

## A Decision with Eternal Consequences:

Are You With Jesus or Against Him?

Matthew 7:13–27 5/31/09 a.m.

Topic: What kind of people will the kingdom of God be populated by?

Assertion: The kingdom of God will be populated by those who choose the narrow gate (7:13-14), are like trees that bear good fruit (7:15-23), and build their houses on the rock (7:24-27).

**Central Truth: If we would choose to enter the kingdom, we must choose the narrow gate (7:13-14), we must be like trees that bear good fruit (7:15-23), and we must build our house on the rock (7:24-27).**

**ENGAGE:** When you set off on a journey, such as a vacation or business trip, in which you are driving, you need to pay careful attention to the road signs or you may not make it to your intended destination. Many years ago before the ready advent of GPS's in vehicles I still remember the sinking feeling I had when I suddenly realized I was fifty miles past my turnoff. I had been heading south on an interstate for the past 45 minutes, instead of taking another interstate to the west. The extra hour and a half it added to my time was frustrating. While my inattention caused me some frustration how much more important that we **make sure our lives are headed in the right direction.**

I appreciate what Bible teacher Haddon Robinson says in this regards (cf. Robinson, *What Jesus Said about Successful Living*, 270-71): “What distinguishes us from one another are the choices we make. **We make decisions and then those decisions turn around and make us....** A playwright in New York City wrote about some of the [people] who had worked with him over several decades. He lamented the fact that many of them began with great promise but ended a lie. Summing up his observations he said, ‘In the final analysis **very few lives are hits that end up on Broadway. Most lives are flops that finish out of town in New Haven.**’

Robinson observes: “His verdict holds a great deal of truth. Most people desperately want to be successful, but when life is over, measured by their own standards, they have failed. Why does that happen so frequently? **We often blame heredity, environment, or genetics.** Although all of those factors possess a shaping and molding force, they don't explain everything.

**“We are what we are committed to.** If you tell me what you are committed to, I can tell you what you are. Certainly that is a theme of the Bible. **Again and again biblical leaders call people to choose.** Moses preached five sermons just before he died. Then he said: SLIDE: “Today I invoke heaven and earth as a witness against you that I have set life and death, blessing and curse, before you. Therefore choose life so that you and your descendants may live! <sup>30:20</sup> I also call on you to love the Lord your God, to obey him and be loyal to him, for he gives you life and enables you to live continually in the land the Lord promised to give to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (Deut 30:19-20 NET). BLANK SLIDE

“In Moses' audience that day stood a soldier named Joshua. When Moses died, Joshua took up the reins of leadership and led the people into the land God had promised them. When Joshua gave His farewell address he said, SLIDE: “Choose today whom you will worship, whether it be the gods whom your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. But I and my family will worship the Lord!” (Joshua 24:15 NET). BLANK SLIDE

**FOCUS:** Now just as Moses and Joshua called the people of Israel to choose, so we are going to see that Jesus today, as He brings His Sermon on the Mount to a close, calls you and me to action. **Jesus answers the question of what kind of people we must be if we are to be part of His kingdom.**

**SET THE STAGE biblically** [cf. Wilkins, *NIV Comm.*, 321]. Now **the disciples** have been the primary object of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matt 5:1-2). However throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus has had an eye on **the crowds and religious leaders**. Jesus extended an invitation to the crowds to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus cautioned both His disciples and the crowds about the false spiritual leadership of the religious establishment, especially the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. Jesus warned: SLIDE: "For I tell you, unless your righteousness goes beyond that of the experts in the law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:20 NET). BLANK SLIDE

\*\*\* "Jesus now concludes the Sermon on the Mount with warnings directed to all three groups because **eternal destiny is at stake**. [Jesus] warns His *disciples* to examine themselves to be sure they are truly members of the kingdom of heaven, not simply those who profess allegiance. [Jesus] warns the *crowds* to consider carefully the alternative of following Him or following their popular religious leadership. And [Jesus] warns the *religious establishment* about their [blameworthiness] for leading the people in the wrong direction. (Cf. Wilkins)

**PREVIEW:** In each of these warnings Jesus gives a choice must be made. We must choose between two gates and roads (7:13-14), two kinds of prophets (7:15-20), two kinds of disciples (7:21-23), and two foundations (7:24-27). **Are you with Jesus or against Him?** There is no middle ground, no other choice, and a decision must be made—a **decision with eternal consequences** (cf. Wilkins, *ibid.*). Today we will see **if you or I would enter the kingdom of heaven we must choose to enter the narrow gate** (7:13-14), **we must be like trees that bear good fruit** (7:15-23), and **we must build our house on the rock** (7:24-27).

**ANNOUNCE the passage:** For the Scripture reading, please turn with me in your Bibles to Matt 7:13-27 [p. 854].

## **If you would enter the kingdom of heaven choose the narrow gate. Your response to Jesus determines your eternal destiny (7:13-14).**

If you or I would be part of God's eternal kingdom we must come through Jesus. **Jesus Himself is the narrow gate you and I must choose if we are to enter God's kingdom.** Entrance into God's eternal kingdom requires that a person put their trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior. You and I must come to Jesus for forgiveness of our sins. Here in Matt 7:13-14 Jesus calls us to a courageous commitment to Him as the entrance to the road of life in the kingdom of heaven (cf. Wilkins, *NIV Appl. Comm.*, 332). Jesus commands us: "Enter by the narrow gate" (Matt 7:13a NKJV).

Now "most Jewish people believed that Israel as a whole would be saved and that the few who were lost would be exceptions to the general rule" (cf. Keener, *IVP Bible Background Comm.* [Matt 7:13]). So today, the vast majority of people believe that most people will be saved and go to heaven when they die. Jesus makes it clear in His warning this is not the case. For a person to

enter the kingdom of heaven they must come through Jesus. “Enter by the narrow gate” Jesus exhorts us.

Now choosing Jesus requires a courageous commitment to Him. **Going our own way, like most people do, appears to be the easier path.** But this broad path of going our own way, ultimately leads to eternal destruction.

**The decision to follow Jesus is not the easy way.** Jesus’ description of the “wide gate” and “broad way” provide a clue not only to the number of those on the highway to hell, but also how their “easy way” contrasts with the troubles and oppression and rigor we can expect as we come through the “narrow gate” and enter the “difficult way.” Notice again Jesus’ command and warning to us in vv. 13-14: “*Enter by the **narrow** gate; for **wide** is the gate and **broad** is the way that leads to destruction, and there are **many** who go in by it. **14** Because **narrow** is the gate and **difficult** is the way which leads to life, and there are **few** who find it*” (Matt 7:13-14 NKJV).

APPL: Jesus says the gate is narrow. There are not many ways to God, but one—through Jesus Christ. Jesus provides a similar analogy of Himself as the gate (or door), that is, entrance into God’s kingdom, as He describes Himself as the gate (or door) of the sheep in John 10. There Jesus teaches: SLIDE: “[*Jesus*] explained [*the figure of speech*] to them. “*I assure you, I am the gate for the sheep,*” He said.... Yes, **I am the gate. Those who come in through Me will be saved. Wherever they go, they will find green pastures. The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give life in all its fullness**” (John 10:7–10 NLT). [BLANK SLIDE]

**There is only one means of receiving eternal life—Jesus alone.**

ILL: Recently a lady expressed to me the popular opinion that there are many ways to God through different religions including Jesus. Part of my response to her was this: If you are going to hold to this view you have to reconcile Jesus’ statement, which He gave to His followers the night before He was crucified: SLIDE: ““*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*” (John 14:6 NKJV). [BLANK SLIDE]

There are **not** many ways to God as many would hope. The way to eternal life and God’s kingdom is through Jesus Christ. We must trust Him, as God’s perfect Son, who died for us and rose again the third day, for our forgiveness. SLIDE: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among people by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12 NET). [BLANK SLIDE]

**APPL/ILL:** Have you entered the narrow gate? Are you on the restricted road? “A letter written to a **Melbourne, Australia** daily newspaper expressed clearly the attitude of a person on the broad road to destruction. This person wrote:

“After hearing Dr. Billy Graham on the air, viewing him on television and reading reports and letters concerning him and his mission, I am heartily sick of the type of religion that insists my soul (and everyone else’s) needs saving—whatever that means. I have never felt that I was lost. Nor do I feel that I daily wallow in the mire of sin, although repetitive preaching insists that I do.

“Give me a practical religion that teaches gentleness and tolerance, that acknowledges no barriers of color or creed, that remembers the aged and teaches children of goodness and not sin. “If in order to save my soul I must accept such a philosophy as I have recently heard preached, I prefer to remain forever damned.”

**APPL:** Most of us here today would not subscribe to this person's attitude, but **what is your response to Jesus Christ?** Have you placed your trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins? Perhaps you made a profession many years ago. Does your life indicate you are submitting to God's kingdom norms? At the end of the day, God is not going to judge you by your outward religious image. God knows if you have truly responded with repentance and faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, accepting the authority of His life and Word over your life.

**Trans:** Now Jesus urges us who desire to enter His Father's kingdom and enjoy eternity with Him, not only to enter the narrow gate, but also to **travel the narrow road. I believe what Jesus wants you and me to understand is this:** As His followers **be prepared to face persecution and opposition.** "The 'broad' road is spacious and accommodates the crowd and their baggage; **the road with Jesus is 'narrow,' it will involve trials and tribulations, including persecution. Jesus tells us the way of discipleship is "'narrow,' restricting, because it is the way of persecution and opposition"** (cf. Carson, EBC: 188-89). In other words Jesus warns us: "Be prepared for persecution as followers of Me" (cf. John 15:18-21; Acts 14:22; 1 Peter 4:1-5). Be prepared for trials.

**Why choose the narrow road, if it is narrow or unpopular?** We enter the narrow gate through Jesus and follow Him on the narrow road for the same reason we choose any road—**for its destination.** Jesus warns us **the broad road leads to destruction.** It may be an eight-lane, well-traveled highway; it may have beautiful scenery, and marvelous accommodations along the way; it may be free of potholes. But Jesus said it ends in eternal destruction. If you or I let the crowd decide our direction, we will be destroyed with them.

**APPL:** Now it's important to note here that **the gate comes first, then the road** (or path [NKJV: way]). Jesus offers by grace this invitation to life. Jesus is the narrow gate through whom we must enter the kingdom of heaven and eternal life. Like the gate, the road is as narrow as Jesus Himself. **This narrow path indicates the life of discipleship on which we embark after entering the gate.** The wide gate and path indicate the decision to choose the world's path over Jesus. Your decision and my decision either for or against Christ comes in this life. **Your response to Jesus is the most important decision you will ever make.** Jesus offers by grace the invitation to salvation and a life of walking with Him. (Cf. Wilkins, 333.)

**Reit/Trans:** Jesus commands us: "Enter the narrow gate and travel the narrow road." Are you with Jesus or against Him? **Your response to Jesus determines your eternal destiny.** There's a second warning Jesus gives here. In vv. 15-23 we see this truth:

**If you would choose to enter the kingdom of heaven make sure you are a tree that bears good fruit (7:15-23). Examine those who claim to speak for god but also examine yourself to make sure you are truly a member of Christ's kingdom.**

**In Matt 7:15-23 Jesus warns us to examine others as well as ourselves.** In vv. 15-20 Jesus warns us to examine the fruit of those who profess a message from God, for they may be imposters. Then in vv. 21-23 Jesus warns us to examine ourselves also to be sure we are truly members of the kingdom of heaven, not simply those who profess allegiance. **If you would choose to enter the Kingdom make sure you are a tree that bears good fruit. Part of what will help us bear good fruit is knowing how to distinguish those who falsely claim to speak**

**for God.** How can we distinguish those who falsely claim to speak for God? Jesus twice in vv. 15-20 tells us we can distinguish those who falsely claim to speak for God **by their fruit.**

Jesus uses the imagery of people who come to us appearing to be one thing but are really something else. Look at v. 15: *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves”* (Matt 7:15 NKJV). In the context, Jesus is warning the people listening to Him about the religious leaders of their day, the scribes and Pharisees, who falsely claim to be speaking for God. As we mentioned previously to set the stage for His teaching here in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus stated: SLIDE: “For I tell you, unless your righteousness goes beyond that of the experts in the law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:20 NET). [BLANK SLIDE]

How can we distinguish those who falsely claim to speak for God? Jesus says we can distinguish those who false claim to speak for God **by their fruit.** Notice how Jesus warns us to examine the fruit of those who falsely claim to speak for God in Matt 7:16-20 in your Bibles: *“**You will know them by their fruits.** Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? **17** Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. **18** A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. **19** Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **20** Therefore **by their fruits you will know them**”* (Matt 7:16-20 NKJV).

Grapes and figs were among the most valuable and widely consumed fruits of the earth; thorns and thistles were worthless and troublesome to harvesters (cf. IVP Comm.). Jesus states, “You (pl.) will know them [i.e., those who falsely claim to speak for God] by their fruit.” Matthew 7:16a, 20.

When you look back at such “false prophets” as Jim Jones (of Guyana) or “David Koresh” from Waco the fruit of their lives clearly indicated that they were not true followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus says, **“You will know those who falsely claim to speak for God by their fruit.”** Immorality, claiming to be Christ, sin after sin being manifested in their lives; even though there was an outward cloak of righteousness; these can all be evidence of those who falsely claim to speak for God.

ILL: A group of students at Harvard once tried to fool the famous professor of zoology Agassiz. They took parts from a number of different bugs and with great skill attached them together to make a creation they were sure would baffle their teacher. On the chosen day they brought it to him and asked that he identify it. **As he inspected it with great care, the students grew more and more sure they had tricked this genius.** Finally, Professor Agassiz straightened up and said, “I have identified it.” Scarcely able to control their amusement, they asked its name. Agassiz replied, **“It is a humbug.”**

**As those who have genuine life from God and who travel the narrow road, Jesus wants you and me to be able to detect the counterfeit and think, “Humbug.”**

**Trans:** So what are some of the characteristics of those who falsely claim to speak for God? “Prophets were known to be false if they led people away from the true God (Deut 13) or their words did not come to pass (Deut 18:21–22).” Jesus teaches us here that if those who claim to speak for God do not live right, they are false (Mt 7:21–23) [cf. IVP Bible Background on Matt 7:17-20].

Those who falsely claim to speak for God **neither acknowledge nor teach the narrow way to life subject to persecution (7:13–14).**

The test to determine those who falsely claim to speak for God is certain, but not necessarily easy or quick. The test is certain. But **this indication can take time to surface.** One may pretend for a time as if he or she belongs to Christ’s kingdom; but “what one is will eventually reveal itself in what one does” (cf. D.A. Carson, *EBC*: 8:191; cf. Judas Iscariot) **Ultimately those who falsely claim to speak for God tear down faith (2 Tim 2:18) and promote divisiveness, bitterness (e.g., 1 Tim 6:4–5; 2 Tim 2:23), and various kinds of ungodliness (2 Tim 2:16).**

The Christian appearance of those who falsely claim to speak for God need not deceive us as followers of Jesus Christ because their true identity can be perceived by examining their deeds or works. Jesus teaches us that one’s spiritual identity is determined not by what one says but by what one does, because what one does inevitably reveals one’s heart. [cf. Comfort, *Cornerstone Comm.*]

**Now Jesus warns of the disastrous consequences of those who falsely claim to speak for God, as well as those who follow their teaching when He warns (in Matt 7:19-20):** “*Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them*” Matt 7:19–20 (NKJV).

**Trans:** So a key characteristic of those who falsely claim to speak for God is that they have never really come under kingdom authority. While outwardly they may appear to be following Christ, they do not truly accept Christ’s authority over their lives. In **Matt 7:15-23** then Jesus warns us not only to examine others who falsely claim to speak for God, **Jesus also warns us to examine ourselves to be sure we are truly members of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus warns us to make sure we belong to His kingdom and are not simply those who profess allegiance.** Look at Jesus’ warning to examine ourselves in vv. 21-23 [of Matt 7]: “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’*” (Matt 7:21-23 NKJV).

**God requires our inward allegiance to His will, not simply external conformity.** Saying Jesus is our Lord, our Master, can be used as a cover-up by us to try to hide our unrepentant heart. So Jesus says that entrance to the kingdom of heaven is reserved for those who do “the will of My Father in heaven” (7:21 NKJV).

APPL [cf. Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Comm.*]: How can you and I prepare for this judgment? *By doing God’s will. Obedience to God’s will is the test of true faith in Christ.* The test is not words, saying “Lord, Lord,” but not obeying His commands. How easy to learn a religious vocabulary, and even memorize Bible verses and religious songs, and yet not obey God’s will. **When a person is truly born again, he or she has the Spirit of God living within (Rom. 8:9); and the Spirit enables this person to know and do the Father’s will. God’s love in their heart (Rom. 5:5) motivates them to obey God and serve others.**

Words are not a substitute for our obedience, and neither are religious works. Preaching, casting out demons, and performing miracles can be divinely inspired, but they give no assurance of salvation. It is likely that even Judas participated in some or all of these activities, and yet he was

not a true believer. In the last days, Satan will use “lying wonders” to deceive people (2 Thess 2:7–12).

So remember, we are to *hear* God’s words and *do* them (see James 1:22–25). We must not stop with only hearing (or studying) His words. Our hearing must result in doing.

Jesus is the ultimate example of one obeying the Father’s will (cf. Matt 26:42). To follow Jesus’ example in discipleship and become like Him will enable us, His disciples, to do God’s will on a daily basis.

\*\*\* Judgment for those who only pose as Jesus’ disciples leads to eternal separation from God. **Jesus makes it clear here that true Christians cannot lose their salvation.** Jesus addresses those He rejects by declaring, “I never knew you; depart from Me” (Matt 7:23b NKJV). Perhaps these people fooled many people on earth, perhaps even themselves, but Jesus knows they never had a saving relationship with Him. Jesus never recognized them as one of His own. (Cf. Blomberg, *New Am Comm.*, 133.)

Reit/Trans: **If we would choose to enter the kingdom, we must choose the narrow gate (7:13-14), we must be like trees that bear good fruit (7:15-23), and ... we must build our house on the rock (7:24-27).**

## **If you would choose to enter the kingdom of heaven build your house on the rock (7:24-27). Build your life on Jesus and His teaching as your life’s foundation.**

Jesus’ final warning compares the wisdom of finding our righteousness in Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of heaven with the foolishness of pursuing the self-righteousness of the religious establishment. **Jesus is the Rock on which your life and my life must be built if we are to enter His kingdom.**

In Jesus’ day the silty soil ringing the seashore formed by sediment deposited by flowing water was hard on the surface during the hot summer months. But a wise builder would not be fooled by surface conditions. He would dig down sometimes ten feet below the surface soil to the bedrock and there establish the foundation of his house. When the winter rains came, causing the Jordan River pouring into the sea to overflow its banks, houses built on bedrock would be able to withstand the floods [cf. Wilkin, 327].

Jesus’ contrasts the wisdom of the wise who builds His life on Jesus and His teaching verses the foolish person who builds His life on something other than Jesus. How foolish a person who chooses the easy way and does not build on the bedrock! Note Jesus warning to us in vv. 24-27: *“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall”* (Matt 7:24-27 NKJV).

Jesus’ question to His hearers and His question to us is this: Will you reject the present secure but shallow sifting sand of the religious leadership as characterized by the scribes and Pharisees. **Will you choose instead Jesus’ words as the foundation for your life? The popular opinion of**

Jesus' day, as well as for us, is to simply maintain a surface righteousness that hides an unstable foundation of religious hypocrisy. Eventually religious hypocrisy will be revealed as not having the answers to our needs.

Jesus encourages you and me to leave behind the way of comfort found in identifying with the popular culture of our day that says there are many ways to God. Jesus gives an invitation to us to the bedrock of true life in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is the only secure truth of life (cf. 1 Cor 3:10-11). Your response to Jesus is the most important decision you can make. The wise person recognizes there will be storms and sacrifices, and builds his or her life on the rock of Jesus' words. The most important decision we can make is to build our lives on Jesus, regardless of what those around us may believe.

**Concl:** [cf. Robinson, 278]: When Charles Colson opened the book *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis, Colson wrote, he found himself “face-to-face with an intellect so disciplined, so clear, so relentlessly logically that I could only be grateful I had never faced him in a court of law.” “Soon I had covered two pages of yellow paper with reasons in support of the view that there was a God.

The more Colson read of Lewis' mighty little book the closer Colson came to God. “I knew,” Colson wrote “the time had come for me. I could not sidestep the central question Lewis (or God) had placed squarely before me. Was I to accept without reservations Jesus Christ as Lord of my life? It was like a gate before me. There was no way to walk around it. I would step through or I would remain outside.”

So for you and me. A choice must be made. **Are you with Jesus or against Him?** There is no middle ground. **A decision must be made—a decision with eternal consequences.....**

**DVD Clip: Steve & Kathy [from The Measure of a Man DVD series 1] 6 min.**

The solid rock that provides true stability, security, and hope for you and me in this life—whatever comes—and the life to come is Jesus. Jesus alone is the Solid Rock, and the life of kingdom righteousness that He has announced in the Sermon on the Mount. Make sure this is where your hope lies....Salvation...