

Sermon on Matthew 7:13-29 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Obedience to Christ matters.

We have arrived at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount and our ten weeks of thinking through the Kingdom Ethic. How we, in Christ, are to live as those redeemed and approved by God.

It has been the clearest definition of what it means to be like Jesus, He has preached on what he stands for and how his followers are to live in response to his grace. This is the way.

This year I have found myself asking over and over again if my life, and that of others seem like Jesus. Whether it has been in the political arena, in our response to the pandemic, or regular life in the church, does what is cherished and pursued, what is proclaimed, sound like, feel like, reflect Christ. I think it is a vital question...

We have learned from the Sermon on the Mount that this question starts at home or in the mirror (looking at my own heart) - but it is a question we can't stop asking and it serves as a measuring stick in the Kingdom. Does the church smell like Jesus, does our ethic for life follow what he has called us to?

As Jesus wraps up his mountain-side sermon, he presents the smell test through some of the toughest words in the Bible.

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Matthew 7:13-29

During our Kingdom Ethic series, each sermon has for me, anticipated arriving here. Not that I was looking forward to it, but knowing that these words had to be confronted and understood has added to the weight of our times together around the word.

This week, as expected, I have found myself wrestling with Jesus' words, with his way. It's okay to wrestle, to be uncomfortable, to want to more deeply understand Jesus as he reveals himself in Scripture. It is normal to think it all through and

push back on what Jesus calls us to as we long for and labor toward truth. In fact, if you are never uneasy with something Jesus or the word declares, it is probably not the real Jesus you have encountered.

What we have here is faith that requires more than mere restatement, it demands vigorous and total attention. Devotion and surrender. And it may not even be expressed in the ways we imagine to be normal. Evaluation of ourselves, and others, to discern if we, and they are truly part of the Kingdom.

He lands the plane of the sermon with warnings and exhortation to be doers of his commands. This is what he has taught. It is central to the mission of the Kingdom.

Matthew 28:19–20 “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.** And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (ESV)

So it is vital that we get this.

Jesus was serious - he really wants us to live this way - and this drives the point home.

Obedience to Christ matters, and we know what we get in the process and results of our living.

1) The Warnings

Comparing what is right and what is wrong, Jesus gives four warnings that are a call to decision and commitment for those that would continue to follow him into the new Kingdom reality.

We could go further in-depth with each but for our purposes today we want to recognize them and think through our response to them.

Two ways: “Enter by the narrow gate...” There are two roads, two paths, two ways of living. One leads to destruction and the other leads to life.

Given the choice between life and destruction, we assume it is an easy choice, but the point is that it is more involved than we might think.

The way of the kingdom is not the easy way... building on what has come before, Jesus is inviting followers to the way of persecution and detachment from the world (holiness).

Don't try to uncover shortcuts to God. Where there are plenty of "easy ways" proclaimed and offered, then and now, Jesus leads us to the way that will claim all of who we are and redefine success and arrival quite oppositely from what we are used to.

It is an exclusive way of following only him, true relationship with him. Taking up our cross and following him. *Bonhoeffer* - "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."

Disabuses us of the well-intentioned "you do you" mentality of our day. The way is consuming but it is life. Not a hobby, but an identity.

It is narrow, requiring we stick close to him. Which way will we choose?

Two Trees: "Beware the false prophets..." Having just instructed us to not judge by means we were unwilling to be measured ourselves, he now tells us we must be evaluating our sources of teaching. Evaluate the fruit of those you follow. The metaphor works, healthy trees produce good fruit, but unhealthy trees don't produce fruit, or if they do it may be strange!

We have not lost the need to be on the lookout for "ravenous wolves." As long as sin remains there will be those looking to build a following and benefit from it. These will be cut down and thrown into the fire. Not a good result.

2 Timothy 2:18b "...They are upsetting the faith of some." (ESV)

Unsettling and leaves hurt people in their wake. False prophets untethered from Christ, making straight paths crooked for their own sake.

Christmas trees - Adorned to draw attention to themselves, cut off from the root, need to be watered and dying. There is no fruit.

Proximity is vital for this evaluation. You can't tell if a tree is producing avocados or walnuts from a mile away. You have to get close enough to see. Jesus is saying don't be swayed by charisma but look at character. Judge by the metrics he would, do they smell like the Savior? Do they seem to need Jesus? Do they point you to Jesus?

Those obedient will live with a Kingdom Ethic that reflects Christ.

Two Claims: This is the one I wrestle with the most. "Not everyone who says to me "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom..."

There are those who are calling Jesus Lord who will be turned away from eternity. They may have the appearance of citizens of the kingdom, they know the right words, even witness wonders that we expect to be of the Lord but he says they are not.

This trips me up. How can the miraculous happen, deliverance happen, and it not be of the Lord? I was reminded of *Moses striking the rock* - God commanded him to speak to the rock, instead, he was disobedient and hit it twice. Yet the water flowed. The miracle happened. But Moses was punished for the disobedience.

Tied to obedience, right obedience.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 "But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. [2] For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, [3] heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, [4] treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, [5] having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people." (ESV)

"Throughout the Bible, God's will is identified far more often with acts of compassion, mercy, and Love than with impressive displays of power. False Christianity always inverts this by preferring spectacular works over humble obedience and sacrificial love." Jethani

When we want the gifts for our comfort or supernatural itch but we don't want the giver. We want the thrill, but we don't surrender our hearts.

Telling someone you love them... Like verbally expressing love but never listening, serving, caring, being there.

Obedience matters, but it is not the action, it is the heart directing the action that ties us to Christ and his kingdom. And those that get it wrong by serving self and dabbling in things of Jesus will be told to depart because he never knew us.

Two Houses: "Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man that builds his house on the rock."

Don't be stupid - hearing and doing is building with a strong foundation. Hearing alone is building without support, it will collapse.

"Jesus makes it quite clear here that this righteousness, this righteousness in action, is what determines the standing or falling of the house. It is not enough to hear the words of Jesus. It is not enough even to admire and believe the words of Jesus. It's not enough to mouth the slogans of Paul or the Reformation. Jesus says we must "do" what he says: "Everyone who hears these words of mine, and does them," that is the man who builds on a rock (v. 24). Anyone who "hears these words of mine, and does not do them" is a fool. " P. Leithart

Always hearing a *story of adventure* but never *living* one.

John 15:13–14 "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. [14] You are my friends if you do what I command you." (ESV)

We stay rooted in Christ by living his Kingdom Ethic.

These are the warnings, expressly, don't miss the boat, do what you hear, be known, surrender all of who you are to the King and the way of his Kingdom.

Why do we wrestle with this truth? What makes us uneasy?

Negatively - we want to live for self, I want to determine what is right for me and surrender is the last word I want to hear or utter. We have enough on our plate, how can we add more?!

Positively - Wrestling with this as a “grace junky.” Hasn’t Jesus done it all? Won’t this spoil grace if I have to live a certain way (which is funny because we don’t mind telling other people how to live!) Is this earning or just appropriate effort?

These warnings are an invitation to full unreserved commitment to Jesus. They serve as an incitement to evaluation (first of self, and in others claiming Christ.)

A bracing call to something better than partial living. Than a hobby, part-time faith in Christ.

2) The Will of the Father

Those that enter the Kingdom are the ones that do the will of the Father. Doing what Jesus has taught - entering by the narrow gate, knowing, trusting, and living like Jesus really is the only way to the Father.

It is being known by Jesus. Fully surrendered to him, nothing in your life hidden or kept from his reign.

Submitting to his authority. When he finished the crowds were astonished... teaching as one who had authority. He wasn’t saying someone else taught - his regular refrain was “but I say.”

Lives of obedience lived under the rule of Christ. He has life. He is our reward.

Doing the will of the Father is not opposed to grace, rather situates us in our need for grace to realize obedience.

Because this King has come, and lived in perfect obedience for us, and given his life for us, we are freed to live not for self but for our sovereign, for Jesus. We are then empowered to live the Kingdom Ethic by his Spirit. Given grace to keep going. Jesus setting the pace as we run. And it is grace he gives, as he heals a leper immediately... someone who couldn’t accomplish restoration on their own.

"As long as I recognize this road is the one I am commanded to walk, and try to walk it in fear of myself, it is truly impossible. but if I see Jesus Christ walking ahead of me, step by step, if I look only at him and follow him, step by step, then I will be protected on this path." Bonhoeffer, Discipleship

Given the chance to go again when we fail, to take step after step through this gate that is narrow as we are kept by Christ. Fruit of repentance growing in our lives.

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Doing the will of the Father leads us back to the beatitudes.

As those poor in spirit, in need of rescue, redemption, and a Savior.

As those who mourn, who ache for renewal and restoration of the world.

As the meek, living for the glory of another.

As those hungry and thirsty for righteousness, for obedience, for being set apart for God. Satisfied only in Jesus.

As the merciful, extending what we have received to others in need.

As the pure in heart, humbling coming again and again to Christ for help and purpose.

As peacemakers, ambassadors of reconciliation, God making his appeal through us.

As those persecuted for righteousness' sake, reviled because of Jesus. Never wavering because there is nowhere better to be than in his will.

This is what we season and illuminate the world with, this is what we smell like. When we live by Christ's manifesto the world will be attracted to him and the Father will be glorified.

The Sermon on the Mount brings us here to the decision of which way will we walk, what tree will we follow and become, what claim will we make, and what house will we build.

1 Peter 2:4–5 “As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, [5] you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (ESV)

Let’s resolve to make this our way. To be obedient to Christ, to live his way. For his glory and our good, because ours is the Kingdom of Heaven.