

# Enter by the Narrow Gate

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**Bible Text:** Matthew 7:13-20  
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If you will turn with me to Matthew chapter seven and we will be reading verse 13 through 20.

The Word of our Lord says:

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.<sup>1</sup>

Let's pray.

*Oh Lord, we thank you for giving us such helpful instruction to teach us to know where we are and the way in which we should go. Oh, Lord, that you would protect your flock this morning by an outpouring of your Holy Spirit upon them to illuminate, to instruct. Oh, we thank you, oh Lord, for sending this great help to us this morning. Amen.*

This passage of Scripture that is here before us this morning is so wonderful because it does what the Word of God does so well and that is to shine a light upon the path of our feet. And here in this passage we learn that you can know where you are in the world. There is in one sense a person can be lost, but in another sense, according to this passage, no one is lost if they understand this principle, if they understand that God is instructing them, that there are only two roads that people are walking on. There are only two gates.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 7:13-20.

So in this passage we find another expression of really the greatness of the love of God to show mankind where he is. You can know today exactly where you are and exactly where you are going. That is the certainty and the clarity of the blessing that is here in this passage of Scripture. And so as every time we open up the Word of God we always find ourselves really basking in his love as he shines a light on the path of our feet and he tells us who we are and he tells us where we are going and he tells us what road we are on and he shows us whether we entered the narrow pathway or the wide pathway.

And I just want to observe this morning that this text it begins with a gate and a path and it ends with a fire. And it helps us to examine everything between the time of entry by the gate and the time of that fire or that entry into glory.

And so here is in Matthew chapter seven in this section, there is such a dramatic opportunity for us to consider our latter end and everything that goes before it and to determine with certainty what road we are traveling on now. And that is what God has brought to this congregation so that we would inspect our lives, so that we would ask this question. What gate? What road?

And so Jesus has been going about and he has been preaching in Galilee and now he has sat down with his disciples and the multitudes are there obviously if you read the other passages of Scripture that document this scene. And while Jesus' primary concern is with his disciples, he is also concerned with the multitudes that are there as well and he has been preaching the kingdom of God.

The Sermon on the Mount has been called the manifesto of the King and so in the Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus Christ is unveiling the way of his kingdom and the destinations of the two kingdoms and he has been explaining the nature of it in many, many details and he has just left us in the previous verses with a very vivid image of someone standing and knocking at a door.

And we talked about how vulnerable you are when you are knocking at the door. There is no greater place of vulnerability to be knocking at a door because you have no idea if it will ever be opened at all. And here he, in this next section, he brings us to an entirely different image that is also wonderful and helps us to understand. He brings us to the image of standing at a gate or walking on a pathway. And in the beautiful way that Jesus Christ teaches his disciples, he helps us to understand our lives by giving us various illustrations.

Now when we get to verse 13 in the Sermon on the Mount we have to understand that it marks a section where Jesus is wrapping things up. He is beginning several principles that form the whole conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount that we have been in for several months here. And he is now beginning to conclude the sermon and bringing forth a number of broad implications of everything that he has said. What it looks to me like is that Jesus now begins a sort of a dramatic sorting out process that he has taken everything that he has said before and now he is sorting it out into one way or another. It is almost as if all the things that have... that he has spoken of before are now falling upon this point

and they are going in one way or another. They are either going to this eternal fire or they are going to his heavenly glory, the two kingdoms that are before us here.

And so there is this great divide that Jesus Christ is explaining that there are two gates, that there are two kinds of trees, that there are two kinds of prophets, that there are two kinds of houses. And so with that, he takes us to his final words in the Sermon on the Mount. So we are finding ourselves, no in the very conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount after Jesus has spoken of many things about his kingdom.

And so in this whole manner of sorting out, I really believe he has in mind and he desires his disciples to have in mind everything that he has already said because he started with the Beatitudes and he told his disciples what it means to be a Christian, both in their hearts and in their relationships and he has been explaining the fundamental characteristics of the members of his kingdom and he has spoken of the way that they are toward him. They are poor in heart, poor in Spirit. They mourn. They are meek. They hunger and thirst after righteousness. This is the mark of a Christian in his heart that all these things are in operation. And I think he is taking these things and sorting them out to one road or another. And then he speaks of the relationships of those who are in his kingdom that the blessed ones who are merciful, who are pure in heart, who are peacemakers and who are persecuted, these things have to do with the relationships of those who are in his kingdom and he says for them to rejoice and be glad for great is their reward in heaven.

And because of the way that they are in their hearts and because of the way that they are in their relationships, they draw fire and they are rejected. They do not fit in. They are persecuted for righteousness' sake and so there is this persecution and pressure that comes upon them and they might be tempted to withdraw into their own little society only and to be secluded from the world. And Jesus anticipates and he says, "No, no, you are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. It is not appropriate for the sons of the kingdom to retreat, but rather to play their role in the world and that is to be as salt and as light in the world."

And then he explains to them how they walk in the world in that way and that is by obeying the law of God and then he begins this very long section on explaining the law of God. And he says, "You have heard that it was said..." And then he speaks about how people have completely misinterpreted the law and then he explains the way that Moses meant it in the law and how it ought to be applied today.

So he is saying that his disciples, they walk by a different drummer. They obey the law of God.

And then he begins to speak about their religious lives. Not only as they are out in the world and obeying the law of God, but they also have a life in the community where there is the giving of alms, there is praying, there is fasting, all these things that happen in the community. And what he is saying is that it is not enough to give. It is not enough to fast. It is not enough to pray. But where is your heart? Jesus is always going down below the

surface of outward appearances and appealing to his disciples to see the true nature of the members of his kingdom and that is that they don't pray for men. They pray crying out in dependence and humility before God. They don't fast for men. They fast to set the captives free. And they don't give in order to be seen by men, but exclusively for God.

And so they find themselves in the secret place. Their life with God is not only public, but it is also very secret and that is also a test of the discipleship, of a true child of this kingdom.

And so with all of these things Jesus has been in a sorting process. But now he comes and intensifies that sorting process and he speaks about that there are two gates and two ways and two destinations and two kinds of trees and two kinds of houses. And he is sorting out the wheat and the chaff, the sheep and the goats, the light and the darkness. He is separating them all out and he needs to do that here in this place now to sort us out so that you know the road that you are on and the gate that you have entered through. You must ask: What gate did I enter through? You must ask: What road am I walking upon?

And so that is the nature of this passage of Scripture.

And, as I said before, he is picturing before us someone standing and there are two doors. And in front of one of the doors are multitudes of people. It is where it is happening. It is where everyone wants to be. And they are gathering there.

You know what happens whenever there is a crowd. People just want to crowd. When you start a small crowd it gets bigger. And that is what is happening at the wide gate. Everyone wants to be there. Everyone who is anyone is there. And then there is this other gate and it seems as if no one is interested in that place, that there is really nothing happening there. It looks like a complete uninteresting place to enter. I mean, wouldn't you think that people would be wanting the very best things, that people would be gathering because that is where it is at, that is where you ought to be? Well, that is the way we normally think. No one wants to go through a gate where no one is unless they are just simply in a hurry.

And so the Lord Jesus begins with a command in verse 13.

“Enter by the narrow gate.”<sup>2</sup>

And this is a command that is just pregnant with urgency and it is another one of the imperatives that we find in the Sermon on the Mount. And it is a call to action. It is a call to enter into the narrow gate. Enter into the narrow gate. And it is a call to anyone who is walking on a broad road, who has already entered and is walking along that road that he is going to describe in the very next verse.

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 7:13.

So Jesus is saying there is something that must be done. And so this is a loving and gracious command to anyone who is walking on the broad way because he is holding out his hands and calling out to those who are walking on the wide pathway that is headed to destruction. And he... those who are condemned to death, he holds out his hands. Those who are being brutalized by the bad shepherd, those who are drinking the poisoned water, those who are eating the food that has glass in it and it is tearing them up inside, because the devil always abuses his disciples. And he is holding out a cry and he is saying "Enter by the narrow gate," he is appealing to all those who are on the broad way because they are going to be destroyed.

And so it is a gracious command that indicates how patient he has been with anyone on that broad way, how merciful he has been, how he hasn't collected you up, but he has allowed you time, even to drink more of the poison, even to eat more of the shards, even to continue to do the things that would tear you to pieces. He continues to cry, "Enter, enter the narrow gate, enter the narrow gate." And so it is an appeal out of mercy and love. He is making room and really showing his patience.

And you notice what he says. He says, "Enter into the narrow gate." He doesn't say, "Think about me," or "Admire me" or, you know, "Consider mine the best way." He says, "No, enter in." That is a completely different kind of response.

I know so many people who appreciate the morality and sort of the fruits of Christianity, but they never enter in and all their appreciation will do nothing at all. And that is why when Jesus called Matthew he said, "Follow me." He didn't say, "Admire me." He didn't say, "Pay attention to what I have done." He says, "Follow me."

And so Jesus here is saying, "Enter into the narrow gate."

Now there are so many issues that come to mind when we think about Jesus' appeal here. One of the things that comes to my mind is a problem that you have when you grow up in the Church and you have heard the gospel so many times and it has been preached over and over again and it just becomes so common and there is no sense of the reality of it, there is no sense of the reality of what it means to walk on the broad way. There is no terror. There is no understanding. There is just deadness of heart. And there is no understanding of the sweetness that is there, because perhaps as a young person you have just heard it over and over and over again and it is just a common thing. But you lose an understanding of what it is at stake here and everything is at stake.

You know, we often forget how it is such a miracle that anyone can enter the kingdom of heaven. It is nothing short of a miracle to enter the kingdom of heaven because the Bible says that we are dead in our trespasses and our sins. And how do you make someone dead alive? Only by a miracle.

And what happens often to people is they hear preaching and they are convicted in their hearts and so they think, "Ok, I am going to clean that up. I am going to clean. I am going to change that in my life." But they have never entered the kingdom of heaven.

And one can continue to clean his life up all the way until the branch is broken off and thrown into the fire. So if there is anyone in here who has been hearing the preaching and has been convicted of the things that are said and has tried to clean up their life, but they know that they are walking on that wide pathway, recognize how absolutely worthless all of your morality is. Recognize how absolutely unhelpful any of your moral changes will get you.

I mean, let's be really honest about the significance of making changes in our lives. Let's say that perfect righteousness is here, the righteousness of God. You shall be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect. And let's say that you are converted and you are somewhere down here. And let's say you double your moral abilities and you go from here to here. And then let's say in 10 years you doubled it again. Your sanctification is working. God is changing your life. He has transformed your marriage. He is transforming your mind. He is transforming your relationships. He is making you more like your heavenly Father. And in the third decade of your life you double it again. And there you are and the fourth decade you double it again and finally when he takes you home, you have doubled it again.

But how far off are you? How far does your moral life get you?

There are so many things to consider when we hear the words of Jesus, "Enter by the narrow gate."<sup>3</sup>

In the confession that our church subscribes to the Baptist Confession of 1689 it speaks of how great a miracle it is for one to be converted. And I have extracted some of the words out of it to help us see it.

We are dead in trespasses until being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit and thereby enabled to answer this call and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed.

When Jesus issues this call, "Enter by the narrow gate,"<sup>4</sup> it is a call to repentance. It is a call to faith, to believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ, to believe that Jesus was sent from his Father into the world to walk with sinners and to give his life as a sacrifice for their sins and to die and to be resurrected again to life at his Father's right hand and to spend the rest of the time interceding for his children. And it begins by believing in the gospel. And only those who repent and believe in the gospel can walk on this way. And it is an absolute miracle.

Today we are going to be baptizing some people who have repented and they have believed in the gospel and there are the fruits of their salvation that are so evident. And so Jesus is saying, "Enter by the narrow gate."

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Now I just want to continue discussing this issue of the narrow gate because this is a call to a remnant. This is the truth that God is going to separate his people into a very distinct society and in that society they will live in a completely different way than the rest of the world. We know where all the people are. But there are a few who enter by the narrow gate and walk by the difficult path and so we become pilgrims and strangers. We become the off scouring of the world. We become a peculiar people because we are walking on a narrow way. it is a narrow path. It is a pathway of two things. First of all, it is a pathway of restrictions and restraints, because God has come to sooth the madness of the human heart, to keep him from destroying himself and so God would restrict mankind from things that would harm him.

So part of the narrow path is that things have to be shed in coming in and in continuing on into that pathway. There are restrictions. That is why in the 10 Commandments, eight of them are thou shalt not, because there are things that are so harmful and damaging and horrible to the human soul and because God so loved the world that he provides good laws for them to live by to keep them from the madness of their own hearts, to keep them from the stupidity of the culture of their family or the foolishness and the bankruptcy of the culture of their friends or the whole message, you know, structure that is just constantly falling upon them by virtue of living in this world.

So he gives restrictions to hold us back from things so that we might be blessed.

And so he sets us on the narrow path on a way of regulation and we are regulated by the Word of God which, whenever people recognize that God wants to control their lives and regulate their lives—and he does—they are like many of the disciples of Jesus as we see in John chapter six verse 66 where many of his disciples withdrew from him.

And not only are there restrictions, but there are also affirmations. There are things that must be added that don't exist when one is unconverted. There are things that must be believed and there are things that must be embraced. There are positive commands to obey as well in order to be sons and daughters of a king.

And so there is a whole different view of life. There is either the wide or the narrow and that is it. This brings a whole different view of life to us. People often want us to be balanced. People want us to sort of find the golden mean as if somehow balance is the greatest virtue. Well, this is not the message of Scripture at all. Scripture does not lead you to a balanced life at all. It leads you to a completely binary life. It causes you to take up this cross and follow him. It causes you to leave everything and follow him. It is not a balanced life at all.

It gives you a whole different view of the majority. It gives you a whole different view of the world, that everyone is either on one road or on another and there is no middle ground. There is no way to bridge the two.

It is narrow. The term that Jesus uses here indicates that it is pressed in. It is like bounded by rocks. It is constrained. It is constricted. That is the narrow path.

But when you think of that you have to think: What is it protecting you from? And that is the beauty of its narrowness, because it literally deprives you of the things that would poison your soul and destroy your mind and your body and your relationships and, finally, your whole everlasting soul.

Jesus said in Luke 13:

“Strive to enter through the narrow gate.”<sup>5</sup>

And he meant to agonize, to struggle to get into the narrow gate.

I recall stories of men like John Newton and John Bunyan who cried out to God for months in agony that God would save them. And that is what we should do.

To enter the kingdom of heaven is not to just pray a prayer, but it is to agonize to enter into one place and one place alone.

Someone has said that this road, it is narrow at the beginning and it actually gets narrower. And you probably understand this by experience, that when you entered into that narrow gate that the way in which you lived was broader now than it is today, because God has sanctified you, because he is helping you to turn away from other things that are destroying you as well, things having to do with your pride, things having to do with your morality, things having to do with the use of your tongue.

The way is actually getting narrower for you, because God is saving you and he is purifying you. He has you under like silver is under a fire and the dross comes up and it is being slaked off and you are being purified. So there is a way in which the road actually gets narrower. When you find someone who claims to have been converted and the way that they are walking today is the same way that they walked when they are converted, they have not been converted, because they have been left in the same condition that they entered. That is a false conversion.

When you find people who continue to long for and imbibe in evil things it is because they have not been converted. We have known people who say they were saved, but they are no different today than the day that they said they were saved. That means that they were not converted at all. It was a false gospel that was preached to them and they preached it to themselves. They listened to a false teacher and they are on the broad way and they think they are on the narrow way.

There is really nothing more belittling in our modern culture than when someone tells you that you are too narrow. There is just ... I mean it is almost becoming illegal in certain places to be too narrow, to not be tolerant. And there are areas in this world where it is illegal to be narrow. And if you are narrow, you are always mean spirited in

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 13:24.



this modern, you know, tolerant culture and Jesus, though, contradicts that whole world view of tolerance because there are only two ways.

And then he tells us why we should enter the narrow gate.

“...for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction.”<sup>6</sup>

He is telling us why. He is arguing with us for why we should strive to enter into the narrow gate.

Now on the one hand it is so broad that there really are no boundaries. You can keep your philosophy. You can keep all of your idols. You can keep all of your practices. You can continue to talk and walk and live the way you have always lived and you can bring all of your ideas along. You can bring all of your friends along. It is no friend left behind and that is the kind of world that the broad road delivers. It is the place of democracy. It is such a roomy place, but it is an artificial roominess, because it does lead to destruction. And it doesn't just lead to destruction. It is destructive. There isn't a sin committed that doesn't immediately harm your soul.

You might think, oh, it feels good now, therefore it is ok now.

That is not true. It might feel good now, but it is destroying you now. And so even though the broad road appears to be easy, it really is the hardest of all the roads.

The Bible helps us to understand how good the path of life is. But this is a path of destruction because the devil treats his fellow travelers so poorly. He promises them everything and then he gives them nothing except sorrows in return.

And that is why Jesus said, “Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it.”

In Deuteronomy 28 we have, perhaps, one of the most vivid explanations of these two roads. In Deuteronomy 28 verse one through 14 we read of what actually happens to people on the narrow road.

Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God: Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 7:13.

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 28:10-6.

But when you get to verse 15 of Deuteronomy 28 there is a change that explains life on the broad road.

But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be the fruit of your body and the produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out.<sup>8</sup>

And if you go to verse 28 you read:

The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart. And you shall grope at noonday, as a blind man gropes in darkness; you shall not prosper in your ways; you shall be only oppressed and plundered continually, and no one shall save you.<sup>9</sup>

That is a picture of walking on the broad road.

And so here before us we have to ask: What road am I on?

You are only on one or the other and I pray that today the Spirit of God would make it so plain to you what road you are on, because only the Spirit of God can show you where you are.

And then there is a statement about the popularity of the wide gate and the broad way. There are many who go in by it. And that is the place where everyone is doing what is right in his own eyes. And so you are with the majority. How could you be wrong? You have entered where everyone else has gone. You have gone with the flow, but you have to understand where the flow is going.

And so the Lord Jesus Christ speaks of this matter of the door, the gateway. Jesus says:

“I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved.”<sup>10</sup>

He said:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Deuteronomy 28:15-19.

<sup>9</sup> Deuteronomy 28:28-29.

<sup>10</sup> John 10:9.

<sup>11</sup> John 14:6.

And so in proclaiming himself to be the door, to be the gate he is instructing us that there are those who enter in, but not through him. And those who have entered in a wrong way are on the wrong pathway though they may have claimed to be on the right pathway.

You can enter into the door of guilt. You can enter into the door of shame. You can enter into the door of trying to fix your life and get yourself a better life now or to get in without repenting, without truly believing in the gospel, without truly understanding that your life is not your own, but that you can add him and you can gain lots of business contacts and make your way in the world better and there are many people who have entered that way.

Some have entered by walking down an aisle and praying a prayer, an action that just does not exist in the whole corpus of what the Bible says about salvation.

We enter in the kingdom through Jesus Christ by repenting of our sins, by having faith in his shed blood on the cross, by believing that his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and by trusting in his death and in his resurrection that you have been buried with him and raised up to eternal life.

And there is only one single hope for you and that is the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses you from all of your unrighteousness and none of your works matter at all in your salvation.

While God calls us to obey him, progressively over our lives, no one ever got into the kingdom of heaven by obeying the laws of God except this one. Enter in by the narrow gate.

And then we see why people might reject the narrow way in verse 14.

“Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life.”<sup>12</sup>

And so there is difficulty that is here. It is narrow on the one hand. No one is there on the other hand it is also a more difficult way. There are things that need to be abandoned, that have become so comfortable to us and we want to keep them and we will keep them unless we repent until we are finally broken off and thrown into eternal fire.

But it is a compressed way and there are few who find it. Recognize those words. There are few who find it. Jesus is speaking to his disciples and those who are on the hill and there are few, even those who are interested who will find it because it is so easy to fake your way and not have a genuine faith, to have no true poverty of spirit, to have no true meekness before God.

But it leads to life. Not only does it lead to life, it is the pathway of life.

“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Matthew 7:14.

It is the path of life. And so while he says it is difficult... And I believe he is speaking about the persecutions, the rejections and also the cryings out to God as we shed our sins, as we repent, as we weep for our sins, it is difficult that way. But in another way it is not difficult at all because it is the path of life.

You know, how difficult is it for us, you know, all our lives to just continue to repent of our sins. The Christian life is summarized by repentance, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. That is why Martin Luther when he delivered his 95 Theses, the very first thesis was this.

“Our Lord and our Master Jesus Christ when he said repent willed that the whole life of believers would be repentance.”

And so that is the primary chord or the Christian life is repentance. Remember when we were talking about when you see a speck in your brother’s eye. What do you do first? You repent first. You come to him on a level plain as a fellow repenter.

The whole Christian life, everything, is summarized by repentance. That is how we make our way in progress in our sanctification. And so in that way it is difficult because we are constantly having to face the reality about ourselves about, you know, when we are saved we don’t realize how much of idolaters we really were. We knew we were idolaters, but then we just realize that we were worst idolaters than we thought we were. And we continue to find ways to repent and to be refreshed because refreshment is always the result of repentance and that is why when we come together to take the Lord’s supper as we will this morning, when we examine ourselves and we are mortified by our sins, we repent and it is called the cup of blessing with which we are blessed. It is the place of happiness. True repentance always issues in happiness, because one is set free.

So in one way it is difficult. In another way it is not difficult at all. It so far out performs the shards of glass that you eat and the poison water that you drink and the emotional trauma and the devastation and the lack of reality and the hardness and the pride and the hypocrisy that just fills your whole soul when you are an unrepentant sinner. So it is hard in one way, but in another way it is not hard at all.

In preparing for this I just thought of so many places to go and to read. You know while it is true that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of heaven, as we read in the book of Acts, on the other hand, if you want your broken heart to be healed, go to that water of life. If you want to be set free, go to that bread. If you want to be healed, then go to Jesus Christ. He will heal you. He will save you.

I am astonished at what God has saved me from. I shudder to think of where I would be today had not Jesus Christ made me repentant.

It is the way which leads to life and there are few who find it.

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<sup>13</sup> John 1:4.

His ways are pleasant ways and all his paths are peace. He is the tree of life. He is the resurrection and the life. He is the good shepherd. He is living water. He is living bread and he is the best door that anyone could ever enter by. I am so glad. I am so thankful for that door.

And then there is warning given of false prophets. It is interesting that he would follow this up, this whole thing of the two ways with false prophets because when you listen to a false prophet you end up on the broad way and you might not even know it unless the Holy Spirit would reveal it to you.

And so Jesus here in these words, “Beware of false prophets,”<sup>14</sup> he is addressing his disciples for how they evaluate anyone who is leading, anyone who is teaching and instructing and people are following. This is how you evaluate them.

Now I don't believe that Jesus is giving us a way for you to evaluate your brother or your wife necessarily. I think he does that in other places, but here he is speaking specifically of the evaluation of prophets.

So I don't believe he is just speaking about the general population, how you evaluate you brother, but how you evaluate those who are instructing. And he is showing his disciples how to have discernment, how to know the right from the wrong prophet and he is also acknowledging that the church will be subject to disturbances and that there will be false prophets that will come. This is a normal occurrence. The devil is always attacking the Church in one way or another and so there are these false prophets, here, ψευδοπροφητης (psyoo-dop-rof-ay'-tace), pseudo prophets.

In 2 Corinthians you can read about pseudo brothers, false brethren. In 2 Corinthians 11 you can read about false apostles. In 2 Peter chapter two, false teachers. In 1 Timothy four there are pseudo speakers and there are pseudo witnesses and there are pseudo christ. This term is used in a number of ways.

But here we find the key for understanding whether they are false or not and we have an obligation to test. That is why John says, “Test the spirits.” We have an obligation to do that. We cannot be silly sheep that have no discernment and just listen to the next person.

It is always remarkable to me when a teacher says something and then a follower, typically on a blog response, says, “Oh, thank you for just warning us,” rather than actually inspecting it themselves, rather than being good Bereans, rather than getting out their Bibles and comparing the messages and the messenger, rather than being wise and discerning to test the spirits to see if they are of the Lord.

We are so much like sheep. We just want somebody to tell us what to do. Just give me the bottom line.

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew 7:15.

I will never forget when we were going through our series on they sabbath, sermon number one, people who came up after that said, “Well, just tell us what is the bottom line.”

We said, “No, we are not going to tell you what the bottom line is. These are the principles of Scripture.”

Sermon number two, “Just tell us what we can and can’t do on the sabbath.

No, no, no, no, no, no. We are going to study the Scriptures. You must study the Scriptures. You must carefully inspect these things and understand them for yourself and not just be a stupid sheep.

Everyone just wants the bottom line rather than to actually test the spirits. And so Jesus is speaking about that, how to identify a false prophet. And they come in sheep’s clothing so we don’t know from outward appearances. That is one way you can’t know, because they are often so winsome and almost always amazing communicators and have such gifts and turns of phrases and things like that. They are very interesting. I love to listen to them sometimes because they come in sheep’s clothing. But inwardly they are ravenous wolves. So they are living a double life. They have an outward life and they have an inward life. They appear, you know, harmlessly compelling, but they are really... they are vicious wolves on the inside. It is so easy to counterfeit virtue. It is so easy to say things in a winsome way. It is so easy even to have good, right practices. It is even... a false teacher can even be delivering mostly right doctrine, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

So it is not just the content. It does include the content, but it is not only the content. It is also the life. This is why as a flock of sheep all of you should be very, very careful in your use of the internet, because you do not know these people. You are listening to them because they are amazing communicators. And you had better be very careful who you listen to, because you don’t know them.

It is so easy to counterfeit virtue.

They also they come to you to win you. They come to you. They come as angels of light as the apostle Paul spoke of in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 where he said:

“Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.”<sup>15</sup>

There are many, many things we could say about the identification of false teachers. Their words, their inner life, but we have to understand this, that they can be angels of light. So you should be very, very careful who you listen to.

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<sup>15</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:14-15.

This is why God has established the local church so that you can know your shepherds, so that you can know their fruit, so that you can look them in the eye and see their real manner of life so that you know them.

And while it is a blessing to have such amazing teachers, you know, in the internet you can get anything your heart desires. Mark that, anything your heart desires. But be very...

What happens often is that people end up with shepherds that they do not know and they are listening to people that they cannot verify and they really should not be their shepherds. God has designed it so that you know your shepherds and your shepherds know you. And that is inherent in this whole principle here that by their fruits you will know them. It is very personal. You know them. You have been in their house, perhaps. You have seen their manner of life. You have seen the results of their life. You have seen the things that have happened. So you can verify.

It is very dangerous for you to make your whole diet of instruction people you don't know and make them your shepherds. Now you can find a lot better communicators than the elders of this church and Sovereign Redeemer out on the internet. I guarantee you it won't take you long to find way, way smarter, better communicators than us. But the truth is, God has not designed it that they be your shepherds. He has designed it so that you would know your shepherds and your shepherds would know you and that is for his own glory and for your own protection and for the protection of the shepherd as well, so that the shepherd is accountable, so that the shepherd is not living a double life, but one life and so that the verification of the shepherd's life comes about when they are appointed by a congregation. You know how important it is to appoint shepherds. That is the job of a congregation.

And then he gives a number of illustrations on how you can tell the difference with the thorn bushes and there are thistles and there are grapes and there are figs. And what he is saying is that there is that false prophets can be known by the kind of fruit that comes out. It is the kind of fruit that comes out. Is it a grape or does it just look like a grape? You know, with a thorn bush, the thorn bushes that have purple berries on them and from a distance they might look like grapes, but they are not grapes at all and so you know them by their fruits, the kind of fruit that comes out. You will know the difference.

This makes it so clear how important it is that we not lay hands hastily on those who are being appointed as elders, but that we know them and that you know them. It is very important to have a relational church. If you don't have a relational church, how are going to get shepherds who are known?

If they are just pulpiteers, if they are platform men and that is all they are, how can you know that they are not false teachers? How can you know the true fruit of their lives?

And then Jesus tells us what a tree cannot do. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. And then in verse 19 the Lord Jesus reveals to us the destination of those two different ways.

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.<sup>16</sup>

So the Lord Jesus is coming and he is speaking to us again about the same subject of appearances. We must think beyond the appearances of things and be wiser in all these matters.

Ok. I would like to just give a couple of applications.

First of all, you know, are you on the narrow way? You know, have you entered through that gate?

The Lord Jesus is instructing his disciples so that they will know how to conduct themselves in the world and he is teaching us the same way, that we, like the disciples, should be hearing this question. What pathway are you on?

One thing that is clear is that Jesus desires that all of the people in the world know where they are. And I dare say that no one here is lost in the sense that they don't know where they are, because they are on one road or another.

If there is anyone who does seem confused about it, Dan and I would be delighted to spend as much time talking this through with you to see what kind of assurance or lack of assurance in your salvation you might have.

Let's pray.

*Oh Lord, how wonderful you are to tell us the truth about the way the world is working and where everything is leading. Oh God, I pray that you would open up our eyes. I pray that you would cause many of us here to enter by the narrow gate. Amen.*

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<sup>16</sup> Matthew 7:19-20.