

The Choice is Yours!

Matthew 7:13-23

Introduction: 1) In the spring of 1977 I was faced with a choice that would impact the course and direction of my life. I was invited by the baseball coach at the Junior College I was attending to travel with the team throughout the summer in Latin America as we would play daily double-headers seven days a week. As a left-handed pitcher, I would be a valuable team member certain to see a lot of action. However, I had begun to walk with the Lord again and had my heart set on going on a 2 week mission trip in June/July to an Indian Reservation in Arizona. Much to the dismay and disbelief of my baseball coach, I turned his offer down, explaining my reason. Little could I have imagined at the time that it would be on that mission trip that the Lord Jesus would call me into the gospel ministry. My life was altered and changed forever by that choice, that decision.

2) Life is filled with choices, decisions, what are often called “forks in the road.”

The Bible recognizes this and speaks to it on several occasions.

Joshua 24:15 says choose which God/gods you will serve.

Psalm 1 says choose the way of the righteous or the way of the wicked.

Proverbs 15:19 says choose the way of the slacker or the way of the upright.

And Deuteronomy 30:19-20 says, “I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, love the Lord your God, obey him, and remain faithful to him. For he is your life...”

3) Matthew 7:13-27 sets before us a series of choices, forks in the road that require us to make important choices that will not only impact our life, they will impact our eternity.

- Will you choose the difficult road and the narrow gate that leads to eternal life or the broad road and the wide gate that leads to eternal destruction (7:13-14)?

- Will you choose the good tree with good fruit or the bad tree with bad fruit (7:15-20)?

- Will you choose a genuine confession marked by obedience or a false profession marked by disobedience (7:21-23)?

- Will you be a wise man and choose to build on the rock solid foundation of God’s word or will you be a fool and build on sand that will lead to your destruction (7:24-27)? We will examine the first three in this study. We will see that the choice is ours. We will see that we must choose wisely. Much hangs in the balance.

I. You must choose between the narrow gate that leads to life and the wide gate that leads to destruction 7:13-14

A poem written by Sara Stowell nicely sets the stage for these verses.

“Forks in the Road”

“There will always be forks in the road,
Decisions that have to be made.
You will always have to bear the load,
Of each debt that has to be paid.

Every fork has a destination,
With consequences to each choice.
Be wary of Earthly temptation,
For it may have the loudest voice.

Other paths will intersect your own,
Other lives will feel its effect.
The aftermath may remain unknown,
With results you may not expect.

Be careful not to be led astray,
From the righteous course you once strode.
Only through Faith can you find your way,
When you reach the forks in the road.”

We have, in a sense, reached the climax of the Sermon on the Mount. Our Lord’s teachings demand a response. Sitting idly by and trying to remain neutral is not an option. Sitting on the fence will not work. Two paths, two gates, stand before us. The one you choose has massive consequences.

1) The wide gate leads to eternal death 7:13

- Jesus immediately shoots a command in our direction; “enter through the narrow gate.” “Enter” is an imperative and calls for decisive and

immediate action. That which we are to enter or “come into” is described as “the narrow gate.” Verse 14 tells us it is the path that leads to eternal life. The reason our Lord delivers such an urgent command is quickly made plain. There is another gate and another road that leads in a different direction and to a different destination. It leads to destruction, to damnation. This gate is wide. This road is broad. “There are many who go through it.”

- The road that leads to the gate called destruction is large, attractive and well-traveled (Carson, 123). Lots of people walk down it. It is very attractive. It is the popular road, the well-known road. Ideologically, it is not narrow in its thinking. It is open-minded. Morally, it is not restrictive in its behavior. It has very few rules. Virtually, anything goes. Spiritually, it is inclusive. There is a wide highway to heaven. Take the left, take the right, or stay in the middle. We are all headed to the same place its signs tell us.
- This road is not new. It has been around a long time. You find its origin in the Garden of Eden when Satan said to Adam and Eve, “trust me rather than God.” Solomon warned his son of it in Proverbs 1:10-16. The words there are striking and ominous. We ignore them at our own peril. “My son, if sinners entice you, don’t be persuaded. If they say –

“Come with us! Let’s set an ambush and kill someone. Let’s attack some innocent person just for fun! Let’s swallow them alive, like Sheol, whole like those who go down to the Pit. We’ll find all kinds of valuable property and fill our houses with plunder. Throw in your lot with us, and we’ll all share the loot” – my son, don’t travel that road with them or set foot on their path, because their feet run toward evil and they hurry to shed blood.” But, don’t neglect verse 18, “but they set an ambush to kill themselves; they attack their own lives.”

- Those on the broad road say, “All aboard!” They say, “Come join the party.” Little do they consider this road is a dead end of eternal destruction. They are, as Solomon warns, setting their own eternal ambush.

2) The narrow gate leads to eternal life

7:14

- Jesus calls us to walk the road less traveled. He calls us to pursue the narrow gate and the “difficult road.” Why? Two reasons are given. First, this road leads to a gate called eternal life. Second, because this road is difficult, “few find it.”
- There is no universalism in the teachings of the Bible. Not everyone is going to be saved. There are not many roads that lead to heaven. Just consider the words of Jesus, Peter, and Paul.

John 14:6: “Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Acts 4:12: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.”

1 Timothy 2:5: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus.”

- Jesus is crystal clear in His teachings. The way to God is exclusive and restrictive. There is only one way, one road. The road that follows Christ is a road that is difficult and will involve suffering and persecution (cf. 5:10-12), but it is a road that takes us to a gate called eternal life. It is a road that can cause us to doubt and even despair if we get our eyes off the end game, if we lost sight of how it will all turn out. Sinclair Ferguson points out the wisdom of Psalm 73, a psalm of Asaph, at this point (p. 164). It is worth reading its 28 verses: “God is indeed good to Israel, to the pure in heart. But as for me, my feet almost slipped; my steps nearly went astray. For I envied the arrogant; I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have an easy time until they die, and their bodies are well fed. They are not in trouble like others; they are not afflicted like most people. Therefore, pride is their necklace, and violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge out from fatness; the imaginations of

their hearts run wild. They mock, and they speak maliciously; they arrogantly threaten oppression. They set their mouths against heaven, and their tongues strut across the earth. Therefore his people turn to them and drink in their overflowing words. The wicked say, “How can God know? Does the Most High know everything?” Look at them – the wicked! They are always at ease, and they increase their wealth. Did I purify my heart and wash my hands in innocence for nothing? For I am afflicted all day long and punished every morning. If I had decided to say these things aloud, I would have betrayed your people. When I tried to understand all this, it seemed hopeless until I entered God’s sanctuary. Then I understood their destiny. Indeed, you put them in slippery places; you make them fall into ruin. How suddenly they become a desolation! They come to an end, swept away by terrors. Like one waking from a dream, Lord, when arising, you will despise their image. When I became embittered and my innermost being was wounded, I was stupid and didn’t understand; I was an unthinking animal toward you. Yet I am always with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me up in glory. Who do I have in heaven but you? And I desire nothing on earth but you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart, my portion

forever. Those far from you will certainly perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. But as for me, God's presence is my good. I have made the Lord God my refuge, so I can tell about all you do."

- There are those who "will certainly perish." There are those who will discover "God's presence is my good." It's that road I want to be on. It is that road we find our Jesus on.

II. You must choose between the good tree that produces good fruit or the bad tree that produces bad fruit 7:15-20

- Jesus now moves the discussion from the path of destruction to teachers of destruction, False prophets He calls wolves in sheep's clothing (v. 15). Just as it matters greatly what spiritual and moral road we travel, it also matters greatly what spiritual teachers we listen to and what moral guides we follow. Looks can be deceiving so we must pay close attention. Jesus tells us to 1) watch how they act towards God's people and 2) examine the fruit of their teaching. In the end, these false prophets will be exposed as those who walked on the broad road that leads to eternal destruction.
- Before examining verses 15-20 we should note the New Testament repeatedly addresses the danger of false teachers. Jesus will do it again in Matthew 24:23-26. Paul will do it in Acts 20:28-30, 2 Cor. 11:3-4, 12-15, and 2 Timothy 3:1-9. Peter will do it in 2 Peter 2:1-22. John will do it in 1

John 2:18-23 and 4:1-6 and 2 John 7-11. Jude will dedicate his short 25 verse book to the subject.

- False teachers produce bad fruit. We need to be careful from which trees we pick our fruit! Three principles are provided to help us pick well.

1) False teachers are deceptive 7:15

Jesus once again fires off a command in our direction, “Be on your guard against false prophets.” Be on guard is a present imperative. It means to pay attention, be on the alert. Keep your spiritual guard up. Why?

Because the devil also has his prophets, “false prophets.” However, and this is crucial, they do not come fully exposed and transparent in their intentions. Rather, they dress themselves up like us, coming in “sheep’s clothing.” But, remember! “Be on your guard.” In reality they are not sheep. Get past the façade and the surface and you will find “ravaging wolves.” Spurgeon well says, “Sheep’s clothing is all very fine, but we must look beneath it and spy out the wolves” (*Matthew*, 74). Carson likewise is helpful when he writes, “the false prophet can only be someone who does not advocate the narrow way presented by Jesus...They do not tell the whole truth, and their total message is false” (*Sermon on the Mount*, 127-28). Disciples of Jesus must never let their spiritual guard down. They must be spiritually discerning, testing every

teaching by the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Word of God. Eloquent speech is not the issue. Faithfulness to the Bible is!

2) False teachers can be detected

7:16-18

- Quarles notes, “False teachers disguise themselves as Jesus’ disciples in order to live undetected among the sheep of the flock and thus devour the sheep with great ease” (322). However, the wolves need not succeed. Jesus tells us we can “recognize them by their fruit.” He then provides a contrasting illustration to make His point.
 - Grapes come from grapevines not thorn bushes.
 - Figs come from fig trees not thistles.
 - Good fruit comes from good trees not bad trees.
 - Bad fruit comes from bad trees not good trees.
 - Good teaching comes from true prophets not false prophets.
 - False teaching comes from false prophets not true prophets. Got it?

I believe there are two essential tests that will expose false teachers, wolves in sheep’s clothing that work to slip into our communities of faith. There is the doctrinal test and the practical test. The doctrinal test: do their teachings line up with the gospel of Jesus Christ that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone? Do they avoid the deadly mathematics of false teachers who add to the Bible, subtract

from the person and work of Christ, multiply the requirements of salvation and divide the people of God by a divisive and destructive spirit? The practical test: are they antinomians on the one hand or legalists on the other? Do they throw off all constraint to the extreme or do they seek to shackle us with legalistic obligations that are suffocating? Pay attention! Rotten fruit will expose a rotten teacher!

3) False teachers will be destroyed 7:19-20

The destiny of false prophets is a signed, sealed and settled reality. They do not produce good fruit. Their end? They are “cut down and thrown into the fire.” The words of our Lord echo those of his cousin John the Baptist in Matthew 3:10 where he says, “The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.” False prophets are on the broad road to hell. Those who follow them will face the same fate, the same eternal destiny. This is the word of God not ours. The responsibility we bear is found in verse 20, “So you’ll recognize them by their fruit.” Daniel Doriani is right, “Many may deceive for a time, but words and deeds eventually reveal where the heart lies.... No one evades God’s justice forever. Bad trees, trees that bear no fruit, are cut down and thrown into

the fire (7:19). But it is not enough to examine others. We must watch ourselves as well” (*Matthew*, REC, 299-300).

III. You must choose between the genuine confession of the obedient or the false profession of the disobedient 7:21-23

- These are some of the most terrifying verses in all of the Bible. They follow quite naturally from verses 13-20. I tremble every time I read them. To think I could say “Jesus is my Lord” and to hear him respond to me, “I never knew you.” To think that I could preach and even do miracles in his name and have Him say to me on the Day of Judgement, “Depart from me, you who work lawlessness.” These words should send shivers down our spine and cause our heart to skip a beat. They should drive us to ask not, “Do I know Jesus?” but instead to ask, “Does Jesus know me?!”
- The idea of true lordship dominates the passage as the word “Lord” appears 4 times in two couplets. Jesus will make a clear distinction between a false profession and a genuine confession. He will provide an ironclad, rock solid test to distinguish between the two. Again, all that is at stake is ones eternal destiny!

1) We give evidence that we know Him by our obedience 7:21

- Jesus begins with a surprising and even startling statement in verse 21, “Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the Kingdom of heaven.” Now, it is important to note that Jesus does not say that our profession of Him as our Lord is unimportant. Scripture makes crystal that our confession of Jesus as Lord is very important! Paul says in Romans 10:9 that, “If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” And Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:3 that, “no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” (cf. also Phil 2:9-11). The implication is that by the Spirit’s enablement we can truly and authentically declare Jesus is Lord and that this is an evidence of authentic Christianity.
- But, Jesus wants us to understand we can profess Christ as Lord without knowing Christ as Lord. It is possible, and some do, to profess Christ as Lord and yet that profession is deemed false and inauthentic by the only one who matters, Jesus Himself.
- What is the litmus test that must accompany one’s profession of faith? The answer is this: a transformed and obedience life. The one who “will enter the kingdom of heaven” is the one who: 1) professes Jesus as Lord and 2) “does the will of my Father in heaven.” Obedience is

an evidence, a confirmation, that a profession of Christ is true, that it is real. Spurgeon says it so well “An orthodox creed will not save if it stands alone... without personal holiness, the caster-out of devils will be cast out himself. . . .Nothing will prove us to be true Christians but a sincere doing of the Father’s will” (Spurgeon, *Matthew*, 76).

2) We give evidence that we do not know Him by our disobedience

7:22-23

- Three times in verses 22-23 the false professors declare that we did what we did “in your name.” Standing before God in eschatological judgment, “On that day,” they will declare: 1) “We prophesied in your name, 2) we drove out demons in your name, and 3) we did many miracles in your name.” Nevertheless, they will hear from the One they called Lord, “I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers.” (cf. Ps. 6:8). The word “lawbreakers” (Gr. *anomia*) connects back to the idea that they failed to do “the will of my Father in heaven.”
- Once more we are confronted with what I call “demon faith” (cf. James 2:19). There is an orthodox confession and even an impressive spiritual resume as judged by men. God, however, sees things in a

completely different light. He sees us as we truly are. Don Carson brings a helpful perspective on all of this when he writes,

“It is true, of course, that no man enters the kingdom because of his obedience; but it is equally true that no man enters the kingdom who is not obedient. It is true that men are saved by God’s grace through faith in Christ; but it is equally true that God’s grace in a man’s life inevitably results in obedience. Any other view of grace cheapens grace, and turns it into something unrecognizable. Cheap grace preaches forgiveness without repentance, church membership without rigorous church discipline, discipleship without obedience, blessing without persecution, joy without righteousness, results without obedience. In the entire history of the church, has there ever been another generation with so many nominal Christians and so few real (i.e., obedient) ones? And where nominal Christianity is compounded by spectacular profession, it is especially likely to manufacture its own false assurance.” (*Sermon on the Mount*, 131).

Quarles insightfully adds, “Just as false prophets were ravenous wolves who disguised themselves as sheep, some goats (25:31-46) [attempt] to masquerade as sheep as well” (p. 330).

Conclusion: These verses teach us how imperative, how important, it is to stay close to Jesus, to know Him, love Him and obey Him. When you and I consider the road to walk, we must remember Jesus is the way and no one comes to the Father but by Him (John 14:6). When you and I consider the two gates that opens before us two eternal destinies, we must remember Jesus is “the gate for the sheep” (John 10:7). As the Lord, Himself promises, “I am the gate. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved...” (John 10:9). When you and I consider the teachers we will follow and who we can trust to give us the words of eternal life, we must heed the words of the apostle Peter who said to Jesus, “Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:68-69). And, when it comes to the essential wedding of our confession and obedience, we will daily recall the words of our Savior in John 14:15, “If you love me, you will keep my commands.” Life is truly filled with choices, with decisions we must make. May we always choose Jesus. It is absolutely certain, we will never be let down or disappointed.