



Sermon on the Mount: An Invitation to New Creation

Session 10 “The Narrow Path”

Jesus says some tough things in the Sermon on the Mount, doesn't he? When we study this sermon, we might be tempted to gloss over the challenging parts or to interpret them in a way that makes the tough parts easier to swallow. But, if we want to take seriously the call to “follow in the way of Jesus,” this includes the tough teachings he gives us as well. In Matthew 7:13-29, Jesus presents to his listeners a series of decisions. He describes two ways (broad and narrow), two teachers (false and true), two pleas (words and deeds), and finally two foundations (sand and rock).¹

The “narrow way” is a particularly tough one for many of us. In our culture, when we say someone is “narrow-minded,” this is not necessarily a compliment. Narrow might not be a word or a concept that we are drawn toward. What does Jesus mean when he says, “But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it?” A key to interpreting this difficult passage is to recognize that in each of the decisions Jesus invites us to make, there is a common theme: obedience. Dallas Willard says:

The narrow gate is not, as so often assumed, doctrinal correctness. The narrow gate is obedience—and the confidence in Jesus necessary to it. We can see that it is not doctrinal correctness because many people who cannot even understand the correct doctrines nevertheless place their full faith in him. Moreover, we find many people who seem to be very correct doctrinally but have hearts full of hatred and unforgiveness. The broad gate, by contrast, is simply doing whatever I want to do.²

Jesus continues this theme of obedience into each set of choices he presents, concluding his Sermon on the Mount with the invitation to not simply hear his words, but to put them into practice. True disciples don't just listen, they also do what he says. Jesus spent a good portion of his sermon showing us that we can do the right things from the wrong spirit, and that the heart from which our actions flow matters as much as the actions themselves. But he concludes his sermon with a push toward applying his teachings to our lives. Our response to receiving his words of love and grace will be to demonstrate this love and grace to others. The word Jesus uses to describe this reaction is “fruit.” And fruit is not produced by simply trying harder to be good or do the right thing. Fruit naturally flows from a life rooted in the love and grace of Jesus.

¹John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 193.

²Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 275.

Matthew 7:13-29

15 “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ 23 Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

24 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

Questions for Discussion

1. What stood out to you, encouraged you, or challenged you from this past Sunday’s sermon?
2. Why do you think it’s significant that Jesus’ warning against false prophets comes right after his discussion of the wide and narrow road?
3. Last week, we discussed Jesus’ warning against judgment (Mt. 7:1-6). Yet, in Matthew 7:15-20, Jesus tells us to pay attention to the “fruit” in someone’s life to determine whether they are a true or false prophet. What do you think the difference is between these two seemingly disparate bits of advice? How might they work together?
4. As you reflect on your own life, where do you see “fruit”?
5. What helps you put into practice the things you are learning? What do you think prevents you from doing this?
6. Read Matthew 7:24-26. What do you learn about the importance of obedience from the example Jesus uses? Have you ever experienced or witnessed an example of his analogy?
7. What has been your greatest take-away from this Sermon Series? What is something you would like the group to pray for you about as you seek to put into practice the things you are learning?