

Part Eleven
The Narrow Gate
Matthew 7:13-23

¹³ “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

A Tree and Its Fruit

¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

I Never Knew You

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

STUDY

1. READ

- a. What are some characteristics of the wide pathway? What are some characteristics of the narrow pathway?
- b. What does Jesus say about discerning a good tree from a bad tree? What is the expected outcome of a good tree? What about a bad tree?

2. MEANING

- a. What does Christ mean in verses 15-20 by the metaphor of wolves in sheep’s clothing?
- b. What types of fruits might characterize a false prophet? How are these fruits different from a true prophet?

- c. What does Jesus say in verses 21-23 about those who do good works in Jesus' name? Is it sufficient to achieve salvation? If not, then what does Christ desire for us?

3. APPLY

- a. What does our life look like if we are attempting to take the narrow pathway?
- b. What are some modern examples of false prophets' destructive teachings? What are some ways we can discern false from true prophets?
- c. Have you experienced or observed belief without repentance, commitment, and discipleship? What are some strategies for rejecting this form of belief and committing to true faith in Jesus?
- d. How is God calling you to grow a deeper desire for him and a deeper relationship with him?

NOTES ON THE PASSAGE

vv. 13-14 – The way to eternal life is “narrow” in that it is through Jesus alone. This way is difficult, although those who choose the easy way (by choosing to please man rather than God) will find that this way only leads to death and destruction, resulting in punishment and separation from God. Jesus alone died for our sins and made us right before God. Living his way may not be popular, but it is true and right.

vv. 15-20 – Jesus teaches his disciples to be discerning when prophets approach them. The life of the prophet and the results on others are the fruits that will indicate whether or not the message is consistent with God's Word. Jesus says that bad trees are only good for firewood, which is a striking condemnation of current and future false prophets. There were many false prophets during Jesus' time. One way you can tell the difference between false and true prophets is because false prophets minimize Christ in order to glorify themselves.

vv. 21-23 – God's community should guard against false prophets and false disciples. Not everyone who approaches will be allowed to enter. If the heart is truly not repentant, then the Lord may not allow the follower to enter. In verse 22 Jesus identifies that false disciples deceive themselves and other believers. Good works are not proof that a follower is truly following God since they can derive from sources other than God, including demons and other humans. We all know morally upright people who do good and moral acts, but that does not mean that their works derive from God's Word or a desire to serve God. Faith in Christ, knowing Him, is ultimately what matters most at the time of judgment. In verse 23, we see that one day Jesus will exercise the choice of condemning people to hell, something only God can do. If Jesus never really knew these false disciples, then they were never truly saved.

COMMENTS

Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount by giving His followers, the crowd, and the religious leaders three basic warnings: they must choose between two gates and roads (vv. 13-14), two kinds of prophets (vv. 15-20), and two kinds of disciples (vv. 21-23). Based on the choices that his followers make across these three warnings, his followers are either with Jesus or against him.

The wide pathway is the path the whole world begins on. The wide pathway is spacious, easy to follow, and popular. However, it also leads to our destruction because it contains the world's views on success, marriage, and morality. It is devoid of God's teachings on these and other difficult topics we will confront throughout life. Conversely, the narrow path is not easy to find and is unpopular. The narrow pathway can only be entered by making a deliberate decision and access to it is restricted. It takes work and effort to move ourselves from the wide pathway to the narrow pathway. Although the narrow pathway is difficult to follow, it ultimately leads to life. Walking with Christ will make this difficult path easier to follow as Jesus says in Matthew 11:28-30, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest... For my yoke is easy to bear, and my load is not hard to carry." We should be honest with others we are witnessing to that there will be costs to following Christ. This is not a decision one can enter into halfway. A true and genuine commitment to Christ requires sacrifice, but it is worth the cost because it leads to everlasting life with Christ.

Christ uses the analogy of wolves in sheep's clothing when he describes false prophets. He is likely identifying them as wolves posing as shepherds. Today, false prophets also often come to us looking like pious, authoritative spiritual figures. Whether it is the evangelist on a street corner condemning others to hell, the pastor in a church preaching a Gospel that is inconsistent with Scripture, or a popular political leader that is not grounded in faith but appeals to Christians in order to garner support. We should try to discern the fruit of their character, their teaching, and their influence in order to determine if they are a true or false prophet. In order to effectively do this, it helps to be well versed in Scripture and willing to test their teachings against what we know is true in Scripture. We should also be discerning without being judgmental. We should recognize that it is God's role to pass judgment. We do have an important role though to be gracious and help point a false teacher to the truth. If we truly understand Scripture and are effective at discerning truth, then we can use those skills to not only protect ourselves from false prophets, but also to protect others (Ephesians 4:11-14).

Probably the most elusive and challenging warning to follow is discerning true faith from false faith. Good works in the name of Christ are insufficient to enter God's kingdom and there are many people throughout the world and in our community that are doing good works in the name of Christ who are not practicing a genuine faith. It is possible we have also fallen into this trap in our own lives by either leading double lives, worshiping other idols, not forgiving others, or by sheltering parts of our life off from God. Performing miracles or fruitfulness are not proof of God's favor or salvation. Unfortunately, many of those who serve in and lead ministries are prone to self-deception, as the Pharisees and Judas Iscariot were in Jesus' time. A true and

genuine faith means we acknowledge Christ as our Lord and Savior. In verse 23, Jesus also makes it clear that a true and genuine faith involves growing an intimate relationship with Jesus. This growing relationship should encourage us to live a life of repentance and turning away from sin over time. This does not mean that we will not sin; all believers sin. But when we do sin, we should recognize it, repent from it, and get right with God to try to avoid the sin in the future. Scripture calls us to grow in Christ and pursue His holiness (2 Peter 1:5-11). Therefore, it helps to periodically examine ourselves to see if we are growing and if Christ is truly in us (2 Corinthians 13:5).

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