

The Great Divide¹

Matthew 7:13-27

Call: Adaptation from Ps 95:1-2, Matt 7:24-25 and Matt 16:18

Scripture Reading: Ps 1:1-3; James 2:14-18

I. Intro

Today, we come to our final text in the Sermon on the Mount. We've been in this text for around 25 weeks, spread over the last three falls. And, today, we've finally reached the conclusion. And what we find in this last text of the sermon is "The Great Divide," as Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls it, or what may be called the parting of the ways. It's as if Jesus is asking directly, "Ok, what are you going to do with my words now? It's not enough to simply listen to them." To us, he would say, "it's not enough to simply read my words or hear my words. What are you going to do with them?"

We knew it had to come to this, didn't we? A great divide. A fork in the road. The title of the series itself implied two ways of living: an upside down way and a right-side up way. But, now at the end, we come to this text, and we wish Jesus wouldn't make it so demanding, that he wouldn't make it so dividing. We would rather Jesus have simply finished with the Golden Rule, *"So, in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you."* It's so simple. It's so brilliant. Although it's a command, it doesn't sound so demanding, so direct. We wish Jesus would have finished with that and left us on the high, brilliant note. But, he doesn't. So, we come to a razor-sharp divide. A decision must be made. What are you going to do with his words in the Sermon on the Mount?

So, we come to this razor-sharp divide that is this text. And, in this text, there are two gates, where we get a division between authentic disciples and the world. There are two trees where we get a division between authentic disciples and false prophets. There are two doers, where we get a division between authentic disciples and sensational prophets and there are two houses, where we get a division between authentic disciples and non-authentic disciples. Indeed, this is a searching and sobering text today.

First of all, the two gates, verses 13-14.

II. The Two Gates (13-14)

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. The Narrow Gate

There are only two ways to live, Jesus says, on hard street or on easy street. There is no third option here.

¹ This title comes from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's title for this text in *The Cost of Discipleship*.

Notice Jesus begins with a command: “enter.” This is not an invitation. It is a command. It means a decision must be deliberately made. It does not just happen. No one drifts through the narrow gate, for it is small and hard to find.

B. The Hard Way

The narrow gate leads to living on hard street. This is the difficult way to live. I think here Jesus is recognizing that his way, the way of the Sermon on the Mount will be difficult. Living right-side up in an upside-down world won't be easy, for it is a deeper righteousness than even the Scribes and Pharisees. It goes to the heart. To be in the world but not of the world, as he says in John, is not easy. There is tension all along this route. It is also difficult because this is the way of denying myself, taking up my cross and following Jesus. But, the narrow way is what we were made for. We become more and more human as we walk this way, the right-side up way. His words match our humanity.

The crowds that day that heard Jesus speak the sermon saw it this way. We see their response in verses 28-29: *28 And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, 29 for he was teaching them as one who had **authority**, and not as their scribes.* Jesus spoke with authority. The crowds that day sensed he had the right to say these things, and that what he said fit with reality. His words matched their reality.

C. Destination of the Hard Way

And, what are travelers on hard street destined for? Life and life eternal.

D. The Wide Gate & Easy Street

On the other hand, the wide gate is easy to find, easy to walk through. You can drift through this one. And, it leads to easy street. On this street, I don't need to throw off any baggage. I can take all my baggage with me, I can take all my things with me. This way is easy. There are no boundaries or tough decisions. There is unbridled freedom, absolute independence and total autonomy. I can live entirely for myself with nothing to tie me down. This is the upside-down way, and it is very enticing.

E. Destination of Easy Street

But, what's the destination of the wide road? Destruction. Notice that Jesus does not say that he will destroy them. It's that the wide road simply destines people for destruction. Why? Because that way is not how we were created. To live that way is to live less than human. It's to live the survival of the fittest mentality. And, when you live that way, you destine yourself to destruction. E Stanley Jones says it this way, “I see the eternal fitness of the [Jesus' words] - it fits the soul like a glove fits the hand. It is the way we are made to live, and to try to live some other way is not only foolish, but is impossible. You cannot live against life and get away with it” (Jones, 13). Jesus says you can't live against the Sermon on the Mount and get away with it. You destine yourself to destruction.

F. Minority Movement

Note lastly, that many people will find the wide gate, but not many will find the narrow gate. I think Jesus is preparing his followers here to be a minority movement. After all, his model was a minority movement. His model was to invest heavily in the transformation of a few, for the sake of the many. Maybe this is a gentle reminder to us that we shouldn't be overly concerned about numbers in our churches.

Jesus moves onto two trees, verses 15-20.

III. The Two Trees (15-20)

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.

A. The Command

With the two trees, we get a division between authentic disciples and false prophets. As Luther said, whereas the two gates divide disciples from "overt non-believers," the two trees divide disciples from "covert non-believers" (Bruner, 352).

Jesus once again begins with a command: "Beware." We must always be careful of false prophets who want to lead us astray. We must be on guard for them, because they look just like Christians, being part of the church.

B. The Recognition

So, how are we to recognize them? Jesus says it twice, verses 16 and 20: we recognize them "by their fruits." We recognize them by what they produce. We recognize them through their track record. Trees and plants manifest their nature in their fruit. Likewise, what people do reveals the kind of person they are. Eventually, a person's deeds will reveal their heart.

C. The Fruit

Now, in context, I think the fruit he is talking about here is everything he's been saying in the Sermon on the Mount.

- Are the beatitudes beginning to emerge in a person's life?
- Is the person mourning over their sin?
- Are they becoming more and more merciful?
- Are they becoming more and more makers of peace?
- Are they growing in controlling their anger and their lust?
- Are they growing in authentic speech such that their yes is yes and their no is no?
- Is there a desire to love their enemies and pray for them?
- Are they growing in giving, praying and fasting without needing other's attention?
- Are they seeking first his kingdom and right relationships?

- Are they becoming more and more a golden ruler, not condemning others but helping and praying for others?

In summary, are the beatitudes and “do-attitudes” emerging in a person? Not that the person is perfect, but are these character traits and actions emerging? Eventually the fruit will reveal the kind of tree they truly are, for grapes do not grow from thornbushes or figs from thistles. And, healthy trees bear good fruit, while diseased trees bear bad fruit.

D. The Destination

Notice again that the destination of false prophet is destruction, verse 19. John the Baptist used the same words for judgment on those who bear bad fruit. As Dale Bruner says, “A Jesus without judgment, a Jesus who does not care about the content of people’s lives, does not exist” (Bruner, 355). That kind of Jesus does not exist. Jesus cares deeply about how we live our lives.

E. The Help

Again, this is why being part of an authentic community is so important. Not only do we affirm each other’s gifts and fruits. But, we also help each other recognize false prophets. If you try to be a lone ranger Christian, recognizing false prophets on your own will be very difficult. But, within an authentic community, we can help each other discern correctly.

Jesus now moves onto two doers, verses 21-23.

IV. The Two Doers (21-23)

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.’

A. The Astonishing Language

Here, we get a division between authentic disciples and sensational prophets. Whereas the two trees divided disciples from false prophets, the two doers divides disciples from sensational prophets.

Jesus uses astonishing language here. First of all, he uses “Lord” in reference to himself. In our day and age, this doesn’t strike us as unusual, but in the first century, this would be extremely audacious to say the least. The Romans called Caesar Lord, and the Jews called God, Lord. So, here in this text, Jesus is equating himself with God. Whoa! That would have awakened everyone! Secondly, he equates his words in the sermon with the will of the Father. To do the Sermon on the Mount is to do the will of the father. But, notice, Jesus does not say the father, he says, “my father.” No first century rabbi would call God, “my” father. This is astonishing language, as Jesus is making everything about himself. And, we’ll come back to this at the end.

B. The Sensational Prophets

Now, the point of these verses is that some people within the church are doing sensational things – prophesying, casting out demons and doing mighty works – all “in Jesus’ name,” and yet have no relationship with him. Which makes us ask – can people actually do all that stuff and still not belong to him? Answer: Yes. These are not signs of people belonging to Christ. Jesus can use a person to do any of these things, but they are not signs that a person is his disciple. After all, God spoke through Balaam’s donkey in the Old Testament (Numbers 22:21-39). They are simply signs of the power of Jesus’ name. As one writer says, “It is possible to work *for* Jesus and yet not live *under* him” (Bruner, 357). In other words, it is possible to be successful at Jesus work without submitting to his words, as found here in the Sermon on the Mount. There is nothing sensational about these words.

C. The “Ordinary” Disciple

The Sermon on the Mount is all about ordinary life. It explains how to live right-side up in ordinary life –

- How to make simple everyday decisions involving anger, marriage, language and lust
- How to respond to people who are not nice
- How to pray, give, fast, while not serving idols or judging
- How to trust in the Father by looking at birds and flowers.

This is not sensational or flashy stuff. This is ordinary, everyday type stuff, which is what authentic discipleship is all about, making Jesus Lord of every area of life. Not just saying Lord, Lord, but *making* him Lord.

The earliest Christian confession is Jesus is Lord. To say Jesus is Lord, or as in this passage, to authentically call him “Lord, Lord” is to *make* him Lord of life by doing the Sermon on the Mount. And, that brings up one of the prevailing ills of our time here in the west. There is often a disconnect between behavior and belief. It is now thought that belief and action can be separated. That’s not the view of Jesus. Belief and action go together. Faith and fruit go together. The fact is that if I confess Jesus as Lord, then do not live it at any particular moment, at that particular moment, someone or something else is Lord of my life: culture, reputation, financial security, comfort, glands, fear, etc. Something else is Lord. Jesus is not Lord at that particular moment. And, the life of discipleship is about *making* Jesus Lord of every area of life.

So, we’ve had a division between authentic disciples and the world, authentic disciples and false prophets and authentic disciples and sensational prophets. Now we come to the two houses, a familiar text to us.

V. The Two Houses (24-27)

24 “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

A. The Foundations

Well, this is a familiar parable to many of us. Here is the division between authentic disciples and inauthentic disciples. In reality, the two houses are two foundations. There are two options for building the foundations of our lives: hearing Jesus' words and putting them into practice, or hearing Jesus' words and not putting them into practice. Notice that both the wise man and foolish man hear the words. The difference is in the doing. Dale Bruner again, "The house that crashes is the house of the person who find Jesus' words important enough to hear, but not realistic enough to live" (Bruner, 361). The house that crashes considers Jesus' words too naïve, too narrow-minded, too old, or simply not practical enough to live in the modern world. Isn't that how Jesus is viewed in our world today?

B. The Rock

The truth is that we are all building a house of life, and we all are building on some foundation, some philosophy, some worldview, some belief system. And, Jesus is inviting his hearers to build their house on his words, because they are the most stable foundation in the world. His words are the rock – not a rock – the only rock which is solid.

C. The Storms

And, what is the evidence of our foundation? How do we know which foundation we have built our house upon? It's when the storms come. When the storms of life come, either the house of our life impressively remains standing or it falls with a great crash. Authentic disciples are not spared the storms of life. The storms come to all, but only those who build on the rock remain standing. And, these are the ones who don't just hear the words of Jesus and walk away. The solid foundation is found in hearing *and doing* his words.

VI. Implications

A. "Doing"

Well that's our text. As I said, it is a searching and sobering text. Hopefully you will have noticed that one key element throughout all four of the illustrations is the focus on "doing," doing the words of the Sermon. The word "do" is the key word of this text. Although not easy to see in the English, it occurs eight times in these verses.

Over the years, there have been many Christians who interpret what Jesus says in the sermon as un-doable, so they call the Sermon "Ethics for a future time," or "Ethics for only the spiritual powerhouses." But, here in the conclusion, we see clearly that Jesus thinks his teaching is workable in life. It is livable he says. It is realistic and practical. The early church saw it this way. They viewed it correctly. They viewed it with the "Just Do It" view. Nike didn't pen those words. The early church penned those words, and they penned them regarding the Sermon on the Mount.

But, it raises the question: Does this text go against Paul's salvation by grace alone? Well, no. Faith in Jesus is not really faith unless or until it acts. This is what James talks about which we read in our scripture reading, "*faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead*" (James

2:17).

[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.”*

If we trust Jesus, we will do what he says.

B. Jesus

And, so you can see that the great crisis posed by the Sermon on the Mount is the preacher on the mount. What are we going to do with him? As we went through this text did you notice the number of first person pronouns? The other key to this text besides the word “do” is the pronouns. Jesus repeatedly says I, me and mine. As we mentioned earlier, he is making himself the central point of our decision. He is standing at the fork in the road. What are we going to do with him?

- Is he good?
- Does he really know what he’s talking about?
- Do his words match with reality?
- And, does he really want what is best for us?

This is the great crisis. This is the great decision that we all have to make. Most people think he is naïve. Most people think he is narrow-minded. Most people think he doesn’t fit in the modern world, which leads people to drift through the wide gate, onto easy street, making their house a house of cards.

What will we do with the preacher on the mount? There are only two options. There is no third option. Will we follow him on the narrow way, or not? If we think he is good and he knows what he is talking about, we will trust him and do what he says to do.

C. Moving Forward

So, what are you going to do? I know what I’m going to do. I am going to go back to the beginning of the sermon. I’m going to go back to “Blessed are the poor in spirit, right-side up are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

To be poor in spirit is to admit we can’t make it without him. To be poor in spirit is to admit we are hopeless without him. Therefore, to throw ourselves entirely upon him, upon his grace and mercy and power. And, when we do that, we build our house on the rock and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Amen.

D. Reflection

At this time, I’m going to have a guided moment of silence for all of us. I’m going to invite James and team up here to play some instrumental music while we spend some time in silence.

First of all, can you say “Lord Jesus” this morning? Can you say those words this morning?

If you can say “Lord Jesus” this morning, I want to invite you to consider the entire sermon.

And, I know we don’t have all the words of the sermon up here, but feel free to open your Bibles too. I want to invite you to think through the sermon right now.

- Tell Lord Jesus exactly where you like his sermon. Tell him and ask him that those things would be made manifest in you.
- Next, tell Lord Jesus where you resist his sermon, where you are afraid to do his sermon. Ask him to please overcome the resistance and fear and grant you the grace to become more right-side up in your life.

Let me finish this time with this assurance. Hear Jesus say to you, “Do not be afraid. My grace is sufficient for you. And, once I grab hold, I will not let go. I will see the job through. I will continue to turn you right-side up. I will never, ever give up on you. And, I am with you always to the very end of this age.”

Amen

Benediction

Prayer Team

Now, receive this benediction adapted from Hebrews:

“Now may the God of peace, who brought up from the dead, Jesus our Lord, the great Shepherd of the sheep, equip and empower you in every good thing to do His will (all the things found in this great sermon), working in you that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus our Lord, to whom be the glory forever and ever.”

Amen.

Go in peace.

Resources

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

E Stanley Jones, *The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person*

Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Christbook: Matthew 1-12*

Darrell Johnson, *Living in Sync: Studies in the Sermon on the Mount (Regent College Course)*

Abraham Kuyper, *Louvanne Movement*

Grant Osborne, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT*

Jonathan Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*

John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*