

Matthew 7:13-29 | “No Third Option”
Preached on July 2, 2023 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew 7, and we will be covering verses 13-29 today. *[pauseeee]*

We are a couple days away from July 4th, Independence Day.

And Independence Day reminds us of the Revolutionary War, which of course was between the Americans and the British. *[pauseeee]*

During the Revolutionary War, there were only really two options...

Either you were a patriot, who sought to be free from British control, or you were a Tory (or loyalist) who was loyal to the British crown.

And so the war, tension, and hostility back then led each person to reveal their true allegiances, which side were they on? *[pause]*

Well that’s a little like what our passage does this morning to us.

It pushes us to evaluate our lives, for it shoots straight to our hearts to penetrate and reveal where our true allegiance lies, for there’s only two choices...

Either our allegiance is to Christ or not. *[pause]*

What we will discover is that this allegiance to Christ is not some half-hearted thing, for it’s a *supreme* allegiance, above any other kind of allegiance to country, family, or anything else.

And this allegiance to Christ affects our eternity. *[pauseeee]*

The passage before us are the final teachings in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.

He has said so much, as He taught the people, but now Jesus will drive the truth home. *[pause]*

He doesn’t ask the people, “Well guys, what did you think of my teaching? Was it good?”

No way, for as He concludes His teaching, He explains to them in black and white that they either listen and obey what He has taught, or there are eternal ramifications. *[pause]*

And this is what He will do for us, too, as we go through these passages.

The question is, “How do we view Jesus and His teachings?” *[pauseeee]*

For some, they see Jesus’ words as teachings that they can take or leave.

They like to pick and choose which ones they want to obey, and which ones they want to disregard. *[pause]*

Others view Jesus’ teachings as just nice, good sounding teachings that are good advice.

But here's the thing: Jesus Himself does not allow anyone to take the middle ground. *[pause]*

He Himself shows us that by seeing His teachings as something that you can take or leave, or as mere advice misses the whole point.

It's all or nothing. *[pause]*

You can't pick and choose, you can't just view His teachings as advice or nice sounding ethical teachings.

You can't just admire His teachings, but you must obey and heed His teachings.

And here at the end of Matthew 7, Jesus puts it plainly: either you heed His teachings and live, or you are on the path to destruction. *[pauseeee]*

This isn't the Jesus that many like.

This isn't the Jesus that many think He is, yet this *is* Jesus.

He talks about judgment all throughout these passages, He shows us that He's the judge, and that adherence to His words is the deciding factor between life and death.

Now that's the Jesus of the Bible, and that's the Jesus that this dark world desperately needs to hear about. *[pauseeeee]*

But let me warn you, what you are about to hear Jesus teach is hard to hear.

He will cause each of us to evaluate our hearts and lives, and make us consider: am I a true or false disciple?

So listen as I read, as Jesus reveals that there are only two gates, two kinds of trees, and two foundations - *there is no third option*. *[READ]*

To close out Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, He uses various imagery and illustrations, and each one causes us to ask ourselves a soul-searching question.

And so I've structured my outline in that way: as a question that we must all reckon with.

So first, from verses 13-14...

I. Have you entered the narrow gate? (13-14)

As you go through life, you have to answer a lot of questions. *[pause]*

Whether it's as a student, taking quizzes and tests.

Or whether it's as an adult, filling out some sort of form or questionnaire, we all have to answer lots of questions in our lifetimes. *[pause]*

Have you ever gotten to a question with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer and feel like your situation didn’t really fit either one?

As you thought through all the variables, you thought, “Well, in this sense, it could be answered ‘yes’, but in this other sense, it could be ‘no’.”

And then you struggled to decide which to put. *[pause]*

That certainly can happen sometimes in life because there are so many different, special circumstances that we have.

But when it comes to eternal life, Jesus shows us that there are only two options: the narrow and the wide gate. *[pause]*

There is no third option, and you can’t write in a note explaining your case, for there is only one narrow way that leads to life, and the other path leads to destruction. *[pauseeee]*

Jesus tells us about two gates, and then explains the characteristics and outcome of each gate...

There’s a wide gate and this gate’s way is easy, and many people enter it, but it leads to destruction.

Then there’s the narrow gate, and this gate’s way is hard, and only few enter it, but it leads to life. *[pauseeee]*

We see here that Christianity is exclusive in the sense that it tells us that there is only one way to life: through Jesus Christ.

He is the way, the truth, and the life,¹ but also, in John 10, he says that He’s the door.² *[pause]*

There are not many ways to Heaven or to God, but only one way. *[pauseeee]*

Our world doesn’t like this, for they deem it so “close-minded” and hateful.

You will not be popular, if you stand with Jesus and say what He said about the narrow gate that leads to life.

As John Stott says, “People like to be uncommitted...To deviate from the middle way is to risk being dubbed an ‘extremist’ or a ‘fanatic’. Everybody resents being faced with the necessity of a choice. But Jesus will not allow us to escape it.”³ *[pauseeee]*

Jesus the Lord, the very Son of God, has told us this truth - there is only one way to life: the narrow gate.

¹ See John 14:6.

² See John 10:7.

³ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 196.

And we must proclaim it and believe it, even amid a world that hates its message. *[pauseeee]*

Now some people may think, “OK, if that’s the way to life, why doesn’t everyone just go that way?”

The answer? It’s the narrow, hard, and less popular way. *[pause]*

It’s narrow because you have to trust in Christ alone to be saved, and you have to submit to His word in all areas of your life.

That’s what makes it narrow and hard. *[pause]*

Our pride has to be shoved to the side, our own thoughts must be discarded, and the world’s opinions must be jettisoned - that’s hard to do. *[pause]*

It’s hard because we want to hold onto our pride, we want our own way, we want to follow the desires of our flesh.

We don’t want to be told what to do, but we want to “choose our own adventures”⁴ and be the “captains of our own souls.”⁵

That’s why the narrow gate is entered by few, but the wide gate is entered by many. *[pauseeee]*

The wide gate is easy: just follow your dreams, do what you want, and choose how you want to live!

And the wide gate doesn’t cost you much in the short run, but it costs you in the long run, for it’s the path to destruction. *[pauseeee]*

Following Jesus is the harder, less popular choice, for it involves death to self, facing persecution for your beliefs, and a submission to the Lord as Lord.

Yet it’s totally worth it, for it’s the path to life. *[pauseeee]*

Have you entered the narrow gate?

Have you trusted in Christ alone to be saved, or are you trusting in your works?

Do you think that there are many ways to Heaven, or have you believed in the one, true way to eternal life, Jesus Christ?

Though it’s narrow, harder, and less popular - think about how it’s the way to life, and therefore, trusting in Christ alone is eternally worth it. *[pauseeee]*

⁴ A reference to the ‘choose your own adventure’ books.

⁵ A reference to the poem, “Invictus”, by William Ernest Henley.

After showing us that there's two gates, Jesus goes on to talk about how there's two kinds of trees, and the question that we will be challenged with is this...

II. Is there good fruit in your life? (15-20)

In verse 15, Jesus starts out by saying, "Beware of false prophets."

And we must do this because there are those who are sneaky, as they come dressed in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves, trying to send people through the wide gate.

[pause]

These people look so innocent, yet they are so harmful.

So we must not be fooled by appearances that people put on, for looks aren't everything. [pause]

But the question is this: if they appear like sheep, then how can we recognize them?

Jesus says twice, "You will recognize them by their fruits." [pauseeee]

Jesus helps us to understand what He's talking about by explaining that we look at the fruit of a tree to recognize what kind of tree it is.

We don't gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles.

A healthy tree produces good fruit, a diseased tree bad fruit. [pause]

So the fruit of the tree displays the state of the tree.

So also, that's how we will be able to discern between genuine sheep and wolves dressed up as sheep: their fruit. *[pause]*

Now this fruit isn't their charisma or charm, for many people can fake that.

Rather, fruit here points more towards their character and everyday life. *[pause]*

The person may claim and look like they are doing great things for God, but is he kind?

How do they treat others? How do they act? Are they repentant? [pause]

Think of the fruit of the Spirit: do they show that fruit in their life?

Are they kind, gentle, and patient? Or are they overly prideful and greedy?

And does their teaching accurately reflect Christ's teaching? [pauseeee]

Now wolves dressed in sheep's clothing won't always be noticed right away, but eventually their true character will show itself.

They can't help but bear bad fruit, and so their fruit will be seen.

So we must be on the lookout for wolves, taking note of the fruit of their lives. *[pauseeee]*

Sadly, there are more wolves in our world than we realize.

There are preachers and teachers, who may look so harmless and innocent, but they ravage the church. *[pause]*

They may look good, but behind the scenes they are dangerous.

I've heard of pastors who were preaching and teaching, but behind the scenes they were molesting children - a diseased tree bearing bad fruit.

I've heard of pastors who were preaching and teaching, but behind the scenes they treated others horribly, were all about the money, and were very prideful...

“You will recognize them by their fruits.” *[pauseeee]*

Jesus says that these bad trees will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

It's this image of judgment.

They display by their fruit that they truly aren't born again, but have been putting on a facade, and the result is eternal condemnation on the last day. *[pauseeee]*

Now it's easy to just point the finger at false teachers, but this can also apply to false believers.

There are some who look like Christians, but are not, and there may even be some false believers in this very room today.

And this text is challenging each of us to evaluate our lives in light of the truth that all true Christians *will* bear good fruit. *[pause]*

This fruit doesn't gain our status with God, but *reveals* it. *[pause]*

In the parallel passage in Luke, Jesus says, “The good person out of the good treasure *of his heart* produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil...”⁶ *[pause]*

The fruit of our lives flows from our hearts.

This is why Jesus can look at our fruit and tell where we stand.

Because “a healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.” *[pauseeee]*

Oh, the great need to be born again by faith in Jesus Christ!

We must have the Spirit, who works in us to bear the fruit of the Spirit. *[pauseeee]*

⁶ Luke 6:45 (italics is mine).

True belief in Christ is demonstrated by righteous living.

So let me ask you: is there good fruit in your life? *[pause]*

Evaluate your own life, and truly discern, do you have good fruit or bad? *[pause]*

Now fruit does take time to grow, so don't just expect good fruit within a week, but assess your life in the past 5, 10, 15 years.

Has the Spirit been growing you over time?

Has the fruit of the Spirit been manifested in your life over time? *[pause]*

Of course, this won't look perfect, for we all sin and fail, and are sometimes inconsistent.

Some of you may even be young or new Christians, so it will take time to see fruit and growth.

But are you repentant? Are you seeking to be more kind and loving? *[pause]*

If you don't see any good fruit, then you must think about the state of your soul.

Have you truly trusted in Jesus Christ alone to be saved?

Don't take this lightly, for all trees that don't bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Turn to Christ, He is the only One able to forgive and save!

He can change you completely and cause you to bear fruit as you abide in Him.⁷ *[pauseeee]*

True faith *always* leads to a changed life, and that's exactly why James can say that faith without works is dead.⁸ *[pauseeee]*

As you move on into verses 21-23, Jesus explains further how there will be those who look the part, but don't truly know Him.

And so the question that these verses leave us with is this...

III. Do you truly *know* Christ? (21-23)

In these verses, we see people who make a profession of faith in Jesus, for they even call Him "Lord".

They even go as far as prophesying, casting out demons, and doing many mighty works in the name of Christ.

⁷ See John 15:1-6.

⁸ James 2:17.

But Jesus says that not everyone who says this will enter the kingdom of heaven. *[pause]*

This is an astounding statement.

Most people would think, “Look at these people, they call Jesus ‘Lord’, and have even done so many spectacular things for Him, they must be saved.”

Yet Jesus says to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.”
[pause]

Jesus is teaching us something surprising.

Professions of faith and spectacular works don’t prove genuine faith. *[pause]*

There are many people who profess that they know Christ, but they don’t.

There are many people who do mighty things in His name, but they are not truly a disciple of Jesus.

A mere profession and even religious activity doesn’t mean that you are a true follower of Christ.
[pause]

Following Jesus involves more than just outward appearance and works, and Jesus is telling us that superficial commitment to Him *will be* revealed on the last day. *[pause]*

You can’t fool Christ, He knows your heart.

You won’t be able to point to your profession in Him, if it’s fake.

You won’t even be able to point to some mighty acts done in His name, if you don’t truly know Him in faith.

You may be able to fool us, but you can’t fool Christ, as you stand before Him on the last day.

For He will say, “I never knew you.” *[pause]*

The idea is that He never knew you as one of His true followers.

You may have acted like one, but you never were one. *[pause]*

This truth reminds us that we so often overestimate who truly belongs to Christ. *[pauseeee]*

I think about how some churches care solely about hands raised and professions of faith, and tout their numbers.

But are they forgetting a passage like this?

Professions don’t always equal reality. *[pause]*

I think also of how some churches focus solely on the miraculous, and tout *that* as evidence of God at work.

But Jesus is showing us right here in this passage that many who aren't even His can do the miraculous! *[pause]*

Do we neglect to remember that Satan can perform false signs and wonders?⁹ *[pauseeee]*

These ones who Jesus never knew are called “workers of lawlessness”.

They may have had mighty public works, but they had mighty bad lives. *[pause]*

They used the Lord's name, but they didn't actually know the Lord by faith and in love.

They had a banner of the Lord over their ministries, but not a love for the Lord in their hearts. *[pauseeee]*

What about you? Do you actually *know* the Lord?

Not just call Him Lord, but do you know Him?

Not just do some things in His name, but do you know Him?

Have you trusted in Him alone to save? Is He your everything? Do you love Him and want to follow everything that He says?

It is our connection to Him through faith that makes us secure, for He is the giver of life and the provider of acceptance before God. *[pauseeee]*

Is following Him just something that your family did, so you feel like you need to?

Is following Him just something you do to make others think better of you or so that you feel better about yourself?

Or do you truly know Christ by faith and desire to follow Him with your life? *[pauseeee]*

That leads me to the last question that Jesus convicts us with...

IV. Is your life founded on Jesus alone? (24-29)

Christ gives the well-known illustration of the wise man and the foolish man, and many of you remember this story because of the children's song about it. *[pause]*

The wise man builds his house upon the rock, and when the storm comes, the house stands.

But the foolish man builds his house upon the sand, and the storm topples the house, so that it falls. *[pause]*

⁹ See 2 Thessalonians 2:9 and Revelation 13:13-16.

That's a summary of the illustration, and many people may know it because of the children's song, but what does it actually mean? *[pause]*

The key is to look at what Jesus is actually illustrating.

He says in verse 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."

And then look at verse 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." *[pause]*

What's the difference?

The wise man hears and obeys Jesus' words, but the foolish man hears and doesn't obey. *[pauseeee]*

So the wise man hears Jesus' teaching and says, "I must listen to Jesus' words! They are truth, they are life, I need to listen and heed what He has said in every area of my life!" *[pause]*

That's wisdom, for you are heeding the words of the One who has all wisdom, and whose words lead to life and stability.

But the foolish man hears Jesus' teaching and says, "Eh, that all sounds nice and everything, but I like the way my life is now." *[pause]*

They may even think, "That was some good advice," or even, "I admire Jesus' teachings," but they walk away not submitting their lives to Him.

They walk away not seeing Jesus' words as their foundation, but build their life on the foundation of sand: their own thoughts or the world's beliefs.

But the wise man says, "Jesus' words must be my foundation! I can't do otherwise, for this is God's very Word!" *[pauseeee]*

It's the foundation that makes all the difference.

Both men build a house, but the difference is their foundation. *[pauseeee]*

What are we seeing here?

Jesus' words are the standard, which determine whether we will stand or fall on the last day. *[pause]*

Sincerity isn't enough, but your life must be founded on Christ's word.

You cannot just admire Jesus' teaching, you must obey it by faith - your eternity is at stake. *[pause]*

Is your life founded on Jesus alone?

Have you gone to Him in faith and trusted that He is the way to have life? *[pause]*

He has all authority, and even taught with authority, and the people were astonished.

And He can teach this way because He *is* the authoritative Lord and Judge.

He tells us which gate is the gate to life, He tells us who will be judged and who will not.

It's only those who truly know Him, who enter the kingdom of heaven, and as Judge on the last day, it's His Word that can declare, "Depart from me."

He is the standard that determines whether a person will stand on the last day or fall.

So we dare not ignore Jesus' authoritative teaching! *[pause]*

So now what will you do with Jesus and His Word?

Will you reject it to your own demise?

Will you just think it's nice sounding teaching, but not authoritative over your life, and experience ruin?

Or will you run to Him, trust Him, cling to Him: the giver of life and the revealer of truth?
[pause]

It's His Word that needs to be our rock, for His Word gives life, peace, joy, and stability. *[pause]*

Do you mold your life after what He has said, or what you feel like doing? *[pause]*

Is His Word your foundation? Do you seek to hear and obey everything that He has said? *[pause]*

Though our world doesn't like this, Jesus is showing us here that...

There is no third option: it's either submit to Jesus alone or face judgment.

Jesus is not saying to us, "Hey guys, here are seven tips to a better life."

He is not saying, "Let me give you some advice on your situation."

He is showing us that He is truly Lord, and we either heed His Word or we will face ruin.
[pause]

Your eternal destination depends on how you respond to Jesus.

Either we go through the narrow gate of Jesus and His Word and experience life, or we go through the wide gate of rejecting His Word for what we want and experience destruction.

[pause]

As Moses says in Deuteronomy, so I say to you, “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.”¹⁰

What will you do?

Will you trust in Jesus Christ, the Lord of Heaven and Earth, who died on the Cross for your sins and rose again from the grave?

Or will you reject the One true way to life? *[pause]*

If you place your faith in Him alone as the way to life and forgiveness, you will be saved, and you can be assured of life and forgiveness forever. *[pauseeee]*

And for those who truly know Him, let’s keep remembering and pressing on, knowing that He is truly the gate and the way.¹¹

He is the vine, so that abiding in Him we can bear fruit.¹²

He is the Lord, who we don’t merely profess, but actually know and strive to obey.

And His words are our rock that we build upon. *[pause]*

Keep going to Him, abide in Him, cling to Him - the One who is not only Lord over all and Judge, but the One who gave His life for you, as loving Savior and compassionate Friend.

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 30:15.

¹¹ See John 10:7 & 14:6.

¹² See John 15:1-6.