“TWO PATHS, TWO GATES, TWO CHOICES”

Scripture: Matthew 7:13-29.

I want to start the lesson this morning a little differently than usual. We’re going to do a little hands-on exercise just to get you to think a little bit. [Christian box]

Jesus wraps up His sermon on the mount. Jesus’ essential message is this: If we want to enter the kingdom of heaven, then we must enter on the King’s terms. We are to do God’s will and that begins by establishing a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. If we are to become citizens of heaven then we must make Jesus our Lord and our King. He is the only way to heaven. He can be trusted. His words are true. They are life giving and life changing words. He is the only way to the Father. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6). We enter the kingdom of heaven only on the King’s terms. Those terms are laid out for us in the Sermon on the Mount. And it isn’t about morality or following a set of rules. It’s about a relationship with a holy, righteous and good God. We come to Him spiritually bankrupt. We have nothing. We have no righteousness of our own. In fact, as the KJV puts it so well, “we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” (Isa 64:6) Jesus taught that we should hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matt 5:6) and to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt 6:33). That should be our priority. That must be our life’s pursuit. Not the things of this world, but a relationship with Him. Then, as we submit to the Holy Spirit, He changes us from the inside out. All the things Jesus teaches in this sermon cannot be done in our flesh. We need Him to do His divine life-changing work in us and through us.

So Jesus comes to the end of His sermon and He says, “It’s time to make your choice. It’s decision time.” Some would say that Jesus is giving an invitation to come to Him, but invitations are optional. What Jesus gives here is a command. He, the King, is telling us what to do. And the question is simply this: Are we going to obey Him or not? His terms or our own terms? Let’s read Jesus’ words beginning in verse 13. I will read the entire text and then we will go back and look at each.

READ Matthew 7:13-28

Verses 13-14 tell us there are two paths and two gates. Conceivably there are two possible ways to heaven. There is the easy way and the wide gate and there is the hard way and the narrow gate. Those on both paths think they are headed for heaven. John MacArthur commenting on this passage said, “Both roads are religious. Both promise God. Both promise heaven. Nobody is selling hell.” But only one of these roads, the hard path and the narrow gate, actually leads to eternal life. The other is headed straight for destruction. Many people take the easy way and enter through the wide gate. The gate is wide because it wants to accommodate anyone and everyone [I think of that new Verizon commercial]. It doesn’t really matter what you believe. The important thing is that we are all unified and we get along. This path is about what we do. It is the path of works, merit and human achievement. “Hey, your work, your goodness is good enough. Come join us and feel good about yourself. Bring all your baggage with you. God loves you and so do we.” The narrow path says there is only one truth and that is that you are a sinner. You are not good enough. You need to repent and turn to Christ to save you. “You are not OK, you need divine intervention, you cannot make it on your own; you need the grace of God. This way is all about divine accomplishment. Jesus did it all for you. You can’t do anything yourself.” People have accused those following this path of being narrow minded and… yes, they certainly are! Jesus command is straightforward - “Enter by the narrow gate.”

READ Matthew 7:15. False prophets are all around us. There is a church or religious group on every corner and around every bend. The various messages come to us by television, radio, internet, Facebook, Twitter, billboards, bumper stickers. The voices of false prophets reach our ears every day whether we want to hear what they say or not. They will even come and knock on your door or leave literature for you to read.

How do you know whether they are sheep (true prophets) or wolves (false prophets)? How can we know for sure? Jesus tells us…by their fruit.

When I was at DTS I did a lesson on this very subject entitled, “How to tell a wolf from a sheep.” I used as my reference 1 John 4:1-6 and I offered a three-question test.

(1) Who do they say Jesus is? A true prophet will confess Jesus Christ (a) is God and (b) was God in the flesh. Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully human. He is God, which means He was not a created being. He is human – He lived on this earth and took on human flesh. Any teaching other than that Jesus was both fully God and fully man is false.

(2) How do they claim you are saved, accepted by God? The Bible teaches that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The Gospel message is that “we were dead in our sins” (Eph 2:5), but God loved us enough to send His Son to die for us, to pay the penalty for our sins (John 3:16); that He died, was resurrected, and ascended back to the Father in heaven where He now makes intercession for us. Because of what Jesus did for us on the cross we can have eternal life (John 3:16). When we were saved, the Holy Spirit convicted us of this truth and of our sin and of judgment. We then accepted the Gospel message, believed it by faith (Eph 2:8). Any works-based message of salvation is false.

(3) Does their message agree with Jesus’ and the apostles teachings in the Bible? Any message that does not agree with what the Bible says is false. If they use a standard apart from the word of God don’t listen to them, no matter how appealing their message might be.

In this passage Jesus adds another very important way you can tell a false prophet – examine their life. A diseased tree bears bad fruit.

Well now we come to what has to be the most terrifying, troubling words in the Bible for religious people, for so-called Christians. READ Matthew 7:21-23. Psalm 1:6 says, “For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” You have all these religious people, in many cases good, moral people, who believe they are saved. They’ve been doing all this stuff in the name of Christianity and yet, in the end, Jesus doesn’t know them. That’s scary! “Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness.” Why did Jesus call them that? Because they did not obey Him. They may have done good things, but they were not obedient to do what He told them. The question is not “are we doing good things?” The real question we need to be asking is “are we doing God’s will?” This passage is scary because it teaches that not everyone who professes Christ as Lord is a true believer.

You see, God knows our heart. He knows who’s genuine and who’s not. At the very end of John Chapter 2 it says that Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast and “many believed in His name when they saw the signs that He was doing.” That’s verse 23. But in verse 24 we read these words: “But Jesus on His part did not entrust Himself to them, because He knew all the people.” Jesus knew those people were not genuine believers. They weren’t following Him for any other reason than to watch the show. They had no intention of committing their lives to Him. Jesus knew that.

 Matthew 22:14 says, “For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Jefferey O’Hara wrote this poem:

“Why call Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things I say?

Ye call Me the way and walk Me not.

Ye call Me the life and live Me not.

Ye call Me Master and obey Me not.

If I condemn thee blame Me not.

Ye call Me bread and eat Me not.

Ye call Me truth and believe Me not.

Ye call Me Lord and serve Me not.

If I condemn thee blame Me not.”

This is why it’s imperative that we come to Him completely honest, spiritually bankrupt, mourning over our sin, wanting Him and His righteousness more than we want our own life or our own dreams and ambitions, or even our own families. He wants all of us. He wants total commitment. Don’t play any games with God. I’ll admit to you a passage like this should cause us to stop and take spiritual inventory. And maybe that’s a good thing.

Verses 24-27 are a familiar passage. I remember singing songs about this when I was a little kid. I am a professional engineer. And I can tell you that the most important part of any structure is its foundation. A wise person will build the foundation of their life upon the solid rock, Jesus Christ. A foolish person builds the foundation of their life on the shifting sands of human wisdom and understanding, on the prevailing philosophy of our day and in a changing standard of morality. The rain, the floods and the winds represent divine judgment. Only the life built upon the solid foundation will be left standing. A life built on any foundation other than Jesus will be destroyed. “On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.”

With that Jesus ends His sermon. READ 7:28-29. The sad reality is that the crowds did not respond to Jesus by committing themselves to Him. They were astonished, amazed, impressed by His teaching. But we are not told that they believed Him and obeyed Him. Today hell is filled with a lot of people – some religious and some not – who were impressed by Jesus and thought of Him as a great teacher. But Jesus came to be our King and the King demands obedience.

God speaking through the prophet Jeremiah says this: “You will seek Me and find Me when you see Me with all of your heart.” (Jer 29:13)