what God says on how you can receive His blessing in your life or you can listen to the myriad of other authoritative and persuasive voices out there, who all lead down the wide path to destruction. I am praying that most of us have made that wise choice to follow the narrow path to Jesus. But just in case someone hasn't made that decision yet, listen to Jesus. He came directly from God to tell us the truth. He even died for your sins to make it possible you can have a relationship with God. You can take the wide, easier path with the majority of the world and experience some pleasures the world offers, but ultimately, they never satisfy and they lead to a terrible, eternal ending.

Jesus says the wise person listens to Him and builds his/her life on His words. Popular? No. Real joy and blessing, yes. Make that choice today if you haven't already.

If we have made that choice, remember we're on a journey. Being saved is not the goal, its only the beginning of your journey. Walk with Him and He'll walk with you through life's difficulties and joys. Trust Him, spend time with Him, spend time with His people learning and growing and you will experience His blessing and joy every day in your life until we come to the end of the road and enter His presence forever.

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