

Matthew 7:13-29

"A Dire Decision"

"Locked in awe." That's how I'd have to describe these last couple of months of making our way through the words of our Lord in this section of scripture known as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus, by far; hands down (bar none) *the best* teacher who ever walked the face of the earth.

& We've been fortunate to pick up on a fairly common pattern that He would employ throughout this teaching. It surfaces in the form of information, amplification & illustration. Jesus would state a principle; then He would amplify that principle, and then He would illustrate the principle.

Yet as with any great message there comes a point whereby you move from the information, amplification & illustration into exhortation/application. The teacher will always drive us to the place of decision. We're brought to a fork in the road (so to speak). **No longer can we sit content to have heard the awe-inspiring oratory; we have to decide how we're going to respond to it. Today Jesus brings the application & gives the exhortation to respond appropriately to all the information that He has divulged to us. In other words, it's decision time.**

Listen, there are only 2 types of people *in* this world; saved... & unsaved. There are only 2 possible destinations *after* this world; heaven... or hell. & It's these 2 people groups & these 2 destinations that were on Jesus' mind as He brought His message to a close... **So He begins to exhort His hearers regarding 2 gates/2ways, 2 trees/2 fruits, 2 builders & 2 foundations. The idea here is that it's time to make a decision. You've heard the message, now decide. Which group, which destination, which gate, which way, which tree/fruit, which builder, which foundation will you choose?**

Vs 13-14

Throughout the sum of Jesus' message, He has been blessing us & blowing our minds w/His incredible teaching. But here He's making us to understand that His goal hasn't been to wow us w/His wisdom, or even inspire us through all of His insight. **He's been leading us up to this point whereby now that we know the standards of God's righteousness, the life that He demands of us & that there's no way we can attain on our own, we have a decision to make.**

He's been comparing the path that the religious leaders of His day have pursued w/the way that God would have us to lead our lives in truth.

& As to where the religious leaders of His day (& our day) focus on external requirements & *reformation*, what God is calling to is an internal righteousness & *transformation* through faith in J.C.

Jesus is saying, "Listen, you have 2 choices here. You can go the way that the majority tends to gravitate. It's easy, it's broad, *many* go that way... but ultimately, it won't serve you eternally, it leads to destruction... Or, you can come My way, heed *My* words, obey *My* will; but comparatively, you need to know that it's the road less traveled, it's not easy, to the contrary it's quite difficult, it's a narrow path & consequently few find it."

When Jesus says, "Enter by the narrow gate" couple things we want to point out. #1 It's not the *destiny*, it's the *entry*. It's not where the journey ends; it's where the journey begins. The 2nd thing I'd point out is that when He uses the word "enter" don't envision Him on the outside barking orders for you to go where He's telling you. No, the idea is that He's on the inside inviting you to join Him where He already is.

Here's the point; it's either His way, or everyone/anyone else's way. He *is* the narrow gate, the exclusive way, "the road less traveled." People accuse Christianity of being "narrow minded" & they're exactly right. We're incredibly narrow-minded. We proclaim that Jesus is the way the truth & the life & no one comes to the Father except *through* Him. He is the narrow gate which leads to life & there is no other. Listen, not all ways & all destinations are equally good. There are only 2 ways, one leads to life & the other to destruction.

The road that leads to destruction is broad; it's an easy, go w/the flow kind of path. Now contextually Jesus is speaking of the external, self-righteous approach to God typical of the Scribes & Pharisees. *But in reality it includes any other way of approaching God (or living life) that does not involve the necessity of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross for our sins and His resurrection from the dead in order for us to be made right with God... Think of all the "isms", the countless philosophies that man has ascribed to throughout human history. They all comprise "the broad way" that many go by. Why? Because they don't deal w/the sin dilemma that is only resolved through the shed blood, the death & resurrection of J.C.*

Listen family, I'm going to say something here & it might rattle you but let it, it needs to. Not everyone is going to heaven. In fact... the majority of people will go to hell. That should be incredibly sobering to us, motivating to us to get the message of the gospel out to our friends, our family who need so desperately to know J.C.

Yrs ago I was watching a prosperity teacher on TBN whip his congregation into a frenzy speaking of a great awakening & a great revival in the last days & how when Jesus came for His church He was taking more w/Him than He was leaving behind... Sounds great, but it's not really what the bible teaches. Hey, I'm all for a great awakening & it's true that a great many will be in heaven, but the plain reading of the bible reveals to us that a great many more, will be in hell.

Most people resist & reject J.C. It's easier to deceive yourself, convince yourself that I'm ok, you're ok & God is good w/everything. But that's not true. Narrow is the gate, & difficult is the way that leads to life & there are *few* who find it. --

Question; if the narrow gate is salvation by grace through faith, why does Jesus say it's "difficult"? There are many reasons; 1 being that it's the road that demands humility of me. I have to admit that I'm a sinner, that I need a Savior. I have to repent (turn from my sin) & trust in the Lord (sometimes at tremendous personal cost) & there is a vast majority who consider the cost too great, it's too much, too difficult.

The way is difficult because it's riddled w/tribulation & persecution. Jesus never claimed to be the easy way, the primrose problem free path. To the contrary He was very open & honest w/us. He said, *"If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."*¹ Paul the apostle underscored this when he said, *"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."*²

It's much easier to float down the river to destruction than it is to swim against the current along the way that leads to eternal life. The way that leads to life is narrow, it can be lonely & it's costly. The broad way is comfortable, popular, self-sufficient. The narrow path is the difficult path of persecution & self-denial.

So here's a little litmus test for you. In your profession of faith in Christ, did it cost you anything? If you have an easy Christianity that costs you nothing; make your calling & election sure. Jesus was clear that the narrow path is difficult & costly (in this life).

Vs 15-20

Having spoken of the broad way that leads to destruction Jesus immediately informs us that there are no shortage of false prophets who would want to lead us down that path.

¹ The New King James Version. (1982). [Jn 15:19-20]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² The New King James Version. (1982). [Ac 14:22]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& Let's not forget that just a few minutes earlier Jesus was saying, "Judge not, that you be not judged" yet here He requires that we do just that. That we learn to discern the genuine calling of God upon a man's life Vs the one who would want you to think that they're there *for* you when in reality they want to feed *upon* you, take from & *exploit* you.

They appear gentle & meek outwardly (they come to you in sheep's clothing), but in reality they're malicious & self-seeking inwardly (ravenous wolves). You won't *discern* that if you're willfully turning a blind eye *from* that, you've got to be willing to make a judgment. So again, Jesus wasn't forbidding recognition of right & wrong. To the contrary it's a necessity that's laid upon us as believers. Careful discretion is an essential element in the Christian's life lest we be deceived, desensitized & led astray (you might listen to last week's message if you weren't w/us).

But let's take a brief look at what our Lord says here. What we need to see is that a genuine encounter w/Jesus doesn't simply cause me to clean up my act outwardly (put on some sheep's clothing, you see) but it will transform my life inwardly. Having an appearance of "godliness", learning Christian rhetoric & carrying a certain public image isn't too difficult to do. So there has to be something more than persuasive speech & public appearance that I can look to, to discern a person's life...

What Jesus tells us here (in brief) is that a person's walk needs to match their talk. Listen, everything in nature reproduces after its kind. What Jesus is teaching us here is that not only is that true physically, it's true spiritually as well. So that even as a good tree will produce good fruit & a bad tree produces bad fruit so to that which is made consistently manifest in a person's life will reveal something to us of the person. **The fruit of a "thorn tree" isn't apples. & You don't get poison berries from a pear tree... We recognize a tree by the fruit that it bears, not necessarily the message that it shares. Some poisonous berries grow in beautiful plants. It might be broadcasting a message that seems so inviting, so "appetizing" but in the end it's death; you have to recognize the fruit.**

Even so Jesus doesn't hone in on the teaching "per say" of a particular person but rather what's made consistently manifest in their lives. One thing we need to realize about "false prophets" is that they don't advertise themselves as such. They don't wear shirts that say, "False prophet; Beware". **If they were always saying outlandish & ridiculous things they'd be simple to spot. However the truth is that they often coat their lies & self seeking agenda in an outer shell of truth. We need to get past what a man says to us & be wise to what he *shows* to us.**

Peter said that like this; He said, *"For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption;"*³

So we can't just look at a particular teaching, we have to look at the person as well. Do they edify people or exploit them, lead you to trust in them, or do they glorify & magnify J.C. as God in the flesh? What's the fruit of their lives?

What kind of fruit are we looking for? I think a good place to start is right back at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mt. Jesus spoke of the characteristics of kingdom citizens right there (poor in spirit, humility, merciful, pure in heart, hungering/thirsting for righteousness etc.). Paul spoke of the fruit of God's agape' love in a person's life as the supreme evidence of the Person & work of the Holy Spirit *in their life* (Gal 5). Hebrews speaks of the fruit of our lips, giving praise & glory to God (13:15). Rom 6 speaks of the fruit of holy living, Col 1 speaks of good works... So it's not simply saying things that make people feel good & being involved in religious activities... It's about being born again through faith in J.C. & that change being made consistently/persistently evident.

So #2 in our litmus test of genuine profession of faith in Christ. #1 Did it cost me anything? #2 Did my life truly change? Am I still partying w/out conviction, doing what I've done, but perhaps going to church & involving myself in a few religious things? Or do I have a new nature (not saying I don't struggle) my life's aim is to be pleasing & bring glory to J.C.

Pay attention to those whom you let into your life in a mentoring role. Do they have a heart for true righteousness; do they show humility & faithfulness in the way that they live? Do they promise you freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption? Are they pouring into you or seeking to extract from you? It may take a little time, but eventually who a man is will be made manifest in how he leads his life. Now we're not looking for flawlessness, but fruitfulness. (You might just read the entirety of 2nd Pet Ch 2. There he deals in detail w/the nature & fruit of the false teacher.)

What does Jesus say of the tree that doesn't bear good fruit? It's, "cut down & thrown into the fire" ... I should say this as well. Even as when Jesus told us that we should consider the log in our own eye before we go jumping on the speck in our brother's eye, even so before we evaluate the fruit in someone else's life we need to ask the question, "Is there fruit in *my life* to the glory of God?"

³ The New King James Version. (1982). [2 Pe 2:18-19]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Because deception is a horrible atrocity, but the greatest danger is *self-deception*. The scribes & Pharisees had fully convinced themselves that they were righteous & others were sinful. *You can know the right doctrine, obey the right rules, speak the right language (even do supernatural deeds) & not be saved... Did my profession cost anything? Has it changed me truly/inwardly? #3 Have I come to know Jesus personally, notice.*
Vs 21-23

Wow... we could spend a long time here but we want to take note of a couple critical points.

A minute ago we were speaking of how words alone aren't evidence of genuine conversion. Here Jesus underscores that in Vs 21.

*Now to be sure, no one will enter the kingdom of heaven who *doesn't* say, "Lord, Lord". A proper verbal confession is vital, but by itself it's not enough. How many of you are aware of the fact that the bible declares that *every knee will bow & every tongue will confess that J.C. is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:9-11)*? So you can be sure that all will say to Him, "Lord, Lord." But in & of itself that won't ensure your entrance into heaven.*

Btw, think about the overwhelming implications being made by what Jesus is saying. Here was a Jewish Rabbi, sitting on a hillside in some relatively obscure location in the world, claiming that He would be the One that every person who's ever walked the face of the earth would stand before on the Day of Judgment. *& That He alone would determine who was received into the kingdom & who was rejected from the kingdom. Can you imagine that!? Now there are those who declare that Jesus never claimed to be God but ladies & gentlemen He wasn't ambiguous about His claim at all! He was very open about it.* Jesus is here staking claim to 2 things. #1 There is a day of judgment. A day when all who've lived & breathed on this planet will be called to a day of reckoning. #2 He's the One we'll reckon *with* & give an account *to*. That He alone is the judge of all the earth!

"Not everyone who says to Me 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven." Again it's not about learning a religious vocabulary. Jesus isn't looking for lip service, He's looking for obedience from the heart! He says that the ratification/verification of genuine inward transformation is obedience to His Father's will (the ways & the word of God).

He says it's not about *words*, nor is it about religious *works*. Did you see that there in Vs 22? *Many* will say (to Me) on that day, "Lord, Lord, haven't we prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, & done many wonders in Your name?"

Question, are miracles the final proof that God is at work & in approval of a man's life? No! (Numbers 22, Balaam prophesied but wasn't himself right w/God, Saul prophesied when *his* heart was far from God, Judas was used in miraculous ways, Caiaphas the high priest prophesied & he didn't even know it). In Acts 19 you find these itinerant Jewish exorcists casting out demons "by the Jesus Paul preaches".

Listen, just because God is moving doesn't mean He's always approving the man or the method through which His word is being employed. God loves people, He is gracious & merciful, His word will always accomplish the purpose for which it's sent forth. There is power intrinsically in the word of God & in the name of Jesus... But miracles don't prove a man is godly... (1 Cor 13:1-3)

I think sometimes God will use unlikely people just so we don't start thinking we're earning & deserving the way He uses us because we're so holy or do everything right.

The key is found in Vs 23, "I will declare to them, 'I never *knew you*; depart from Me, you who (notice) *practice* lawlessness..." **It comes back to the fruit doesn't it? Access into the kingdom of God demands a personal intimate relationship w/J.C. ... we have to know Him & be known by Him & the evidence of that relationship will be found in the obedience to the word/will of God (Vs 21). These people proclaimed godliness but they practiced (they're life was defined by) lawlessness, disobedience.** No amount of religious works earn you a "golden ticket", it's not what I profess publicly, what do I practice privately? When you give your life to J.C. He will change your life... truly.

Vs 24-27

It's interesting that in Vs 21 we're called to do the *will of the Father*, in Vs 24 we're called to obey *the words of Jesus*... here's the point; they're 1 & the same.

But notice the call to action. Both builders are said to have *heard Jesus' words*, but hearing the word is dangerous business if we're not placing the word into *practice*.

Over & over again the bible warns us against hearing *only*, we're called to be doers of the word of God. That's what it means to "build your house upon the rock." Attaching your life to a solid foundation comes through obedience to God's Word.

Notice they both built a house, the difference wasn't found in what people could see. It was found in what lie beneath the surface, the foundation. One built their life of the rock solid foundation of obedience to God's word, the other on the shifting sands of self-sufficiency...

Listen, obeying God's word doesn't shelter you from the storms. Storms come to us all, but it will ensure your standing in the end. & We could speak of the storms of life, the wind, the rain, the floods, how they beat on us & all of that would be true.

But for the sake of time let's get to the point. Jesus is speaking of the storm of the coming judgment. The storm is coming & now is the time to prepare. That's the heart of what Jesus is saying to you & me. Don't just try to glide by in life & hope it'll work out in the end, it won't. Now is when we're to be taking measures to prepare for our eternal destiny. Things may look good on the outside & you have all of us fooled real nice, but when you stand before God it'll collapse all around you & crumble out from underneath you.

Has your confession of Christ cost you? Has your surrender to Christ truly changed you? Do you have a relationship w/Jesus that's evidenced by obedience to the word of God in & through you?

We're not talking about *agreeing* w/God's word; or even *admiring* God's word, are we *obeying* God's word? When we stand before God it's too late. Now's the time to decide... which gate, which path, which tree, which foundation will you choose? Self sufficiency, or surrender to J.C. whole heartedly?

Vs 28-29

Jesus wasn't quoting from this rabbi, or that scholar, He wasn't presenting man's opinion, but God's Word. I pray that you're astonished as well... Not at my exposition, but at the words of J.C.

Jesus is the way (the narrow gate), the truth (the Good Shepherd, not a false prophet) & the life (putting His words to practice will cause you to whether the storm of God's judgment). He will judge the earth in righteousness & no one will come to the Father but through Him...

Prayer Points:

Lord Jesus we thank You for being so direct w/us. Not leaving it up to confusion or misunderstanding. You've spoken clearly & it's to us to decide individually how we'll respond to Your word. Help us to respond appropriately, to know You & surrender to You fully. Help us Lord, to obey You, to love You & to honor You w/our lives.

Self sufficiency, or absolute dependency upon Jesus. Those are your 2 options in standing before God. Abandon yourself to J.C. Enter by the narrow gate, count the cost & choose the road less traveled. Trust in the sufficiency of the shed blood of J.C. to wash your sin away & make you right in the sight of God.