

Matthew 7:13-20

A Christian's Commitment: A Radical Choice - Part 1

Friday, July 8th, 2005

Introduction:

In our last study, we were reminded of our relationship with our brothers and our Father in Heaven. Christ condemned a judgment of others that was hypocritical... but clearly instructs us to correct a brother with humility and love once we have faced our own sin first. At the same time, we were reminded of our Heavenly Father's willingness to answer our prayers. A willingness not without conditions, but also one which frees believers to "do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matt 7:12). As we near the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ begins to point would-be followers to the necessity of a choice. One which is radical and demands your all... one which some may attempt in vain to circumvent.

To this point, Christ has laid out several contrasts to illustrate how His disciples were to be radically different from those around them. For review, list as many as you can.

- Christian vs. Pharisees (Hypocrites) with respect to righteousness & devotion: heart / internal vs. superficial, for God vs. for man, judgemental / proud v.s. merciful / loving
- Christian vs. Pagan with respect to devotion
- 2 Treasures: Earthly vs. Heavenly
- 2 Masters: God vs. mammon
- 2 Ambitions: Material wealth / needs vs. the Kingdom of God & His righteousness

Read Matthew 7:13-20.

"Enter through the narrow gate..." (v.13-14)

How do the two paths / gates described by Christ differ? What choice does this represent? (John 10:7-9; Psalm 118:19-23; cf. Acts 4:8-12; Matt 5-7)

- the 2 roads differ...
 - in their gates (small – by GRACE alone, in CHRIST alone, by FAITH alone, require a repentance of our sins; denial of self and faith in Christ; wide – any other religion, good works, faith in self);
 - John 10:7-9 – *"Therefore Jesus said again, 'I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep... I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.'"*
 - Psalm 118:19-22 – gate / capstone = Christ (Acts 4:8-12)
 - in their roads (narrow vs. broad) – by context at the later part of the Sermon on the Mount – a choice between the character / attitude / religion / ambition & treasures of heaven (narrow) or earth (broad) – the earthly road does not need to be learned. It comes naturally to man... cf. John 14:6 – Christ is the WAY, the life, and the truth
 - in their destinations (life vs. destruction) – cf. Deut 30:15-18 – Moses laid the same choice before the Israelites...
 - in their travelers (many vs. few) – will form the minority if we should choose to follow the narrow path and small gate

With such an obvious difference in the outcome / destinations of the two paths and their corresponding gates, why do "only a few find it"? (v.14)

- few find it because the broad road seems easier / more natural / takes no effort → people love darkness rather than light (blinded by sin in our lives)

What type of faith is needed to follow the narrow road?

- Hebrews 11 (esp vs. 8-10, 13-16, 24-28)

- requires FAITH that results in a *Heaven-minded Vision* – all of these "heroes" were looking forward to their final destination
- v.10 – *"...looking forward to a city with foundations whose architect and builder is God"*
- v.13 – *"...they only saw and welcomed them from a distance"*
- v.16 – *"...were longing for a better country – a heavenly one."*
- v.26 – *"[Moses] regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value... because he was looking ahead to his reward"*

- Phil 3:8; 1 Cor 9:27; Luke 22:42

- required FAITH that allows one to *forsake all and discipline oneself*
- PAUL's example:
 - Phi 3:8 – *"What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ"*
 - 1 Cor 9:27 – *"No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."*
- CHRIST's example Luke 22:42 – *"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."*

“...Every good tree bears good fruit...” (v.15-20)

In this passage, Christ warns us to “Watch out for false prophets...”. How are we to identify such false prophets? What do other passages in scripture teach us about identifying false prophets?

- v.15; cf. Matt 24:24; Acts 20:29-31; 2 Peter 2:1

- we are NOT to rely on their outward appearance → v.15 - “... They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”
- **What is “sheep's clothing”?**
 - miracles and signs alone – Matt 24:24 – “For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible.”
 - church membership / teaching
 - Acts 20:29-31 – Paul's warning to the church
 - 2 Peter 2:1 – “But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you.

- v.16-20; cf. Galatians 5:22-24

- by their FRUIT - v.16/20 - “By their fruit you will recognize them...”; v.17 – “...a bad tree bears bad fruit”
- see “bear good fruit” below – fruit of the Spirit – pertaining to our CHARACTER and CONDUCT – this is missing in False Prophets
- **What are the fruits of false prophets that reveal their true identity?**

- Jeremiah 23:16-17; (Eze 22:23-29)

- AMORAL OPTIMISM: by their attitude toward sin – Jer 23:16-17 – “This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. They keep saying to those who despise me, ‘The LORD says: You will have peace.’ And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts they say, ‘No harm will come to you.’”

- 1 John 4:1-3, cf. John 15:26-27; Matthew 12:33-37

- TEACHINGS: by their denial that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh – 1 John 4:1-3 – “...do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist...”
- cf. John 15:26 – if they speak from the Holy Spirit, they will testify (as does the Holy Spirit) of Christ
- Matt 12:33-37 – Pharisees are rebuked for their teaching (their careless words) as bad fruit

- 2 Timothy 2:15-18

- TEACHINGS: by the way in which they handle the truth...
- INFLUENCE: by their effect on those who follow them – 2 Tim 2:16-18 – “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth, They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some.”

What does it mean to “bear good fruit” (Luke 3:7-9; Luke 6:44-45; Matt 7:21; Galatians 5:22-24)

- Luke 3:7-9 – begins with repentance...
- The fruit we bear (our life, speech, etc...) comes as an overflow of the condition of our hearts – Luke 6:44
- Doing the will of God / Obedience - Matt 7:21 – “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”
- Fruit of the Spirit - Gal 5:22-24 – “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.” → becoming Christ-like in our character / conduct

According to Christ, what is to be the fate of those who do not bear good fruit? (v.19; 2 Peter 2:1-3; cf. Matt 7:21-23)

- Destruction - v.19 – “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” – same message in Matt 3:10
- 2 Peter 2:1-3 – “They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves... Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.
- Christ will deny knowledge of them – v.21-23 – “...then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

Reflection and Application

In spite of the danger of false prophets and their harmful influence on the church, Paul encourages us that “Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: “The Lord knows those who are his, and, ‘Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.’” (2 Tim 2:19) We are left where we started... with a choice. To confess the name of Jesus Christ, turning away from wickedness and walking the narrow path that leads to life, or to reject His grace and mercy following your own way... a way that leads to destruction.

Which path are you traveling at this time? Do you need to make a change by entering through the narrow gate that is Jesus Christ?

Have you drifted off the path that leads to life? Turn to God in repentance knowing that “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)