

Dec 9th 2012: Sermon on the Mount #9(Final) Matthew 7:7-29
Three Final Choices

There is a programme on TV called myth-busters in which a couple of guys attempt to prove whether a well known myth about something is true or false. In our reading today we discover Jesus exploding a popular myth. A myth that has been propounded by man since the Gospel was first declared. A myth that suggests that there are many pathways leading to heaven, and that commitment to Jesus Christ as the Son of God is just one of them.

Several years ago, Muhammad Ali wrote in his autobiography: "My mother was a Baptist. She believed Jesus was the Son of God, and I don't believe that. But even though my mother had a religion different from me, I believe that on Judgment Day my mother will be in heaven. There are Jewish people who lead good lives; and when they die, I believe they're going to heaven. If you're a good Muslim, if you're a good Christian, if you're a good Jew; it doesn't matter what religion you are, if you're a good person you'll receive God's blessing."

To this, a Christian professor at an evangelical seminary wrote: "The truth is that Christianity by definition is an exclusive religion. The belief that there is one God and only one way to God stands at the center of the Christian gospel. Nowhere does the New Testament teach that there is any other way to God but through a personal commitment to Jesus as the Messiah."
(Mark Wingfield, Ali's Appeal for Tolerance is Intolerant, Western Recorder, April, 3, 1997.)

As Jesus reached the end of His sermon on the Mount He declared exactly that when He said, as recorded in Matthew 7:13-14 (CEV)

Go in through the narrow gate. The gate to destruction is wide, and the road that leads there is easy to follow. A lot of people go through that gate. But the gate to life is very narrow. The road that leads there is so hard to follow that only a few people find it.

Two gates, that lead on to two different ways, that end at two entirely different destinations.

The narrow gate leads on to a road that is hard to follow but it leads to life. Jesus Himself is the gate. He said so in John 10:7-9

Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.

To enter through Jesus means to accept that a sacrifice is needed for us to come before a holy God and receive from Him an eternal life that we don't deserve. A sacrifice that was offered when the sinless Son of God gave His life in our place on that cross at Calvary, and was seen as acceptable when God raised Him from the dead.

We are to receive it as a gift that requires in return our recognition that we now belong to God's kingdom and are to worship, live, and serve Him as children of that Kingdom from now and into eternity.

Such a requirement is as nothing compared to the life after death with the Father that is promised. For Jesus declared so powerfully in John 14:6

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

BUT the gate that is Jesus is narrow. It is free to enter but it demands total surrender to the Lordship of Christ to do so. There is a requirement that we remove the clothing of self-reliance and self determination and take on the clothing of salvation only through Jesus. The wardrobe of a life lived to worship, serve, love Him; and the giving of our totality to Him, and for His mission.

Entering through the gate that leads to life means accepting that from the moment we cross the threshold we become ***God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.***

However, many prefer to enter through the other gate. The wide gate that seems to offer so much but that leads to destruction. This is really surprising when you think about it. Why would the majority chose a road that leads to destruction when they could chose a road that leads to life, even if the gate is narrow and requires an act of surrender to go through it.

Well one reason for that is because the Prince of this world, the evil one, has convinced so many that the broad track also leads to life. That there are many ways to get to heaven and none need that narrow road and that narrow track that is Christ alone.

(I was watching a programme about Viet Nam where the cameras were taken into a shop that was completely given over to selling cardboard images of things from this world that could be placed with the deceased when they were buried or cremated. The belief was that in the afterlife they would need such things and would have a head start on everyone else. And the biggest seller in that shop was cardboard money. How sad. How deluded. But it's not much different here in Australia. Many times I have been so saddened by the comments made at a funeral which refer to the deceased now living it up with their mates in heaven and continuing to enjoy a self-seeking lifestyle that had little or no room for God.)

Another reason is that the broad way with the wide gate is the default position for everyone. You don't have to join this road because you are on it from birth, and it is a lot less effort to stay on it and ultimately perish than to go through the narrow gate onto the road that leads to life. Indeed, without the convicting voice of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Gospel of Jesus no one would ever consider leaving the way that is broad and wide.

(Many years ago we were driving in Wellington. We were on a main, broad highway and we knew exactly where we wanted to go. We also had a fair idea that we needed to leave the broad way at some point and take another road to get to our destination, but for some reason we never took that exit. Consequently we stayed on the broad highway that took us over a bridge that we didn't want to cross, and to compound our failure to make the right choice, the bridge was a toll bridge and we had to pay the price of going somewhere where we didn't want to go! We could and did turn around and go back the way we came, but on the road of life, once you have crossed the bridge that is death, there is no turning back)

And Jesus firmly pointed out that the broad and easy way leads to destruction. Whatever some may say about everyone being saved in the end, Jesus pulls no punches here whatsoever.

That Greek term destruction, one commentator mentioned, means utter and complete loss of anything and everything that is desirable –forever. That means that once a person experiences this "destruction" that's mentioned in verse 13, there is no hope of gaining anything that was destroyed, back again.

So, in the context of Jesus' teaching in these two verses, the meaning is very clear. Destruction means final, finished, over with, done, end of story for anything and everything that has the remotest chance of being desirable.

But destruction is also a continuous state of being in a place of the undesirable forever.

All this shows how important it is that you know in your heart this morning that you have made the choice to enter the narrow gate. That you have not just fronted up to the gate and looked at it, but you have walked through it by trusting Jesus as savior, and declared that fact to others by being baptized in His name.

(I remember clearly that as a boy of about 11 or so I was very shy and not good at meeting new people or entering into new situations. And I recall how at times I would go to the local small shop and walk past it several times before mustering up the courage needed to walk through the door, face the person behind the counter, and buy the required item. Don't put off meeting with Jesus. By faith enter through the narrow gate that leads to Life.)

So we enter the narrow gate and begin our journey through this life to Glory and along the way, says Jesus, we need guides to help us. We need to entrust ourselves to those who, by the power of the Spirit within them and by their knowledge of God's Word, are able to lead us along the right path.

And we especially need to be on the lookout for false prophets who:-

"come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them."

Such teachers will guide you away from the truth and, if possible, shipwreck your faith. They may come across as extremely sincere and dedicated. From the rest of this passage we can see that they are even able to sound correct in their teaching and to perform mighty acts. But the fruit we are to judge them by is not in what they do or in how they act, but whether what they say is true to God's Word.

When a nice young man knocks at your door and tells you that you need to rely upon extra teaching to that found in the Bible, then go and see what the Bible itself says about that.

When others tell you that Jesus is just a god like the gods we will all be one day, then go to the Bible and check it out.

When a preacher suggests that you need this special knowledge or accomplishment to be part of the Kingdom then go to the Bible and check it out.

When a friend tells you that you don't need to be part of a group of believers committed to worship and service to be a Christian then go to the Bible and see what it says about that.

John Bunyan's Pilgrims Progress has Pilgrim on his way to the Celestial City being tempted away from the narrow path by many false prophets who professed to be fellow pilgrims. Yet it also shows Pilgrim being encouraged and kept in his journey by the Lord's faithful servants such as interpreter.

Jesus wanted His followers to know that we must be diligent once we have commenced the journey to life, in our seeking after the truth. Always ready to test those who would lead us astray, for as Paul says in 2 Cor 11:14 **"Even Satan tries to make himself look like an angel of light."**

It is this warning against following false teachers in our journey to Life that makes the final section of teaching that Jesus gives, so important.

He calls us as believers to build our Christians lives on the firm foundation of His words. Not just on the things that He has said in this sermon on the Mount but all the Words of God the father, Son, and Holy Spirit contained in the Bible. This is God's Word and we must know it, obey it, and follow it's teaching.

Paul speaking to Timothy and to us says in 2 Tim 2:15

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

And again in 2 Timothy 3:14-17

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

I sometimes get concerned when I see how the emphasis of some churches and some Christians has moved away from the centrality of the Word to the centrality of Worship. Worship is very important but I sense that the Worship we offer through the hearing and doing of the Word is paramount.

Along with that we need to encourage one another in the personal and group study of God's Word. It is not enough for us to hear God's Word expounded by another, we must also study it for ourselves in order that we might build our lives upon it.

So Jesus comes to the end of His sermon, and His listeners were amazed because of the authority with which He spoke. For Jesus spoke as God. As the One before whom, one day, all will come. And on that day Jesus tells us in verse 21 of this chapter, He will welcome those who will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, and turn away those whom He does not recognize as his own.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

If you know Him and He knows you, then you have no fear of rejection. For as John 1:12 says:-

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

