

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Life, the Jesus Way
(Studies in the Sermon on the Mount)

Warnings and Invitations from Your King Study #9
(Matthew 7:13-29)

Introduction: King Jesus and President Washington...

With local, state and national elections nine days away, I was thinking of the address our nation's first president gave when he left office.

Writing a long letter to the citizens of a very young United States of America, George Washington warned them against certain things and he urged them to embrace other things.

Washington's letter makes for a very interesting read, but what his specific warnings and invitations were all about isn't relevant to our time together today. What is relevant is that Washington devoted so much energy to give warnings and to cast vision to those he led.

It is relevant because this morning, we listen as Jesus speaks to us, not as an out-going president, but as an in-coming king. He issues sober warnings about things to avoid as He gives an invitation to a LIFE like no other.

We come this morning to the end of our study of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. We've been exploring this Sermon for the past couple of months and we have heard Jesus outline how His kingdom will function.

His kingdom is not like other kingdoms.

It is NOW a kingdom without a land or borders and is made up of all people who believe in Him. It will ONE DAY be a kingdom with a land and borders over which He will reign as sovereign. And those who have submitted to His rule and reign NOW and who have obeyed His commands NOW will reign with Him THEN.

I will warn you here at the outset that today's time together, listening to Jesus' finale to the Sermon on the Mount, is very challenging.

His words may be among the most challenging you have ever heard. This message certainly ranks among the most challenging, the most sobering, and, I hope, the most hopeful I have ever given.

Before we dive into the biblical text, I want to review with you who Jesus was speaking to, what was the audience, who first heard the Sermon on the Mount.

Review...

From the beginning, it was clear that He was speaking to His followers.

He was speaking to the twelve who were His apostles. And then He was also speaking to a crowd of people (mentioned at the beginning and at the end) who had climbed the "mount" to hear Him. This crowd was following Him. They, too, were His people.

Throughout, the way He speaks makes it clear that He is addressing children of God.

- He makes repeated references to **"your heavenly Father."**
- He warns His listeners of persecution.
- He calls them to prayer and fasting and giving.
- He calls them **"salt"** and He calls them **"light"**.

Now, it is likely that Judas Iscariot, the one who would eventually betray Jesus, had already been selected as an apostle and that Judas heard this Sermon. Judas wasn't saved. There may have been others present who weren't saved.

But Jesus' words are directed to and intended for the people of God.¹ It is very important to remember that as we give our undivided attention to what He has to say.²

You and I often talk about the cost of discipleship. And it does cost to be Jesus' serious disciple.

In contrast, God offers eternal life as a free gift of grace. Jesus having paid the price for your redemption when He died on the cross.

But discipleship costs. As He wraps up this Sermon, Jesus speaks of the even greater costs of not being a disciple.

The picture Jesus paints here is clear and easy to imagine.

Warnings from King Jesus (vv. 13-27)

Be Careful to Walk Jesus' Narrow Way (vv. 13-14)

[13] "Enter through the narrow³ gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. [14] "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Two paths

The wide gate and the broad way

On the one hand, there is a nice broad highway. You can think of this road leading to a big, bright city or to a vacation resort.

It's easy traveling on this road. You easily arrive at your destination through big, wide gates.

The narrow way and the small gate

And there is another road. It's not a broad highway and there are no big, wide gates to pass through when you arrive.

The gates are small and the road is what Jesus calls "narrow." It is a crushingly narrow road.

There are a number of words Jesus could have used to get across the idea of "narrow." The one He did use is closely related to the Greek word for "tribulation." This narrow way is not easily navigated. It's challenging. The narrow way is the inconvenient way.

Not surprisingly, these two different roads and gates lead to two different destinations.

Two destinations

Destruction

Jesus says that following the broad path - the easy path, the path to pleasure - will not take you to that delightful destination you imagined. It leads to destruction.

He's describing a life that doesn't obey His Kingdom Constitution. We are to picture someone who doesn't turn the other cheek, doesn't fast or pray or give to the poor, someone who doesn't forgive those who wrong them and who gives in to every lust.

He says that the end of that life is a wreck. And at the end of that wrecked life, on the other side, Jesus would say is someone who will be ***[Matthew 5:19] "called least in the kingdom of heaven."***

¹ I'm confident that God has used the Sermon on the Mount to bring many people to saving faith in Jesus. But fundamentally, this Sermon is not an evangelistic message. Nowhere in Matthew 5-7 do we read of the necessity of faith for eternal life or of God's amazing grace. He was speaking to the saved about how to lead a life that counts for eternity.

² Jody Dillow - "Matthew 5:1-2 couldn't be more explicit that Jesus' intended audience was His disciples." (***Final Destiny***)

³ The King James translation "straight" reflects the Latin word "strictum", not the original Greek, "stene" which speaks of narrow (as opposed to broad).

It that is me, I have lived an unsalty life and have hidden my light. If that is you, you will have stored up no treasure in heaven.⁴

By contrast, the narrow path leads to life.⁵

Life

The narrow way is the way of the disciple. It takes us through persecution. It takes us through suffering. It goes through the second mile. The narrow path leads us past enemies we are committed to love.

The narrow path is the path of hardship. And that is exactly what the Apostle Paul told the Christians in the city of Derbe on the First Missionary Journey to anticipate after he himself had been nearly stoned to death in Lystra - **[Acts 14:22] “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”**

But, ironically, this narrow path is the path that leads to L-I-F-E. This is the life that Jesus lived and died and rose again to give us and it is the life to which He calls us.

Jesus Himself calls this life the **[John 10:10] abundant** life. It is the life of purpose, meaning, joy and peace.

In the future, after this life is over, following this path will lead to an **[2 Peter 1:11] entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ** that will be **“abundant.”** (It will evidently be possible to have an entrance into that kingdom that is not “abundant”.)

Jesus has given the opening salvo of the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount.

⁴ While the word we translate “destruction” can refer to an eternity in Hell, it certainly need not mean that. And in a context in which Jesus is speaking to believers of the danger they face for not living out the Sermon on the Mount, other common understandings of the word fit much better. I would prefer the word “ruin” (See Matthew 9:17; 1 Corinthians 8:11 for use of the word in this sense).

⁵ Some take “life” here to refer to “eternal life” and say that following the narrow way - the way of obedience to the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount - is the way of eternal life. This idea, though, that good works takes us to heaven, is contrary to the biblical teaching that eternal life comes by grace through faith.

This is Jesus, speaking as king, calling us, His subjects, to take what He has said in the Sermon just given - and order our lives accordingly.

You submit to the Sermon on the Mount every time you follow the path of discipleship. You take a step on the narrow road when you obey your king. And each of those steps - taken purposefully and prayerfully - is a step into life.

There are unparalleled benefits and blessings that come with the crushingly narrow way. And there are crushingly severe consequences for taking the easy, broad way.

If you are now on board to obey what Jesus has commanded, great. But if that’s you, you need to be alert to the danger of those who would get in the way of you entering the kingdom by the narrow gate and the narrow way.

He warns us that there are those out there who would lead us to the broad gate and down the broad path.

Beware Those Who Would Derail You from Jesus’ Way (vv. 15-23)

False prophets from without (vv. 15-20)

Mistaken identity (v. 15)

[15] “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

These **“false prophets”** are not a part of the faith community. Jesus describes them **“coming to you.”** They move from the outside in. They infiltrate.

They are toxic. And they are especially dangerous because they look benign.

You would never guess by looking at them, by watching them, by seeing their lives that they are anything but innocent sheep. Sheep are God’s people. These false prophets aren’t sheep. They are wolves.

The church my family attended when I was in school through my teenage years was a very large church in Dallas. The minister at that church was known city-wide for his work with people who struggled with addictions. He and the other leaders of the church were really nice people. My lingering memory of that church is that I was always urged to do good stuff. It was a church of exemplary morals

It was not a church to attend if you wanted to know how to find forgiveness or how to get right with God. I never heard the Gospel there. Nor did I ever hear anything about being or making disciples.

I did hear that the Bible was full of errors, that the Trinity was bunk, that Jesus was not God's Son, and that the resurrection was make-believe happy nonsense.

The leaders of that church were wolves, dressed as sheep. Or, as Jesus goes on to say, thorn bushes pretending to be grapevines.

The tale of the tree (vv. 16-19)

[16] "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? [17] "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. [18] "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.⁶ [19] "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Jesus is here simply putting into agricultural terms what He had just said about wolves and sheep.

If a thorn bush wraps itself up in grape leaves, you're still not going to get grapes from it. Just thorns. No matter how good it looks, it's poisonous.

So, if a wolf dresses up like a sheep, it's still a wolf. And if a mountain cedar dresses up like a peach tree, come December, it's still going to be spitting out noxious yellow pollen.

What, then, is the fruit of the "false prophets" Jesus is warning us about? We get some help on this from the Old Testament.

In Deuteronomy 13, Moses tells the Jews that if a prophet performs a miracle, you're going to think whatever he says is from God. But, if that prophet successfully tells the future and then speaks contrary to God's Word, don't listen to Him. He is a false prophet.

The bad fruit of a false prophet is that he speaks against what God says. Upstanding character is always better than bad character. And miraculous powers are impressive. But neither power nor morality guarantees truth.

It can be really, really tempting to believe what somebody tells you about life with God, especially if they are nice and moral. Jesus says, "Watch out!"

Fruit inspection (v. 20)

[20] "So then, you will know them by their fruits.

And their fruit is their teaching. For starters, in the context of Matthew 7, it is this.

- Does this prophet affirm everything Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount?
- Does this prophet call you to loving sacrifice, to prayer, to fasting?
- Does this prophet call you to faithfulness to the point of suffering persecution?
- Does this prophet call you to turn the other cheek, love your enemies, pursue holiness?

⁶ James' letter (3:1) makes the point that good trees SHOULD bear good fruit. We (good trees) SHOULD lead God-honoring lives, but we might not. We might bear rotten fruit. Jesus' point here is that you will never pick peaches from a cactus.

In the broader context of Scripture, does this prophet proclaim a message of faith alone in a crucified and resurrected Christ, alone for salvation?⁷

If he doesn't, he's a false prophet. And Jesus says that once you begin traveling on the narrow road of discipleship, you need to beware of these false prophets. They'll lead you astray. They are far from God and they'll lead you away from God's truth.

Don't listen to their podcasts, watch them on TV, catch them on the radio, or pay attention to their You Tubes.⁸

Those false prophets are outside the faith. Jesus now speaks of others, whom I happen to believe are *inside* the faith community, who highlight another danger. They illustrate another way to be derailed from the narrow path.

False prophets from within (vv. 21-23)

[21] "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.⁹ [22] "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' [23] "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

Entering the kingdom of heaven

Jesus speaks here of "*entering the kingdom of heaven.*" And if your instinctive thought is to equate that phrase with "*receiving eternal life*" I get it. But I believe that is not what He is talking about here.

Let me explain.

⁷ This is the understanding of most of the early church fathers (i.e. - Jerome), John Calvin and the other Reformers, along with Jody Dillow, David Anderson, et al.

⁸ See 2 Corinthians 11:14-15.

⁹ Those who have trusted in Jesus are guaranteed entrance into the millennial kingdom. What is not guaranteed is their position in that kingdom and whether they will rule with Him.

Throughout the Old Testament, God invited His people to "enter" many things to participate in the plans He had for them in a new way or to a deeper level.

For instance, they were invited to "enter" the land of promise. (Deuteronomy 4:1) They were invited to "enter" the temple to worship God. (Psalm 100:3)¹⁰

They didn't become God's people when they entered. They were already God's people when they were invited to enter.

This invitation to enter was a genuine offer, with choice to accept or refuse. In fact, the nation of Israel did fail to enter the Promised Land and they did fail to enter the temple to worship as often or as fervently as they should have.

So, here, in the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus speaks to believing people about "*entering the kingdom of heaven*" I believe He is not speaking about becoming God's child. He's inviting us to enter a "kingdom-of-heaven-kind-of-life" - exactly the kind of life He's been describing in the Sermon on the Mount.

At the same time, and as an extension of THAT entering, when someone lives a "Sermon on the Mount" kind of life, they are making great preparations for a rich and abundant entrance into the presence of God when we exit this life. (See 2 Peter 1:11)

This is Jesus' invitation to you, today. Enter this kind of life and the rewards will be great.

But we hear Him say that there are people who are in the family of God who have not "entered" into the kingdom way of living and who will, therefore, not enjoy a rich and abundant entrance into the presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

¹⁰ The Jews were also invited to re-enter the Mosaic Covenant every seven years in a ceremony at Mount Shechem (Deuteronomy 31:10-13).

And this, more than anything else, may be where you will, today, come to a dramatic shift in your understanding of what is at stake, as a Christian, in living for Jesus or not living for Jesus.

Not doing the will of the Father

These people confess Jesus as “Lord.” That’s “code” for *Christian*. (Paul wrote that no one says - and means it - “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit; 1 Corinthians 12:3)

These folks prophesy and perform miracles, I assume, by the power of the Spirit. They cast out demons.¹¹

But they do not do the will of Jesus’ heavenly Father. That is, they don’t obey what Jesus has given us to do in the Sermon on the Mount. (And did you notice that there is not one word in Jesus’ Sermon about supernatural prophesying, exorcisms, or miracles?)

The problem with these people and the reason they will not [abundantly] enter the kingdom is that they have not done the works required to enter.^{12,13}

And here are the words you never want to hear. These are the words Jesus reserves for those who don’t “enter” into a kingdom way of living.

“Depart from Me, I never knew you.”

[23] “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.”¹⁴

¹¹ Unsaved exorcists cannot cast out demons. And, as Jesus said, Satan cannot cast out Satan (Matthew 12); see Acts 19:14-16.

¹² At one point Jesus said that doing the will of the Father meant believing in Him. (John 6:29). That is not what He means here, though, because the context makes it so clear that He is not talking about faith in Him for eternal life (as He did in John 6 where it was an explicitly evangelistic setting), but is speaking to believers who are already “in” the kingdom, but who may not be “abundantly” in.

¹³ If the issue is eternal life, then Jesus is saying that in order to have eternal life, we must do good works. And that violates Scripture’s clear teaching about salvation by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9 and elsewhere).

Christians who don’t take seriously the call to discipleship are “in the kingdom” in the sense that they will be in heaven. But they are *least* there. (5:19) They will have no reigning authority with Jesus.

The word “*depart*” is not Jesus’ command to depart heaven. It is a dismissal from His immediate presence. They are not welcomed at the table. Those places are reserved for those who lived as disciples.

The Savior will have no “*Well done, good and faithful servant*” for them, but will say, “*I never knew you.*”¹⁵

Not absolutely. There was relationship. But Jesus and the non-disciple never enjoyed intimate fellowship with Him the way He did with the one who is a disciple. Jesus didn’t approve of his life.

Now, if you are having difficulty with the way I am approaching these words of Jesus, I understand. They are challenging words no matter how you take them and there are lots of people out there who see them differently than I do.

But the other way to take what Jesus says is to say that He is admonishing people who might not be saved to be sure that they do enough good works to go to heaven. And that’s a message that I can’t quite imagine Jesus giving.

So, yes. This is a sober warning to children of God about what awaits them if they fail to submit to Jesus’ lordship.

They will walk away from the abundant L-I-F-E Jesus saved them to enjoy. They will forfeit rewards that could have been theirs.

¹⁴ “Depart from Me” is often understood to mean exclusion from eternal life and that Jesus is dooming disobedient people to condemnation. But it is only necessary to think this if the essential characteristic of the Christian is obedience. The essential characteristic of the Christian, though, is that they believe in Jesus. We can name numerous believers (in both testaments) who committed grievous sins. We could also list the hundreds of exhortations to not sin or to stop sinning that affirms the very real possibility that believers might not be obedient.

¹⁵ The Greek word used here is “ginosko”, a word that often refers to deep, intimate relationship. It can also refer to “approval” (see 1 Thessalonians 5:12), which would fit the context here very well.

They will be greeted by their Savior with disapproval. They will be least in the kingdom.

So, having placed your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life, you will take one of two paths. One is broad and wide, and consists of pursuing pleasure and earthly treasure, satisfaction of “*I wants*” and the reign of King Self. That is a ruinous path of destruction.

The other path is the path outlined in the Sermon on the Mount. It is a narrow path, the path less frequently taken. It can be a crushing path of following Jesus, submitting to Him, denying self, and growing in love. But it is the way of life.

Once you hit the narrow trail, you will encounter those who would try to derail you from the path of discipleship.

Some from without will be models of morality who downplay discipleship and deny the Gospel: Christ crucified, Christ resurrected, Christ Lord. Salvation through faith alone in Christ alone.

Another derailing possibility is seen in those who spout fancy words and are flashy. But they don’t give attention to prayer, generosity, fasting, sexual purity, forgiveness, or sacrificial love.

Pay no attention to either group. Instead, simply follow Jesus. Following Jesus will make you solid.

Be Careful to Build Your Life on Jesus and His Way (vv. 24-27)

Built on the rock (vv. 24-25)

[24] “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. [25] “And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.

Following Jesus doesn’t eliminate stormy, windy, rainy days. Those days will still come, and you know that.

But Jesus says that if you take to heart what He has said and live by it, your house, your life, will not be shaken.

Every word we have heard from Jesus is solid. Take time this afternoon - or some time this week - to pick up your Bible and read through the whole Sermon on the Mount.

Notice how comprehensive it is. Notice how it speaks to your dilemma. Notice how it calls you to be with “that person.” Allow its words to wash peace over your troubled soul, to strengthen you in your weakness, to guide you in your confusion.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, the Sermon on the Mount will equip you to face the storms life throws at you in a way that honors your God.

Don’t be like the other guy.

Built on the sand (vv. 26-27)

[26] “Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. [27] “The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

To state the obvious, this is serious stuff. This is life and death.

Storms come to us all, and without a solid foundation, the storms win.

I was speaking with someone recently who has endured several storms. Her life has been battered, but she is solid. Years of walking with Jesus didn’t keep the storms away. But years of walking with Jesus did keep her afloat in the floods. Her house is standing. She’s moving forward.

But a house, a life, built on a large financial net worth, on a good career, on a loving family, on health, on national security, will fall and will fall hard when the storms hit.

And with that, Jesus (maybe) closed in prayer.

The Amazing Authority of King Jesus (vv. 28-29)

[28] When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; [29] for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.¹⁶

Neither I nor Jeff nor anyone who ever stands here or at any other church speaks with authority. First century Jewish rabbis didn't speak with authority. Political leaders don't speak with authority.

All authority you ever see exercised today is derived from some other source.

But Jesus and His teaching was fundamentally different than anything anyone in that crowd had ever heard. He *had* authority. Intrinsic authority. So, His words were authoritative.

They were then and they are now. He alone has the authority to rightly and in a new, fresh way, interpret God's Law. And He alone has the authority to tell us, His people, what to do. He's our king. And our king calls us to follow and to obey.

Conclusion:

You and I often think of the high cost of Christian discipleship.

That's a good thing to think about. Having received the incredible gift of eternal life through faith in Him, He calls us to pray, to give, and to fast. He calls us to holiness and to love, to treat others the way we want to be treated.

To live the life of a disciple costs. But as we have seen this morning, there are higher costs to the life of non-discipleship.

¹⁶ There are parallels between Jesus' teaching and that of the first century Rabbis - but only in form of expression, themes addressed, not in content or style.

To not follow Jesus is to travel a road that leads to ruin and destruction. It is to forfeit the abundant life and an abundant arrival into the kingdom. It is to build a life on the sand that won't stand when the storms come.¹⁷

The temporary upside of the broad path has no long-term benefit. But the temporary hardships of following Jesus come with the joy of His presence now and the promise of great reward then.

I'll wrap up now with a couple of thoughts for every one of us here, because all of us can make progress in following Jesus.

- If you can identify areas where you have been saltless or situations where you have been hiding your light; if you can put your finger on areas Jesus points out where you have been disobedient, go to God. Confess. Come clean. Repent and obey. Submit to your Savior.
- If you are not now in community, linking arms with others who are on the same path of following you are on, please find someone, today, and tell them what is stirring in your soul. Avail yourself of groups we have here (Care Groups and ABF and mid-week studies) or start your own group. We are not meant to go it alone.

I have always found conclusions to sermons to be difficult. It's hard to wrap up well. That's why I always leave conclusions to the end.

So, today, I'm going to wrap up the way Jesus did. He finished talking.

I'm finished talking. Now, let's all do what the first crowd did. Leave amazed at Jesus.

¹⁷ From Dallas Willard, "Non-discipleship costs abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout by love, faith that sees everything in the light of God's overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging of circumstances, power to do what is right and withstand the forces of evil. In short, it costs exactly that abundance of life Jesus said he came to bring (John 10:10). The cross-shaped yoke of Christ is after all an instrument of liberation and power to those who live in it with him and learn the meekness and lowliness of heart that brings rest to the soul... The correct perspective is to see following Christ not only as the necessity it is, but as the fulfillment of the highest human possibilities and as life on the highest plane." (from Devotional Classics, p. 16)