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**Matt. 7:13-29**

**Four Warnings, Two Ways, One Lord**

The book **Pilgrim's Progress** is an incredible story, a true Christian classic. It paints the Christian life as a **journey** - from the *city of destruction* to the *Celestial City*, eternal life with God in the Kingdom of Heaven. Near the beginning, Pilgrim flees the city of destruction, heeding the warning of the Evangelist, and after several trials, *enters through the "Gate"* - he is converted, becomes a Christian! And yet, this is only *the beginning of the story*. The rest of the book is his *long journey* towards Heaven - full of trials, dangers, and suffering. It is such a good book because it accurately presents the journey of the Christian life as one of *difficulty and trial*, yet always traveling *towards the sure destination of eternal life in the Kingdom of God*. The Christian life is a *journey, a pilgrimage*, towards **the Kingdom of God** - the "Celestial City" - *because we trust the message of the King*. The call of conversion is to *trust Christ and be saved* - and when we do so, we embark on a *journey* of following him - and it is by no means easy; there are hills to climb, obstacles to overcome, giants and dragons of sin and temptation to slay along the way.

Many people talk about Christianity and faith as if it's the key to a *good, easy, prosperous life* - some people become Christians thinking it's the missing key to simply having a *better, happier, more satisfying life now*; and for the reason, many who come on such false pretenses quickly become *disappointed* and fall away. Life doesn't magically become easier when we become Christians, does it? In some ways, it becomes *harder*. We become aware of indwelling sin in deeper ways and are called to *fight it*. We're challenged by our own flesh, temptations, and faulty ways of thinking, feeling, and living. The world around us becomes more hostile. We begin being assaulted in the battles of spiritual warfare raging around us. When it becomes difficult to follow Christ, have faith, and obey the Lord as a Christian, we might be tempted to think: "Did I get it wrong? Is this really what the Christian life looks like?"

And to make matters worse, we see *alternative choices* along our path all the while: people that claim to be on the same path as us, going to the same place; claiming to be Christians walking towards the Kingdom of God! And yet, their path looks *different from our*; easy,

comfortable, appealing to the world - and yet, they *depart from the true teachings*, or do not take *obedience and sin seriously*; they do not build their teachings and lives on the *gospel*.

Christ knew that such would be the case, so He gives us *four warnings* in **Matt. 7:13-29**, in order that *we will not be fooled*. Even though many claim there are different paths, Jesus makes clear *there is only one way to salvation, eternal life in the Kingdom of God: through Himself, Jesus Christ, by traveling down the path He calls us down - the journey of true faith*. And it is a journey down *the narrow, more difficult path*. Yet, we must not be fooled! Our destination is sure; the Lord is with us on the path; and all the “alternatives” are simply one giant *false road* leading to destruction.

So then, let us look at these *four warnings*, so that we will not be fooled but will be *strengthened in our faith and pilgrimage*.

## **I. Two Ways: The Road to Life and the Road to Destruction or Two Roads - but Only One that Leads to Eternal Life (Matt. 7:13-14)**

Jesus begins the section with the first warning in **vv.13-14**: “*Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*”

This warning is a sobering reminder that there are only *two possible paths* in life - two possible ways of living - that are presented to each and every person that’s ever lived; there is no other alternative, no middle ground. There are only **two roads**: one that leads to ***destruction***, and one that leads to ***eternal life***. Knowing the destination makes all the difference, doesn’t it? These are not two arbitrarily different roads that just so happen to branch off in different directions; this is not a choice of casual preferences, or one that has insignificant consequences: *it is the difference between life and death!* And not merely *physical* life and death, but *eternal life versus eternal damnation*: destruction in Hell, the punishment of God’s *just, holy, and righteous wrath* against our sin - the destruction we all deserve. *That* is what is at stake here; those are the only two possible destinations: we will all end up in one or the other. With the destinations clearly set before us, we would think that the choice would be obvious: *choose the path that leads to life!* ANd yet, *tragically*, that is *not* the path that most people take.

### **A. The Wide Way**

Most people take *the wide road* that leads to *destruction*. There are only *two roads*: there's only *one way* that leads to life; that means that *every other possible* "road" or "path" someone might claim to take to lead to *life* - every other religion, philosophy, or any response to Christ and the gospel *other than the response Christ demands* - all such paths are simply *the one and same road*; and they all lead to the same place. This is why the way is so wide and so populous.

After all, the wide way is the *easy* way. The "gate is wide": anyone can enter in, free of charge; in fact, every one of us is born into this "way," for we are all born sinners. And the way is "*easy*," for this road is the way of *the flesh*; there is no need to fight sin, change one's ways, deny the self, or obey - this is the way of simply "following your heart" and doing whatever you want to! It is the way of giving into temptation, not fighting it; chasing after the desires of the eyes, of pursuing all that the world has to offer, no matter how wicked, sinful, or idolatrous. This is the *way of the world* - the way of *majority opinion* and *tolerance*! No persecution here; simply *drift along* with the cultural currents; simply tolerate the choices of others, and your lifestyle will be tolerated as well - no matter how unethical, immoral, unloving, ungodly, unnatural, or ridiculous it is. This is the way of Satanic forces - no spiritual warfare to be waged on this road. It is the *wide and easy way* - at least, for a time. For it leads *straight off a cliff, right into eternal destruction*. This is the way of **sin and evil** - and it includes **any possible way of life apart from bowing the knee to Christ in repentant, obedient faith**. Therefore, we should not be surprised that *most people* will walk down this path.

## **B. The Narrow Way**

But there is *another road* - the way that leads *to life*. But this way is *narrow*. there are not nearly as many people on it as there are on the "wide road" to destruction; in comparison, "those who find" the narrow path "are few," Jesus tells us. After all, There is only *one way* to enter this path - through the *narrow gate*. There are not *many roads* and *many ways* that can lead us to God, salvation, or life - *there is only one!* And the way, the truth, and the life *is Christ Jesus Himself!* Jesus, our Lord and Savior - He himself is the gate! We enter onto the path of life *through Him* - by *repenting*, by turning *away* from the wide road of our sin to the narrow way of the Cross; by trusting and believing in Christ alone; by turning to *follow after him* as His disciples *down the path that leads to eternal life!* This path, this way - it is the life of discipleship that every Christian *necessarily must walk down!* It is a call to *turn away* from our

previous life of unrepentant sin, to *turn to Christ in faith* and so enter the gate, and to *follow after him and walk down the path to life by striving to trust and obey Christ in all that He demands!*

And this means that this narrow path - the only path that leads to life - "*this way is **hard.***" We must not be fooled into thinking otherwise. To walk down this path is to "*pick up your cross and follow Jesus.*" It is to *die to ourselves* - to put to death our old, sinful ways of thinking, feeling and living; to put to death our sinful habits and lifestyles; to acknowledge, confess, and turn away from our deep-seated, sinful, habitual sins and patterns of ungodliness; to confront our own weakness and failures; to give up the pursuit of pleasure, pride, and glory. It means accepting that *this world* is not worth living for, but truly believing that *the life in Christ's Kingdom is!* It means accepting the fact that *life may get harder* as we strive to live the Christian life; **our flesh and desires** will oppose us, the **unbelieving world** will oppose us, **demonic forces** will oppose us. It is not easy!

So why would anyone willingly take up such a life? ***Because it is the only road that actually leads to life - salvation, eternal life with God!*** There is nothing better; there is no other hope! We either believe this message from God, or we don't; we either *believe in Christ and trust the good news of salvation he offers by grace through faith in Him alone - or we don't!* There is no middle ground. This is the sobering warning for us that frames the rest of this passage: you're going to walk down *one of these paths*; you're going to reach *one of those destinations* -either **eternal life** or **eternal destruction and damnation**. Which one do you want to reach? Which path do you think you're on? Which path does your life look more like *right now?*

The choice should be obvious. However, there will be many that try to convince us to *abandon* the narrow road of life for the wide way of destruction. Therefore, Jesus gives a second warning:

## **II. Good and Bad Fruit: Beware of False Teachers Who Aim to Lead Us Astray (Matt. 7:15-20)**

Verses 13-14 have just warned us that *the majority of people do not follow Christ to life, but instead walk the path that leads to destruction*. In the next three sections, verses 15-27, Jesus warns us that *there will be many who **claim** to be on the narrow path of life, who may appear to*

be, but are, in fact, living on the wide path, and their end will be destruction. He gives us three different examples of this.

And the first example, the first *false category* that he warns us about, are **false teachers** who will come among us “*as ravenous wolves*” in “*sheep’s clothing*.” He gives the warning very clearly in **v.15**: “*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.*”

#### **A. Warning: Beware of false prophets - wolves in sheep’s clothing (v.15)**

These “false prophets” are the same kinds of people that are referred to in others passages as “*false teachers*.” However, we’re warned that, even though false and malicious, they come “*in sheep’s clothing*.” Even though they’re wolves, they pass for sheep; they give the appearance that they are *believers*; the church thinks they’re true Christians! Not only that, but these wolves *assume leadership and teaching positions* within the church. They claim to believe in Christ; they claim to believe right doctrine; they *look* godly; *unless we look closely*. Though they appear to be Christians - even godly and mature Christians - they are, in fact, “*ravenous wolves*” - they infiltrate the church seeking to *devour* God’s people and lead them astray.

They could do this in many ways. They could be pastors, deacons, Sunday School or Bible Study teachers; maybe they just strive to have a large amount of informal influence or political power within the church community. But though they *claim* to know Christ, believe the gospel, and believe in the truths of GOD’s Word, *they actually twist God’s Word; they believe and teach false truths*. Often, they do this by *using the same words* we use but by *meaning very different things by them!* There has been a long history of people doing this throughout church history; even in the recent history of our own church heritage - the Southern Baptist Convention - there were many Bible teachers, seminary professors, and pastors, who snuck into our churches in the 1900s, claiming to believe right doctrine, while truly believing and teaching the *opposite* - for example, they claimed to believe that the Bible was God’s inerrant word, but actually believed and taught that *the Bible of errors*, and we just need to push the parts that are “wrong” aside.

Or we could point to many other examples of how *false teachers* and *wolves* creep among us. There are many who *give the impression* of spirituality, godliness, and the ability to teach scripture, but are actually *hypocrites*. The church community is *deceived* by such people - and, if we’re not careful, we can be lead astray; such false teachers can do incredible harm and damage

to the local church: they can cause division, undermine the gospel, promote false teachings and beliefs, and hinder the faith and godliness of individuals. And as v.20 makes clear, their end is *destruction*: and they try to lead others down this road with them.

### **B. Testing of their Fruit (16-20)**

Therefore, Christ warns us that *we must be on guard* against such wolves! How? *By evaluating the fruit of people's lives*. This is the point of the metaphor in vv.16-20. Just as a *thornbush* does not produce grapes, so it is with people: “*You will recognize them by their fruits*” (v.16). Healthy trees bear good fruit; unhealthy trees bear bad fruit. True believers produce the fruit of the spirit in our lives; no, we're not perfect, and yet *each believer* has the Holy Spirit - *and the Spirit works in our lives to produce fruit!* And so *false teachers* can be identified by the *lack of good fruit* and the *abundance of bad fruit*. Though they might appear to be figs from a distance, they are actually thistles; though these false teachers might *appear* to have good fruit at first or at times, *their true character is revealed* as we look closely at their *lives* - what they do - and their doctrine - what they say, believe, and teach. We must not be fooled; we must be vigilant. Our fruit - the overall picture produced by all that we *do* and *say* - this reveals *who* and *what* we truly are.

And this is not limited just to *leaders and teachers*, but to *all* of us, which is what Christ tells us in the third warning:

### **III. True and False Followers: Many People Who Claim to Believe are Not Truly Christians (Matt. 7:21-23)**

The warning Christ gives in vv.21-23 might be some of the most *haunting* words in all of scripture: “*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.*” Hauntingly, Christ says that “*many*” people will say to Him “on that day” - the day of judgment - “*Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’*”

This clearly draws a distinction between *true Christians* and *false Christians*; he's saying clearly that there are people who claim to be Christians, who claim to profess faith, who even attend churches and are church members, who even *do good, spiritual things* - and yet are not believers! The last warning Christ gave told us of “wolves” that deceive others; but these people *also deceive themselves*; they *think* they're Christians, but they *never truly knew Christ!* **V.21**

tells us that only those who “do the will of the Father in Heaven” will enter the kingdom - *eternal life, salvation*. Does this mean those who *do lots of good, impressive spiritual works*? Clearly not; these are the kinds of things that these people appeal to - prophecy, casting out demons, many mighty works - and yet, none of it is enough! These are incredibly impressive, obviously *spiritual, good works!* And yet, strikingly, they’re called “*workers of lawlessness.*”

\So who gets in, then? What does it mean to “do the will of the Father”? The only way to do the will of the Father is to *repent and believe in Christ*; not merely to *profess* faith, but to *truly, genuinely know Christ*, being united to Him by *true, genuine, repentant faith*; to truly *know God* as our Father by His grace alone! There is no substitute for *personal discipleship* - truly knowing Jesus Christ personally; knowing and being known by him through *true, genuine, saving faith*; to be a part of His family and truly know God in Christ Jesus.

This warning here *should give us pause*. We can’t simply gloss over it or ignore it; if it doesn’t fit with your understanding of the gospel and faith, then *your understanding needs to change to match scripture*. It is not enough to simply *claim* to believe; just because someone *professes* to be a Christian *does not mean they’re a Christian!* We’re told “*many*” people will deceive themselves in this way. It’s a chilling thought isn’t it: to wonder how many people have sat beside us on the pew, or as fellow church members, all the while not truly knowing the Lord?

This should make us examine our own hearts carefully. But neither is it enough to simply *point to the “spiritual works” we’ve done*, as if they’re sufficient grounds for salvation. It is not enough for us to simply claim to be Christians; it’s not enough to walk an aisle, to repeat a prayer, to be “baptized,” or even regularly attend church, give, or even serve! It’s possible to do all of these things *and yet not personally know Christ through faith!*

None of it matters *if we don’t have a genuine, personal relationship with God through Christ Jesus!* This warning proclaims to us the absolute necessity of a real, genuine relationship with Christ; of truly knowing and loving him, personally, for yourself! And so it is here that this *haunting, harrowing warning* also becomes *a joyful, life-giving word of encouraging assurance*: this warning doesn’t say “go examine your life and make sure you’re good enough!” Rather, it says, “Run to Christ and fling yourself upon his grace! Rest in Christ alone!” Love him because of His love for you! And if you truly know Him through faith, then *you can rest assured that you are His, and you will be spared on that day!*

We are saved by grace through faith alone - and yet, it is a faith that is *never alone* - which brings us to the final warning and exhortation:

#### **IV. Two Foundations: We Must Build Our Lives on Christ and His Authoritative Word (Matt. 7:24-29)**

Christ's fourth warning gives us a *second contrast between true and false Christians*: this time, between those who *believe and obey* and those who *claim* to hear and believe, but they do not truly believe; and their lack of faith is revealed by the fact that they *do not obey*. *They do not respond to Christ with faithful obedience; and therefore, they do not do the will of God.*

This is the point of **vv.24-27**: He gives us an illustration of *two builders* who build on *two different foundations*. The first builder is the "*wise man*" who "*builds his house on the rock.*" The house has a *sturdy foundation*; when the rain, floods, and winds of the storm come, *the house stands firm and secure*. But the second builder is the "*foolish man who built his house on the sand.*" The sand is an *insecure, unstable* foundation - especially when *wet*. When the storm brings rain, wind, and floods, *the foundation of sand washes away and the house collapses*.

The "*foolish man*" of the parable, Christ tells us, refers to "*everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them.*" They are "*hearers*" only, not doers of the Word; it's the same idea as **James 1:22**, "*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*" Or **James 2:14, and 17**: "*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ...So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*" The foolish man *hears* Christ's Word but *does not listen and obey*. And this reveals that *he did not truly believe!*

But the "*wise man*" is anyone who "*hears*" Christ's words "*and does them.*" *True faith* produces *good fruit*; if we truly believe Christ - if we truly **know him, love him, and trust him** - then *we will obey Him*. We must build out entire lives on the *sure foundation* of Christ, by believing and obeying His authoritative Word. In short, by *believing and obeying the gospel*, and therefore, *building our lives on the entirety of the Bible, God's Word*. True, saving faith is an *obedient faith*.

Christ demands *complete submission to His lordship* over the entirety of our lives. There are only two choices: *1. Total obedience, true righteousness, and eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven; or 2. Rebellion, self-centeredness, and eternal damnation*. The obedience Christ demands is that we *repent and believe in Him* - this is not a one time thing; to truly believe is to



live a life of *ongoing repentance and faith!* True saving faith is an *obedient faith*; we are saved by *faith alone* - but it is a faith that is *never alone*. Jesus puts it simply and clearly in John 14:15: ***“If you love me, you will obey my commands.”***

So let us heed Christ’s warning and *do the will of the Father* by *turning away from the wide road of destruction* - repenting from our sin - and *turning to the narrow road of life* - by entering the “gate” of **Christ Jesus**. Let us *cling to Him* and *know Him* by truly *believing the gospel*: that Christ lived, died, and was raised in the place of needy sinners; that if we *trust in His grace alone*, then *He will forgive and save us!* So let us cling to Christ and follow after him, no matter how hard the road is - for our destination is *eternal life in Christ!*

If you’re on the *road to destruction*, then I plead with you to turn to the way of life by repenting and trusting in Jesus alone. If you have any questions about this, or about baptism and church membership. I would love to speak with you. You can come now, or find me after the service. Let us pray.