

**Sermon on the Mount – Not everyone who calls
Matthew 7:13-29**

We have walked a journey that has led us through the greatest sermon ever given - Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. We have heard things, hopefully in a new light, which has hopefully helped us understand Jesus' teaching better. Jesus' listeners had never heard teaching like this before. The message was deeply rooted in their own religious heritage of the Law and the Prophets, and we need to take that into account as we try to understand it, but was also very different from the teaching of the Pharisees.

The last verses of the Jesus sermon in Matthew 7:28-29 says, "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law."

Together, over recent weeks, we have walked through a significant bit of teaching on some pretty important topics...what kind of people the Kingdom of God blesses, we've looked at anger and murder, lust, divorce, integrity, prayer, giving, fasting, worry, having the right treasure...we've looked at a lot of things.

And now we come to the last part of the Sermon on the Mount, and what I would say is one of the most disturbing passages of scripture.

Let's start reading it Mathew 7:13-29

¹³ "You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. ¹⁴ But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.

As I said I think this is one of the more disturbing statements of Jesus anywhere in Scripture.

- I don't have a problem understanding that there is a wide gate and a broad road that leads to destruction. I think we see that every single day. There are endless ways that we can make a mess our own lives and the lives of others with the poor choices we make. I understand that. I get it.
- I don't have a problem with Jesus claiming to be the narrow gate that leads to life. After all, he is the son of the living God who proved it by

living a life that backed up everything he said. He's the only one with a resurrection on his resume. No one else that I know of has ever returned from the dead, never to die again. Jesus is unique in that way.

- I don't have any problem with Jesus claiming to be the only way to the Father. In fact, I'd have a problem if Jesus claimed to be one of many ways. But he didn't. The very first name given to the Christian movement was "the Way, the Road" based on these very words.

But it's that last phrase that concerns me when Jesus says *only a few ever find it*. That's the phrase that troubles me. I looked up the Greek word for 'few' and you know what it means? It means 'few', as in not very many, it doesn't have any other meaning just a few in number." That's not good. That's what makes this one of the hardest sayings of Jesus.

That means that there are a lot of people headed down the wrong path. But that road is a dead end. Only a few have the courage to take an exit ramp off the main highway.

Two Paths

As Jesus winds down his sermon, he is reminding his listeners they have a choice.

Two paths laid out ahead of them.

But this isn't just about our eternal destiny. This isn't just about where we end up when the fat lady sings. This is primarily about the here and now and this life we are living. We make choices every day that determine whether we are on the path that gives true life, or whether we are on the easy road that leads us down the path of destruction.

There is the wide gate with its broad road that, while it seems good...it has nice scenery...it has well paved streets...and nice safe neighbourhoods...Everyone who's anyone is on it. It is made up of those natural choices, those things that seem like common sense, those ideas that seem to be good. It can easily seem like the right path, but it actually leads to destruction. Jesus says that many people travel this road.

Instead, Jesus says choose the narrow road. Choose the road with the small gate and the narrow road that leads to life. This isn't the road that seems good, or seems like it will lead to life. It can and will have difficulties. It requires sacrifice. It won't allow you to continue doing things as you have been doing

them, and it will constantly ask you to change and grow...

Jesus is talking about *intentionality*. The small gate and the narrow road takes work to find. You will not just stumble upon it. You have to want to be on that road because it doesn't just happen. And it also takes work to stay on...This is where our salvation theology come into question. When we talk about make a decision to follow Jesus, we are not talking about a one-time decision at a particular point in our life and then we are sweet. We are talking about a regular on-going decision to stay on that road. Because life has a way of dragging you to the easy road...the broad road...the road where you do the easy thing. But the narrow road is a lifelong journey of choices to stay on that road.

The narrow road is what the Sermon on the Mount has been about. It asks us to regularly confess our wrongs...to be part of a community...to make sacrificial giving and living a part of our lives...to seek after Jesus' way above all else...The narrow road asks us to do some pretty scary things because life, true life, is about more than just being alive...it is about having life...even though many have died because they are on the narrow road.

A warning

In verses 15-20 Jesus goes on to warn us to be discerning. Interestingly back at the beginning of the chapter he warns us not to judge and now he tells us to judge. It's not contradictory. One area he is talking about hypocrisy and the other discerning truth. He is warning us to be discerning about teachers, people in positions like me! Due to time we will skip over these verses about wolves and sheep and good and bad trees and their fruit.

Then he gives another warning, which again can be disturbing.

In verses 21-23 Jesus is clearly describing those that are his true disciples. He has just finished talking about false teachers and advising that we judge a person by the fruit they produce, not by what they say or how they appear.

Jesus seems to be implying that it is important to judge the genuineness of a person by how they live their lives and, at the same time, to examine how we are living as well. The implication here is that it is easy to deceive *ourselves* in terms of whether or not we are actually true disciples that will see the Kingdom of Heaven.

²¹"Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter.²²On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.'²³But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws.'

As one commentator put it; *Jesus was not speaking here to irreligious people, atheists, or agnostics. He was not speaking to pagans or heretics. He was speaking to devoutly religious people who were deluded into thinking they were on the narrow road that leads to heaven when they were actually on the broad road that leads to hell. According to Jesus, one day not just a few but many will be shocked – eternally shocked – to find that they were not in the kingdom of God after all.*

How awful it will be for these people, many of them perhaps well-meaning Christians, maybe even pastors and teachers, will have their hopes dashed on that fateful day. How awful it will be for these believers to hear the Master tell them, "Depart, I never knew you."

Have you ever read this passage and thought - *What if he's talking about me?*

A significant part of the problem stems from Christianity's grace vs. works contrast. We are saved by grace, through Faith in Jesus, but then faith without works is dead!

Unfortunately over the years, decades, centuries, much of Christianity, in the broadest sense, maybe we could call it cultural Christianity, has devolved into a shallow and largely hollow system of rules and regulations, do's and don'ts, that bear little resemblance to the practices and principles taught and role modelled by Jesus.

This form of Christianity is so shallow it is only dependent on a person making a "decision" to accept Christ as their personal saviour. This decision, often made at the end of a service or in a more private place, often after praying some special words known as the "Sinner's Prayer."

Increasingly, critics both within and outside the Christian faith have been re-evaluating this sort of "ticket to heaven" Christianity. Nowhere in scripture does it speak of someone saying some magic formula like the Sinner's Prayer,

nor is there any repeated emphasis in scripture about “accepting Christ as your personal saviour.”

Jesus said that we would know the truth or falseness of a teaching based on the fruit produced.

While it does boost the ego of the preacher to see a whole lot of people come forward and pray the sinners prayer, decisional Christianity tends to result in a highly superficial approach to the faith. This requires little of the convert once the “decision” is made to “accept” Christ, as if for some reason God, who created the entire universe and who now holds all things together, pines away for our acceptance. It is really a ridiculous thought when you get right down to it. Listen to what a guy called David Platt says regarding this issue:

You will not find a verse in Scripture where people are told to “bow your heads, close your eyes, and repeat after me.” You will not find a place where a superstitious sinner’s prayer is even mentioned. And you will not find an emphasis on accepting Jesus. We have taken the infinitely glorious Son of God, who endured the infinitely terrible wrath of God who now reigns as the infinitely worthy Lord of all, and we have reduced him to a poor, puny Saviour who is just begging for us to accept him. Accept him? Do we really think Jesus needs our acceptance? Don’t we need him?

This guy Platt minces no words in describing the unworthiness of such a response to the person and the mission of Jesus. And based on the teachings of Jesus, especially those we just looked at in the last part of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ expects a lot more as well. Platt continues:

I invite you to consider with me a proper response to this good news. Surely more than praying a prayer is involved. Surely more than religious attendance is necessary. Surely this gospel evokes unconditional surrender of all that we are and all that we have to all that he is.

Platt zeroes in on the essential issue of our response to God’s incredible compassion and love when he says, “...unconditional surrender of all that we are and all that we have to all that he is.”

Yes we are saved by the grace of God, and God’s grace is given freely but it isn’t cheap. In fact, it costs all that we are.

*Take up your cross and follow me.
He who loses his life shall gain it.
Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies.....*

We are called to come and die. We are to step out of the drivers seat and let Jesus take over. Easier said than done I know, but absolutely essential if we are to reap the full benefits of being a follower of Jesus.

Conclusion

After considering that Jesus might be talking about me when he said, “I never knew you,” I could not help but wonder how many other supposed followers of Jesus might be in more trouble than they think.

As I think about my responsibilities of being the pastor of this church, the shepherd of the flock if you like, I couldn’t help but wonder how many of the good people sitting here might falsely believe they are true believers in Jesus when, in actual fact, they are not. I wonder how many feel assured of their eternal future when, possibly, in the Lord’s eyes, they are total strangers. I fear, chances are, more than a few are in this predicament whether they know it or not. I fear that there are still some that are under the illusion that reciting the Sinner’s Prayer, church attendance, and coughing up a few bucks for the collection plate is what this faith is all about.

Can I conclude quoting David Platt again.

The danger of spiritual deception is real. As a pastor I shudder at the thought and lie awake at night when I consider the possibility that scores of people who sit before me on a Sunday morning might think they are saved when they are not. Scores of people have positioned their lives on a religious road that makes grandiose promises at minimal cost. We have been told all that is required is a one-time decision, maybe even mere intellectual assent to Jesus, but after that we need not worry about his commands, his standards, or his glory. We have a ticket to heaven, and we can live however we want on earth. Our sin will be tolerated along the way. Much of modern evangelism today is built on leading people down this road, and crowds flock to it, but in the end it is a road built on sinking sand, and it risks disillusioning millions of souls.

Jesus calls us to a life of far greater potential, filled with possibilities for service to others and positive work toward the establishment of his kingdom here on earth. Jesus calls us to become the best version of ourselves, all for the sake of

others and for the furtherance of his kingdom. Yet he directly tells us, and in so doing leaves no wiggle room, that there is indeed a price to pay for full status as his follower. Jesus, and the gospel that he authored and lived, requires a response from us and that response cannot be half-baked. If we reject Jesus, we do so outright, but if we accept him, then, we must accept him with totality.

Communion