



Matthew: The King and His Kingdom

Series: The Manifesto of the King, Part 25: The Warning to Choose Wisely

Matthew 7:13-27 (13-14)

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Introduction:

Like all good preachers, in the text that we are looking at this morning, Jesus brings the hearers of his sermon on the mount to the point of decision. That is the goal of all preaching -- to bring people, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, to a place of decision and response to the words that have been preached, to interact meaningfully with the Word of God, and to see the Word of God do its work in the hearts and souls of the listeners. That is what Jesus is doing in the text that we are looking at today. He has just preached the most famous sermon in history, a sermon that exposes our hearts and uncovers our deepest motives, a sermon that, if we receive the words of Christ truly, shows us the depth of our sin, our need for an atoning substitute – the Savior Jesus Christ, and our ongoing need for God’s grace to live the life that we have been saved to live as disciples of Christ.

Having presented this manifesto of the Kingdom of God and describing the way of the disciple, and having given to us this absolutely awesome and soul lifting promise that God the Father will give to us all that we need to see the words of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount become a reality in our lives – if we will just ask, and seek, and knock, Jesus calls His hearers to make a choice. He calls them to respond to His words.

And His call to make a choice is coming after has just taken great strides to explain clearly the nature of true discipleship. He has completely deconstructed the Pharisees and Scribes ideas about righteousness and holiness and has instead explained what it really looks like to be a child of God. What Jesus has described to us is Christianity; the Sermon on the Mount is a description of what it means to follow Christ; it is a picture of what saving faith looks like lived out in this world. Salvation is found only in Christ. He is the one who gives it. No one comes to the Father except by Him, and whoever follows Him, his or her life will be radically changed, radically different from the world around him – different from the world that is completely pagan and gives no thought to the things of God and completely different from the cultural Christianity that plagues this country. Jesus does not soft-sell discipleship and does not minimize the cost of following Him.

Confronted with these words from Jesus, He demands His hearers to make a choice. Boiled down, it is a choice between two ways – the way that leads to life or the way that leads to destruction. Jesus calls his hearers to make a wise choice – to choose between the narrow gate or the wide gate; to choose to hear and receive faithful prophets or to hear and receive false prophets; to choose to do the will of His Father who is in heaven or to do the will of your own flesh; to build your life upon the rock or to build your life upon the sand. Do we believe that Jesus is God in the flesh and that his words are life and truth or don't we? Your response will have massive consequences for your life. Having given to us this amazing teaching, we need to see as He closes this sermon; Jesus is calling us to choose and to choose wisely.

Choose and choose wisely. (v. 13-27) In verses 13-27, Jesus is emphasizing the responsibility of all people who have heard His words to choose wisely. Now this call is not in conflict with the sovereign grace of God. I know sometimes for those who are reformed in our theology that we get nervous when we hear the words choose and salvation too closely together in a conversation. We are concerned that God get all of the glory for the salvation of His people and He should. It is not in man to choose to be saved apart from the miracle working power of God to raise a dead soul to life. Jesus is not forgetting the sovereign truth that no one chooses to submit to God and receive Christ as Savior and Lord unless God has chosen him or her first. We know that. Jesus Himself said: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day." (John 6:44, ESV) AND "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out." (John 6:37, ESV) How do the "whoever's" come? Drawn by the Spirit of God, they choose to come to Christ. The point that Jesus is making here, however, is that from the human perspective, the decisions that you make regarding Him and His words that you have heard -- well, those decisions have very real and unavoidable consequences – quite literally, life or death. The way that you respond to these words of Christ is the difference between life and death, deliverance or destruction, heaven or hell.

Now it is important for us to keep in mind that the ones that Jesus is calling to make a decision are those who have heard Him teach regarding the gospel of the Kingdom. He has nothing to say today to those who have not heard His words. This message isn't about the person on the other side of the desert who has never heard the gospel at all. His call to choose wisely is directed specifically to those who had heard Him preach. He is not just speaking to people in general, but to those who had heard His words. He is speaking to people just like you and me.

All of us who have been granted the grace to hear the words of Christ are now confronted with the need to make a choice –will we hear and believe and apply the words of Christ to our lives or will we hear them and ignore them and in the case of the pagan unbeliever chase after some other gods or in the case of the religious rejecter pursue some religious, even pseudo-Christian

substitute. That is the thread that ties each of these illustrations, each of these exhortations at the end of chapter 7, together. Look at them and you can see what I mean.

(Matthew 7:13–14, ESV) There are two gates, two paths, two ways that you can follow – one ends in life and the other ends in destruction. Choose one and choose wisely.

(Matthew 7:15–20, ESV) There are two kinds of prophets in this world, the faithful prophet who faithfully preaches the truth of God, whose life gives evidence of His faithfulness to Christ, and the false prophet whose god is his himself, whose life gives evidence of his faithlessness and rebellion. Choose the one whom you will receive and to whom you will listen, and choose wisely.

(Matthew 7:21–23, ESV) There will be two kinds of people on the day of judgment, some of both even in this crowd around Jesus, ones who will claim to be followers of Christ, who will appear to do mighty works in His name, but who live to do the will of their sinful flesh and there will be those who claim to be followers of Christ whose lives attest to fact, who do the will of Christ's Father who is in heaven. Choose who you will be, and choose wisely.

(Matthew 7:24–27, ESV) There are two foundations upon which to build – you can either build your house on the rock as on who hears the Words of Christ and does them or you can build your house on the sand – having heard the words of Christ and refusing to do them. Choose the foundation for your life, and choose wisely.

In all of this, the thread that ties these passages together is the idea of a call to action and application. Choose! You don't need to wait for lightning to strike. Some people think they need to wait for some experience to overtake them, some feeling to come over them, before they can respond to Christ. You don't. You are not called to determine if you are chosen or not. Christ has given you His word and now He calls you to respond.

So let's look again this morning at verses 13 and 14, at the initial call to action from Jesus -- "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. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." (Matthew 7:13–14, ESV) Now what does Jesus mean for us to see here? I think the first thing that strikes us is the absolute nature of the choice that is before us. We like options. We like many different choices but from the outset Jesus lets us know that there are only two possibilities to choose from. A person either enters the kingdom or he doesn't. He either walks the road that leads to life or he doesn't. There is no third option. There is no neutral response to the words of Christ.

1) The Command of Christ (v. 13a) – Jesus says, “Enter by the narrow gate.” Having preached to them with the authority of God. Having spoken to them the words of life, Jesus tells his hearers, “I don’t want you to simply hear the ways and the words of the Kingdom of God, I want you to enter.” He is calling His hearers and calling us to be His disciples. He is calling us to trust in Him, an no-one else, for salvation. He is calling us to accept His words, and no-one else’s, as the authority for our lives, to obey His commands and live for His glory. He is calling us to rest in Him for salvation, to trust in Him, to believe in Him, to submit to the authority of His word, to walk in the way of His commandments.

Christ is calling us to enter the saving rule of His Lordship. These are not the words of a mere man. These are the words of the one who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, the one by whom and for whom all things were created, in heaven and on earth, the one on whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through whom God reconciled sinful man by the blood of his cross.” (cf. Colossians 1:15–20, ESV)

What is the narrow gate that Christ is speaking of? That gate is none other than Jesus Christ Himself. In the gospel of John, Jesus said of himself: John 10:9–11, ESV) Later in chapter 14, He says: (John 14:6, ESV) God’s only provision for man’s salvation and entrance into the Kingdom is through faith in Christ as God’s Messiah and our Savior and submission to His Lordship – that’s it and that is the very thing to which Jesus is calling us. His words are to be received not as something to consider, but as something to be obeyed. He is to be received not as a messenger from God but as the Messiah of God.

This narrow gate requires faith and repentance from sin. It requires an admission and an owning of our sin and of the reality of the condemnation that we deserve. It requires exclusive trust in Christ alone as the One who has purchased our forgiveness by the shedding of His blood and so demands our allegiance and faithfulness. This narrow way that leads to life is hemmed in on both sides by the lordship of Jesus Christ. It is a narrow gate, impossible to enter apart from the saving grace and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, but it is the only gate to eternal life. Jesus tells us to enter by the narrow gate, to choose life, because there are many who choose

2) The way of destruction (v. 13) Look at the way that Jesus describes the path that leads to destruction:

The gate that leads to destruction is wide...or broad and easy to enter. There is no requirement to enter the wide gate that leads to destruction. All of us, by nature of our sin, begin on this path. This is the way of lost humanity. It is the natural path of everyone not found in Christ.

The way that leads to destruction is easy...or broad and spacious in the sense that the easy way accommodates a host of different beliefs and lifestyles and people – even those that are

seemingly contradictory. The easy way is not populated only by atheists or by vocal rejecters of the gospel but is populated by everyone who rejects the way of life that is offered by Christ. What Jesus is saying is that the way that leads to destruction has room enough to admit all sorts of people. As long as it is not Biblical Christianity, you can embrace whatever kind of life you want and be on the way of destruction. There is plenty of room on it for diversity of opinions. It is filled with diversity, tolerance, and permissiveness. Travelers on this way are encouraged to follow their own desires, to do what seems good to them and their fallen inclinations. Superficial living, self-exaltation, idolatry, a rejection of absolute truth – all these things are allowed. You can be moral if you like or you can be immoral if you like. Religious or irreligious, it's up to you. Make it up as you go along. There are no boundaries, no rules. Live according to your own standards. The words regarding Israel, found in Judges 21:25 are applicable here: "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." (Judges 21:25, ESV) The wide and easy way doesn't discriminate.

Islam, Chrislam, Hindu, Buddhist, Mormon, JW, new-ager, tree hugger, atheist, agnostic, all the pseudo-forms of Christianity like Catholicism -- or the cultural – mom, Chevy, apple pie, family, pro-military, I was born a Christian, good ol' boy, country music, small-town values, Christianity complete with spiritual sounding goddisms, religious vagaries, undefined gospel, undefined love, undefined Jesus, undefined morality, and the 94.9 Star Country warm and fuzzy. The broad way accommodates the discounted Christianity that says following Christ costs nothing, and the broad way Christianity that says you can have Christ and your sin, the legalistic Christianity that says you can earn your own salvation, the make much of yourself, seeker friendly Christianity, or the get rich and prosper Christianity and everything in between. The gate to hell is broad and inviting. You can go to Hell as an atheist or an agnostic. You can go there as a Baptist, Presbyterian, or under any denominational label. You can go as a preacher, priest, rabbi or layman. You name it --- as long as it is not Biblical Christianity, all are welcome on the broad way. The wide and easy way is filled with people would never believe they are on the same path. But they are and the path leads to destruction.

It leads to destruction...it leads to hell. It leads to eternal loss, to eternal suffering. Jesus speaks here of an ultimate destiny - "destruction" in a complete sense; a state of complete spiritual loss and eternal ruin. It's a destiny that Jesus once described in horrifying terms as being "cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched - where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:45-46) It is the eternal destruction described by Paul when he said of those who do not know Christ: "They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, " (2 Thessalonians 1:9, ESV) The sad thing is that otherwise intelligent people give no thought to the destination before them. When you try to tell them that it leads to destruction, they will deny it and argue that they are no worse than anyone else that is on the exact same road and

some will even argue that God would never allow the destruction of so many or that that is not what the Bible means, etc. The Scriptures tell us something else. This destruction is real and inescapable for all on the broad way and Jesus tells us:

It is the way of the majority...Those who enter by the wide gate to destruction are many. This is the popular path, the road most travelled. It is the populated and the most popular. In contrast to this path of destruction, Jesus sets before us

3) The way of life (v. 14) Jesus says: "For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." (Matthew 7:14, ESV) In contrast to the wide, easy, popular way that leads to destruction, look at the way that Jesus describes the path that leads to eternal life.

The gate that leads to life is narrow...That word narrow means constricted and squeezed. It points to the idea that not only is the gate small; it is singular. In other words, as we have already said, the only gateway into eternal life is Christ Himself – not the popular misconceptions of Jesus, but the Christ of the Scriptures. The way of salvation is singular, it is restrictive. There are not many ways or avenues to heaven and life eternal; there is only one. There are not many gospels or many messages that lead a man to redemption, there is only one. The gate is narrow because it is exclusive and restrictive. Men and women can approach God only through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time." (1 Timothy 2:5–6, ESV) The gate is Christ and the way that leads to life is hard.

The way that leads to life is hard...That word for hard is a word that means "difficult, hemmed in, pressed." Poverty of spirit is difficult. Prayer is not easy; righteousness is not easy; transformed God-centered attitudes are not easy. In fact, all of them are impossible apart from God's grace and none of them are developed apart from trial, apart from testing, apart from refining fire. Later, Jesus would more fully describe the cost of discipleship when He said: (Matthew 16:24–25, ESV)

It is hard in the sense that it is hemmed in. It is a life that is hemmed in by divine revelation. Truth is not a matter of personal belief or the consensus of society. Truth is not up for a vote – it is a matter of what God has said. Revealed truth defines what we may believe and revealed goodness how we may live. Morality is not a shifting scale but a fixed reality. Righteousness and holiness and good are clearly defined. Certain ideas about God and about Christ are true and others are false. The way and the means of salvation are clearly explained. God's creative and redemptive plan is revealed for our understanding. God and His Word clearly define all truth that is necessary to life. To those outside of Christ, it all seems too confining but to us

who submit our minds and our wills to Christ, it is the most liberating thing imaginable. As Jesus said: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." " (John 8:31–32, ESV)

The way that leads to life, following Jesus, is pressed because it involves suffering and to one degree or another, it will involve persecution. Jesus told us that from the very outset -- (Matthew 5:10–12, ESV)

Following Christ does not come without a cost. If we would enter the narrow gate and follow the hard road that leads to life, each day we will have to confront and deal with sins that did not convict me before I followed Jesus. Daily we will have to identify and wrestle with the philosophies and values of this world. Daily we will have to seek to live my Christian life in the midst of a world that is hostile to Christ and to His gospel. Daily we must go against the grain of my own culture. Daily I must die to myself and take up the cross and follow Him. There is a cost, but

The hard and narrow way leads to life...It leads to abundant life both now and eternal life forever. There is no greater joy than to personally know God through the Lord Jesus Christ. There is the joy now of sins forgiven, the blessed satisfaction of continuous and growing sanctification and triumph over temptation. There is the joy of new friendships and the growth of fellowship with other followers of Christ that Jesus could say: (Mark 10:29–30, ESV)

It is the way of the few...The narrow way of discipleship wins few popularity contests. True Christianity is not popular, It never has been. Jesus does not allow for what the late John Stott calls "easy –going syncretism", the easy-going combining of different beliefs – a little Christianity with a little homespun religion or wisdom, a little gospel with a little cultural morality, or a little religion and God-talk with living however you please.

Jesus says, those who find the way of life are few. One writer said: Offer an "anything goes" Christianity, and you will attract the masses. Say nothing about sin or the sinner's helplessness and hopelessness; say nothing about the narrow gate of repentance and faith in Christ alone or the necessity of the cross of Christ as the sinner's only hope, and the crowds will come. Say nothing of the demands of discipleship at all costs, or the fact that biblical Christianity brings with it opposition and affliction, and the masses will join you. But spell out what Christ has declared, and see that "there are few who find it."

Jesus reminds us there are many, many who hear the Gospel. But there are few that respond to it. There are many that hear the call of the Gospel, but few embrace it. Only those who have embraced the Gospel, find the way of life. For all these reasons, the Lord Jesus calls us to embrace the kingdom, to join the kingdom. That is His call to you today. And know this

4) Neutrality is impossible. Jesus takes any possibility for neutrality off the table. You are either on the broad road leading to destruction or you are on the narrow road leading to life. You will never enter the narrow gate which is Christ by accident or unawares. You must enter by faith, thoughtfully and purposefully. And so we must ask ourselves this question: Have I committed myself to this Messiah, this Savior, this Lord? Have I, by God's grace chosen this – the narrow way, the way of life? Have you? Is this what you are hungering and thirsting after? Do you desire to walk with Christ in His way?

This does not mean that you are absolutely sinless and perfect, keeping in every degree the precepts taught in the Sermon on the Mount. There is no one who does that. What the Lord Jesus Christ is saying in effect is this: "My people are the people who follow me, who trust in me for salvation with their whole heart and soul and mind, those who hear my words and receive my words as the very words of the Living God, those who desire to follow me and who are striving to do so." You may fail and fall into temptation, you may stumble, but in it all you confess and repent of your sin and you continue to pursue that for which Christ has taken hold of you.

We must choose and we must choose wisely. The gate into eternal life is narrow, the way of eternal life is hard.

It is a great act of mercy for Jesus to put this before us today. To call us to a place of decision. Consider the eternal destiny that hangs in the balance. Heaven and hell. And consider the fact that there are many who hear this message and they turn a deaf ear to it.

The Lord Jesus is calling you to choose wisely today – one of two paths, one of two destinies. If you confess Christ today, the Lord Jesus is commanding you to examine your walk in light of His words. And if you have not trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, He is issuing an urgent call that you receive Him, that you enter the narrow gate, before it is too late.

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