

Series	Sermon on the Mount
Study	Study 16
Topic	The Conclusion
Reference	Matthew 7:13-8:1
Date	22 July 2020
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We now come to the last session on the Sermon of the Mount. We are going to be doing Matthew chapter 7, verse 13 right up to chapter 8 verse 1.

This is the conclusion of the entire sermon and as we come to any conclusion of a sermon, there will always be a challenge and in this particular sermon, there are three metaphors which Jesus employs to both challenge and warn us. The three metaphors are:

1. Picture of the gate; one narrow and one wide
2. The second is of the two different types of trees, which symbolize true prophet and the false prophet.
3. And the last metaphor is that of two houses one built on the sand and one built on the rock.

And basically the three metaphors present to us a stark contrast. There are only two options in life. There is the narrow gate or the wide gate, the true prophet or the false prophet, the house built on the sand and the house built on the rock.

You see, Jesus doesn't give us any rigor room at all. Our eternal destiny, it will be eternal destruction or eternal life will be determined, it will be hard or it will be easy and all this will be determined by our choices in this life. The choice will not be easy but it will be crucial.

This statement by Jesus goes against the grain of how people today view the truth. We live in an era of post modernism where people live within a framework of thought that believes that there is no real truth and that everything is relative. Hence all belief systems are equally plausible, something is true if it is true for me. So, Christianity is true because there are many believers all over the world. So the words of Jesus are true not because it is the truth but because there are Christians who believe it is.

Hence it would mean that man and not God is the arbiter of truth. Jesus words are true not because of their intrinsic truth value but because we validate it and say in our experience that it is true. Hence Jesus is placed on the same level as Buddha or Mohammad. Man takes the place of God and decides on what is true as all Truth is relative.

Hence homosexuality is true and right as long as there is a segment of the population for which this is true. Anyone who insists on absolute truth is then cast as a radical or fascist or intolerant.

Post modernism avoids the truth. The most obvious example today in the behaviour of the United States President Trump who regularly casts all negative truths about his own behaviour as fake news and only positive news or news that show him in favourable light as authentic or true. Which explains his constant downplaying the havoc of the coronavirus pandemic which will affect his election, and he is trying to actively suppress this or wish this reality away just simply saying over

and over again that things are going very well. However truth has a nasty way of being apparent to all with a rising death toll and finally few days ago he finally had to admit that things are going to get worse before they get better.

Now Jesus will have none of that...in these three illustrations that sum up the entire Sermon on the Mount he is categorically stating that there are only two outcomes for every single person in the world. Our neighbours will castigate us as being judgmental because we do not accept everyone's views as equally valid. But, imagine if you have someone lying on the railway track and you see a train rushing towards him but he cannot hear it because he has got a hearing problem. You run towards him and signal to him of the imminent danger but he does not believe you because in his mind his view is equally valid, there is no danger and he will not look.

Are we being judgemental? When you actually run towards him and yank him out of the way of the oncoming train and he finally sees the truth, do you think he will be mad at you for being judgemental? Obviously not, because the truth saved his life and without his life his opinions have little relevance. The truth that there are only two ways to live in Jesus final challenge to us at the end of this Sermon on the Mount is exactly like that. It sounds judgemental or harsh to our eyes because we live in a world that is completely sold on pluralism.

Since the sermon starts -off with blessedness the sermon now ends with a challenge to blessedness. How are we going to live blessed lives as the true disciple of Jesus?

He summarises the entire sermon with a challenge to a decision which will involve three metaphors or pictures of kingdom living. The metaphor of the gate tells us how we are to enter into real kingdom living. The metaphor of the false prophets tells us about the evidence of kingdom living. And the last metaphor of the house built on the rock tells us about the focus of kingdom living.

So the sermon on the mount encapsulates the strategy of the whole of our life. If you want a meaningful life, a blessed life, these three metaphors will challenge us to this.

Now let us take each of the three metaphors one by one and see what Jesus is trying to convey to us.

The first is the metaphor of the gate. For this metaphor there are four essential facts.

1. First of all, the nature of the gates; one is narrow and one is wide.
2. The road after the gate; one is hard and the other is easy
3. The numbers of people deciding on each gate, the overwhelming majority will take the wide gate, they are many.
4. The outcome of the decision to take that particular gate, one leads to life and the other one leads to eternal destruction.

Let's take each of these four features. Let's take the gate. The obvious gate which most people will go through is the wide gate, many will go through. You might say, this is the default mode and then the other a narrow gate where very few people go through. The wide gate is easy and the narrow gate is hard. How we interpret the passage will depend on how we view the entire Sermon on the Mount. When we take the entire sermon the mount, if we take this as the greatest moral teaching for us to live by then we will conclude that the narrow gate is for the people who are good enough to follow the highest ethical standards of this Sermon on the Mount.

It is so high that just looking at your neighbour's wife with lust is the same as having an affair with her. Scolding your neighbour in anger and derision and condemnation is the same as murder. So the gate of righteousness is indeed very-very narrow one and the way is very-very hard and very few people will be able to live like this. So Jesus is saying going to heaven is very-very difficult. Most of us will then go away feeling totally depressed and lost.

So the take away is you must try very-very hard and if you are obedient enough to meet this standard then God will accept your obedience as righteousness and give you eternal life.

Now this is not likely to be the reason Jesus is preaching the Sermon on the Mount. Because it is useless to preach about a standard, which virtually is impossible for anyone to fulfill and at the same time talk about a narrow gate and a wide gate, when the gate is so narrow that no one will be able to fit through. There must be another reason and we can see that in the opening verse of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:3

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

You see, Jesus starts off the sermon with blessing, makarios. He is looking at his disciples and saying to them that they are blessed. Blessed are those who are poor in spirit and they mourn. He is saying to them that these folk are blessed not because they have the highest ethical standards but because they have recognised that they don't cannot possibly live up to these impossible standards. They are the people who have come to realise that they are spiritually bankrupt and are mourning this fact in their lives. They are the ones who recognise that even our righteous acts are like filthy rags before a holy God as we read in Isaiah 64: 6

We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

It is only when they recognise their spiritual poverty that they will come to the conclusion that there is only one gate to enter into true and complete righteousness and that is through the person of the one preaching the sermon, Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus says in Matt 5:17

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them

There is only one person who can fulfill the ethical standards of the Sermon on the Mount. There is only one person who has ever looked at any woman and not committed adultery in his heart. There is only one person who has ever been angry at another person and not committed murder in his heart. That person is Jesus.

The gate is so narrow because it goes through the person of Jesus Christ. We are spiritually bankrupt and we cannot do it but we can trust in Jesus who has done it. The narrow gate is Jesus, so our union with Jesus Christ who is the origin and source of all spiritual blessings and all discipleship.

So the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount is not to teach someone to merely live a better life. Throughout the sermon Jesus is the person through whom God speaks, Jesus is the person through whom God redeems, and Jesus is the person through whom God reigns. So the "enter" command is a summons to Jesus first and foremost. The gate is narrow because it requires a person to turn from

sin to follow Jesus, to do the will of God as taught by Jesus. This is very difficult indeed for most people because for most of us will never admit in our pride of hearts that we are helpless and hopeless and that is the reason why the gate is so narrow and the way is so hard because we will not accept our own helplessness. We will not let go.

On the contrary, most people (the default mode) will go through the wide gate, because in the center of every human heart is the default thinking that if you give God a good record God will bless you or will be obligated to bless you. Look at every religion in the world and you will find only one core principle underlying them that is us trying to provide God with a good moral record so that we will get the blessing and eternal life.

You might even be fooled into believing that this is an admirable effort on our part to please God but it really isn't. In fact it is the opposite; it is in reality a subtle way of controlling God. If I give God something, He will give me something back in return. It is the way of filling up our own self-esteem or our own self-glory so that others around us can see how good we are on the outside as we build our own reputation.

If we go through the narrow gate which is the Gospel, God will be giving us a perfect record because Jesus lived the life for you and you live for Him, being enabled by the Spirit to live out the ethical standards of true righteousness. On surface the one going through the narrow gate and the one going through the wide gate may look the same. You are both trying obey the 10 commandments, both trying to pray, both trying to minister but one does it because he has been saved but the other does it in order to be saved. You see the truth of the matter is that no man enters the kingdom of God by his obedience but it is also equally true that no man enters the kingdom without obedience. Only a Spirit filled disciple will be able to live a life that approximates the ethic of the kingdom, which is the only kind of life that God will accept and bless. God does not lower His standards for His people with a nod and a wink. It is through Jesus that God provides the means to be able to live out the complete righteousness of the kingdom.

The wide gate leads to an easy road and many or most will go through this road simply because they include both the religious people and the irreligious people. It includes people in the church and also people out of the church. It is the majority position (the default mode). It will include people out of the church like Mahatma Ghandi who thought Jesus was a great teacher and moral example to follow but he never knew Jesus personally. He applied his principles. It includes a lot of the secular public especially in Christian countries because every time Jesus is put on a magazine cover in the United States sales go up by 45%.

Andrew Sullivan, a former Catholic and practicing gay writer in his Newsweek article in 2012 described the Sermon on the Mount as "the most sublime and benevolent code of morals that has ever been offered". He writes "If we return to what Jesus actually asked us to do and to be—rather than the unknowable intricacies of what we believe he actually emerges more powerfully and more purely.

What Sullivan and a lot of secular folks are saying that they are fed up with what organised religion of what is teaching and saying. What we should be doing is to be going back to what Jesus taught originally, like in the Sermon on the Mount, a great moral code that will be the basis of a great moral society. We should buy into the ideas of Jesus who taught about neighbourly love, integrity and sacrifice but not into the person of Jesus, that would be too narrow.

The wide gate would include all people who say that all religions teach people to be moral and good and all roads lead to one destination. When we adopt that stance most people in the world will readily agree with us and there will hardly be any objections. It is only when we say there is only one way to be saved and that is through the person of Jesus that we are to be saved and Him and Him alone, that there will be lot of anger and recriminations and objections.

The most shocking fact is that wide gate and easy road will include even people in the church. In Jesus time when he preached this sermon he was directing his criticism towards the religious leaders like the Pharisees. The people who were most qualified, most like to have eternal life because of their piety and Bible knowledge, they were the ones most in danger and on the road to destruction. The same situation was with the first century Christians that Paul had to deal with in many of his letters like the one to the Galatian church. They might have started off believing that they had chosen the narrow gate through Jesus but in the end, in reality they were really operating like the rest of the world. They are motivated by the same self-glory of sin...the motive is always the same but the mode is different.

A person may be pushing and arguing and promoting himself in the secular world because he is building up his own reputation before he became a Christian but once he becomes a Christian he may still have the same motive of self-glory but he now does it in a Christian way. He will insist in his way of doing worship as the only way, his ministry is the most important ministry, his opinion is the most valid and his behaviour is the most holy. To do so he lives an ethical life style and criticizes and judges people who do not conform to his standards. There is no underlying attitude of spiritual bankruptcy and the humility. There is willingness to accept that he needs to map out the areas of sin in his life and start living in obedience. He will still be gathering friends in a fan club bubble so that his self-esteem may continue to be bolstered and he will be judgemental but in a different way. In the past he will judge his secular friends and competitors based on their ability to work or on their competence or skill level or the amount of money they have or make, but now in church he judges them on the basis of church attendance, ethical standards, how they dress or how their gifts are used or the number of converts they have brought to the church and how much they sacrifice. The motive of self-glory is the same but the metric by which we achieve it is different. That is why the road is wide, it covers most of mankind.

The narrow gate however leads to a hard road and few get on it simply because it involves radical repentance. This means that we have to make a 180 degree turn around and decide that everything we have ever been through about being a good person in order to gain a reputation or merit is ultimately of no value. Most of us have a vision of ourselves that while we are not perfect, we sin now and again, but after all to us human and I have done some good thing and some bad things. It is very hard to really see ourselves as really spiritually bankrupt. In fact we take great pains to surround ourselves with like-minded friends who affirm us and tell us that we are okay, we are no bankrupt. It is like in life we surround ourselves to the mini fan club who will keep us within that bubble of affirmation and love. Anyone who will disagree with us or condemn us or correct us will be kept out of that fan club because they will only highlight what we don't want to hear, which is our sins.

We might have been a loyal son, a courageous fireman, a dedicated doctor or a loving husband but the bottom line is that while all these thing are good, they are only good on the surface but the motives underlying these actions are directed towards our own glory and desires. We love our spouses because they love us. We help the poor because helping them makes us feel good, so that we look good in the eyes of the community. We perform well at school or at work because we want to do well and earn well enough to provide for our families not other people's families. It is all

ultimately focused on self.

Repentance is a complete death to self, a complete change of attitude when we realise that this is wrong because the reason we do all the good things have always been for ourselves and is not for God. It is a death to self and that's the reason why it is very hard and only when we see ourselves as bankrupt can we ever hope to experience a radical transformation.

Let's look at the next metaphor, which is that of the false and true prophets.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

See the metaphor here is of false prophets and it makes four points. Firstly, they are difficult to identify because they look like any other member of your church. They are described as wolves in sheep's clothing. They are going to look good on the outside, holy, devoted and they will probably use a lot of bible language and sophisticated theological terms. Most of these false prophets are Christian leaders or pastors and this is how Jesus describes them.

Matt 7:21 Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

You see, the second thing is that, these folk they look like they are real deal and they say the right things. They call Jesus Lord, the Greek word for Lord is Kurios. This is the same word, which the emperor Julius Caesar used for himself called Kurios which was a word for deity. They rightly identify Jesus as God, which means they have the right doctrine, they are orthodox in their belief.

Thirdly, the word Kurios was repeated twice, Lord, Lord. In ancient times if you repeat a word, the repetition of a word was used to convey intensity of emotion. Let's look at 2 Samuel 18: 33. This was when King David had lost his son, evil son Absalom who actually rebelled against him and it reads in verse 33

And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

See David is mourning the death of his evil son, who rebelled against him and his name Absalom is repeated as was the phrase "my son" "my son". So these false prophets or preachers are totally passionate about their faith as they kept calling Lord, Lord. They are going to be there at every prayer meeting and every bible study and lastly they are tremendously gifted. They cast out demons, they work miracles, you cannot prophesy without the help of the Spirit, you cannot do ministry without the help of the Spirit. King Saul prophesied with the help of the Spirit. Even Judas was part of the apostolic team that actually cast out demons.

In Exodus 21 and 22 the magicians could turn their staffs into snakes just like Moses, even turn water into blood just like Moses. So the performance of miracles and doing ministry is not a good confirmation that the person is even in a relationship with God, because Jesus said "I never knew you" He describes these folk as lawless people. The point of the example of the false prophets is that it is not the miraculous or exercise of the gifts that is the indication of authenticity of a person's spirituality. Spiritual gifts are what you do but spiritual fruit is what you are. We live in a world that hungers for the miraculous and spectacular miracles but this is not a reliable indicator of a relationship with God.

Take for example the prosperity gospel preacher Kenneth Copeland. He told in a Christian magazine that the fear of the coronavirus was a sin. He said when people fear they give the devil a pathway to their bodies. On Twitter he told his 432,000 followers: "No weapon meant to hurt you will succeed ... No disease. NO VIRUS. ... Believe it. Receive it. Speak it in Jesus' Name!".

He also told people to continue tithing to the church even if they lose their jobs due to the coronavirus. But if look at his own life...he owns three private jets and even has his own airport. When he was asked how he could afford one of the particular jets sold to him by Tyler Perry, the movie director he replied that the plane was "so cheap for me I couldn't help but buy it."

You see, you will know the tree by its fruit. You can look at his lifestyle. In the metaphor of gate, is about choosing the narrow gate. The metaphor of the false prophet is designed to warn us that kingdom living is all about spiritual transformation of who you are and the focus is not at all on what you do. Spiritual fruit is our character, is the most important outward evidence of our authentic relationship with God.

When Paul writes to the Corinthian church, they were an extremely gifted group of believers, they could prophesy, speak in tongues and work miracles but Paul writes in 1 Cor chapter 13:1

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

I love the last verse. It says in verse 13

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Jesus is now challenging us that the key to a real relationship with Him is spiritual fruit, it is love. It is when we are in prayer, when we ask, we seek and knock. It is to ask for the power to think, to act and to talk in ways that are utterly pleasing to Him. We pray and ask for the power to strengthen our moral resolve, the power to walk in transparent gratitude to God, the power to be humble, to be discerning, the power to be obedient, the power to be trusting and the power to grow in conformity to Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus is challenging us into.

Now the last metaphor is that of the two houses built by two men. On the outside the houses look exactly the same. Same like the two men, they look the same. There is no description of either one of them except they describe one as "wise" and the other one as "foolish" and the assessments whether they are wise or foolish is based on the kind of foundation on which the houses are built on. The thing is the storm comes and these storms can either be trials and tribulations that characterise

life in general or the final judgment which the Bible often describes as a storm. The house built on a rock will stand but the one built on the sand will be washed away. The one built on the rock is built by a man who is described as wise and successful. The other one who builds it on the sand is described as foolishthe Greek word is moros which actually means moron.

You see the foundation upon which we live our lives is not something that is immediately apparent to people on the outside, like the two houses. It is only when the storm comes that the foundations will be exposed. Each of us are only given an opportunity to build one house in life, to build one life. We can either build our lives upon the solid foundation of Jesus teaching in the Sermon on the Mount or we can build it on anything else because when the storms of life comes only the life based on Christ will survive the judgement, anything else is washed away.

Jesus is giving us a warning and a choice at the end of this Gamma course. His words can either remain at the level of our brains and go no further aside from the intense theological discussion we can have in our Zoom groups or we can take His Words and learn to live by them. Not in order to be saved or to present God a record of good record or works in order to compel Him to bless us but because we have chosen the narrow gate. When we have chosen the narrow gate, we have chosen to live in Christ and if we have chosen to live in Christ then His words need to be translated into actions in our everyday lives.

So before we leave this Gamma course we need to leave with Jesus words embedded in our lives. The next time we get our monthly pay check, we should remember that we are not to lay up treasures for ourselves on earth where the moth and rust destroy, where thieves break in and steal, but to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

The next time we start to feel anxious about our health, when we see our neighbour struck down with cancer. The next time we feel anxious about our jobs when we see our relative lose his job because of the coronavirus pandemic and recession, we are to be filled by His words that we are far more valuable and loved by God than the birds or the flowers of the field and if He can feed them He can surely provide for us and it is then when we decide instead of shrinking back in fear and anxiety, we instead boldly step forward to seek His kingdom to serve Him with greater and greater vigour.

The next time someone hurts us and we naturally want to retaliate in anger, let the Words of Jesus flow from our heads to our hearts and we remember that Jesus said to "Love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us" because if we only love our friends and family we are no better than unbelievers. No we are different, we have been transformed because we have chosen the narrow gate and our characters have been moulded by the Holy Spirit and somehow He is going us the strength and peace to be able to withhold retaliation and to even forgive.

So the next time we are tempted to look at a woman with lust we are to remember that this is not the kind of behaviour that glorifies our God. Others will not see our hearts but God does and we turn away. We build our lives upon the rock. We will wake up each morning and the first thing in our minds should not be just our job and the money we make from them but the first thing should be our jobs and how this job will glorify God, so that we get to be that salt and light that this world so desperately needs to see.

You see, the Sermon on the Mount is the greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest person who ever lived, but it will only impact our lives and transform our world when we decide today that we will build the rest of our lives on it. It will not be easy, it will take your whole lives and it will take the

whole church as a body because we are all obligated to help each other build our lives upon the rock.

28 When Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, 29 for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.1 When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him

Now you see there is a bit of irony here, the crowds loved the sermon, it was astonishing, it was powerful, they actually recognised that he was teaching with the kind of authority that surpassed all other human teachers who were just giving their opinion. Jesus was giving divine facts. The result was when He came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. The irony is the words of Jesus excites us, astonishes us, great crowds followed him but you fast forward to the end of book of Matthew, same mountain, you know how many people were there, 11 disciples. Fast forward to the Book of Acts, you know how many people were waiting at Pentecost. 120 disciples. Where are the crowds? Where was all these people who were so astonished about his words. You see, it is a narrow gate. Today, the Sermon on the Mount challenges us to this narrow gate and this narrow life. Let us make sure that at the end of time, at the end of our live we too will be counted as the blessed disciples and we make the right choice.

May God bless all of us, as we let His words sink into our lives. Amen.