

"DECISIONS AND DISCERNMENT"

Matthew 7:13-20

In the Sermon on the Mount up to this point, the Lord Jesus has taught His disciples and those who were considering becoming His disciples the standards of God's Kingdom. We have examined them in detail in the past few months. You remember some of the key takeaways, don't you?

- **The Beatitudes**
- **Salt and light**
- **Sacredness of the marriage relationship**
- **Loving your enemy**
- **Prayer**
- **Forgiving those who hurt you**
- **Stewardship of money**
- **Proper and improper judgment**
- **Seeking God's kingdom first**
- **A life of righteousness**

The time had come for the people who were so blessed to be in the Lord's presence and to hear His message to decide whether they were in or out. Life demands that you and I make decisions and that we practice discernment. Some decisions are not as important as others. For instance, during an average day you must decide what you will wear, what you will eat, what you will say, and where you will go, etc.

Other decisions carry much more weight. Whom will you marry? What will you choose as your career path? What values will you instill in your kids? These are extremely important, and they have far-reaching implications. However, life's ultimate decision comes down to a distinct choice between two options. This decision affects your soul in the here and now and in the sweet by and by.

In our study tonight, Jesus moves into the conclusion of this great sermon by pressing people to accept His invitation to be a part of the eternal kingdom of God. A poem written by Sara Stowell nicely sets the stage for these verses.

"Forks in the Road"

"There will always be forks in the road,
Decisions that have to be made.
You will always have to bear the load,
Of each debt that has to be paid.

Every fork has a destination,
With consequences to each choice.
Be wary of Earthly temptation,
For it may have the loudest voice.

Other paths will intersect your own,
Other lives will feel its effect.
The aftermath may remain unknown,
With results you may not expect.

Be careful not to be led astray,
From the righteous course you once strode.
Only through Faith can you find your way,
When you reach the forks in the road."

Let's launch our study tonight by examining Matthew 7:13-14. . .

Matthew 7:13–14... "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14 "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Jesus paints a picture of two gates. The first gate is a **narrow gate**. The adjective "narrow" comes from a verb form that means *to groan*. The choice Jesus offers here is offensive to most human beings.

John 10:9... "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

John 14:6... Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

Do you see what He is teaching here? As one makes life's ultimate decision, he/she must come to grips with the weight of our Lord's words. So, the narrow gate is Christ and His bold and gracious offer of salvation. He is the only way to be saved. Only He can forgive sins and change a person's life. . .

Acts 4:12... "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

The second gate is the **wide gate**. This is the preferred gate of our culture today. To many the idea of the Lord Jesus Christ being *the only way to heaven* is preposterous. They view it as a radical form of blatant intolerance. Our world prefers a wide gate that offers multiple choices concerning one's relationship with God. Walk through this gate and you can choose the god you want. You can live the kind of life that fits your personality and your own innate desires.

Religion, not a personal relationship with the one true God through Jesus Christ, is the end-all be-all for the vast majority of people today. For others it's all about good works. Remember the gate is wide here. You can have it your way!

Jesus continues pressing His kingdom upon the people. He moves on to two ways to live. The first is the found in the words, **"The way is broad."** Once you decide to walk through the wide gate you find yourself on a broad road that is smooth as silk to begin with.

Absolute truth is not a necessity on this broad road. What is true for you may not be true for others. You just live the way you want to live. Since there is no belief in absolute truth, the Word of God is robbed of its authority and sufficiency. Morality is situational. Everyone does what is right in his/her own eyes. All the signs seem to indicate you are on your way to heaven! It is the life of freedom—the broad way.

But there is another way. Listen to the words of Jesus, **"The way is narrow."** When you choose the narrow gate and put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone to save you, then you find yourself on the narrow road. The word "*narrow*" here brings before our mind the scene of a person being hemmed in by a narrow mountain gorge.

If you decide to walk through the narrow gate and embrace Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you are honor bound to live by His standards and for His glory. On the narrow road, the Word of God is your final authority for faith and practice.

Luke 9:23... And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.

Do you want to have it your way or do you want to spend the rest of your life living in such a way that you reflect your personal commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. You must decide! This brings me to the third consideration.

Every decision we make in life has consequences and life's ultimate decision is no different. Jesus now makes clear what you will find at the end of the road you choose. First, He describes the end of the broad road— **"Leads to destruction."** The destiny of one who chooses the wide gate and the broad road is *Hell*.

The word "*destruction*" means loss of well-being not loss of being. It signifies waste and ruin. When a person walks through the wide gate and travels down the broad road, they have no idea what awaits them in the end. The ironic thing is that *nobody is invited to go to hell!* Hell is a place where the love of God does not exist, where demons will be one's neighbors, and where there is no hope. Malice, envy, hate, violence, and misery will last for eternity!

There is another option. Jesus described the end result for the one who chooses the narrow gate and the narrow road— **"Leads to life."** The destiny of this person is *heaven*.

- **This "Life" was manifested in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (John 5:26)**
- **Man has been alienated from this "Life." (Eph. 4:17-18)**
- **Through faith in Christ we can have this "Life." (1 Jn. 5:10-12)**

Jesus wants people to go to heaven. Here is the invitation! Look at Jesus' word in verse 13— **"Enter."** Jesus offers life abundant now and life eternal in the splendor of heaven. Where will you spend eternity? There is one final consideration.

Jesus said, **"Many are those who enter by it."** What frightening words these are. Jesus indicated that the number of people choosing the wide gate,

the broad road, and destruction would be a majority of people. Vast numbers of people will walk down the broad way until they come to sign at the end of the road that reads—*"dead end, welcome to hell."* Some of you might be tempted to believe that so many people couldn't be so wrong. Don't fool yourself. Listen to Jesus' warning here!

Proverbs 14:12... There is a way *which seems* right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

What about the people who chose the narrow gate, the narrow road, and life? Jesus indicated **"few are those who find it."** These are those who are willing to count the cost and follow Jesus Christ—who seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

As Jesus came to the end of the Sermon on the Mount, He focused on the ultimate decision and then the need for spiritual discernment. As the return of our Lord draws near, there will be an explosion of false christs, false prophets, and false teachers.

Matthew 24:24... "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.

1 Timothy 4:1... But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.

Matthew 7:15... "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves."

What is a false prophet? The word **"prophet"** means to speak before or speak forth. A true prophet of God was called and commissioned to speak forth His Word. A false prophet was not called and commissioned by God and they did not speak forth God's Word.

Notice how Jesus described their appearance. He said they... **"Come to you in sheep's clothing"** referring to the wool garment worn by shepherds. Jesus said you can't detect them by appearance. In fact, they appear to be legitimate. They may even use the Bible to speak of Jesus, the cross, and the resurrection. Paul describes their deceptive appearance in graphic detail. . .

2 Corinthians 11:13–15... For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. **14** No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. **15** Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

How dangerous are they? Jesus described them as **"ravenous wolves."** A sheep's worst enemy was the wolf. This carries the idea of snatching or seizing. Once a wolf snatched a sheep, he would tear them to pieces. Get rid of the notion that false prophets/false teachers are good, well-meaning, but misguided people. Listen, they are so dangerous that Jesus began this section with the word **"Beware."** This is a strong word that means *to hold your mind away from*.

With all of this being said, how are we as believers supposed to detect false prophets and false teachers who lure people to the broad road that leads to destruction?

Matthew 7:16–20... **"You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 "So then, you will know them by their fruits.**

The first thing you must do as a fruit inspector is to look at the person's character. How do they live? Are they morally pure? Do they appear to covet money? Are they full of pride? John MacArthur stated. . .

"Unless those who claim to be God's spokesmen give evidence that their deepest motives and life patterns are to honor, glorify, and magnify God, and to grow in humility, holiness, and obedience, we can be sure that God has not called or sent them. If they are oriented to money, prestige, recognition, popularity, power, sexual looseness, and selfishness, they do not belong to Christ."

The second thing you must do as a fruit inspector is to listen to the person's teaching. Please keep in mind that he/she may use Christian phrases lifted from the pages of the Bible. One thing seems to be true of a false prophet—their teaching is man-centered not God-centered. The person and work of Jesus Christ is marginalized. The principle is clear—**good trees produce good fruit and bad trees produce bad fruit.**

All the time they have preached peace, happiness, and prosperity. From all appearances they are successful and popular. According to them, they are at a different spiritual level than the normal person. They have led scores of people down the broad road to destruction. Spiritual ruin lies in wait for them. Listen to the words of Peter. . .

2 Peter 2:1–3... But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. **2** Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; **3** and in *their* greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Here are some safeguards you can incorporate to protect yourself and your family.

1. Study the Word.

We live in a day when believers make statements like, "We don't need to know all that theological or doctrinal stuff. We just need to know Jesus." Listen, warm fuzzy stuff won't do! Jesus said, ***"You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free."*** (Jn. 8:32) He prayed to the Father, ***"Sanctify them through your truth, Your word is truth."*** (Jn. 17:17)

2. Test the spirits.

Again, look at their character. Listen to their words and make sure what they say is backed up with the clear teaching of the Word.

1 John 4:1–3... Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. **2** By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; **3** and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

3. Limit your exposure.

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. ⁸ Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. ⁹ Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the

Son. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; ¹¹ for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds. (2 John 1:7-11)