

Matthew 7:13–23

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[0 : 0 0] from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 7, verses 13 through 23. Please stand for the reading of God's Word. 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 is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits.

Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? So every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of the Father who is in heaven.

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 works in your name? And then I will declare, I never knew you.

[1 : 1 0] Depart from me. Your workers are, you workers of lawlessness. This is the word of God, the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning and welcome to Christ Church in these months of almost deliberated worship where we consciously take steps that are not always of the greatest ease, but of utmost importance.

I'm so glad you're here today as we get underway with our series, the seventh and a series of eight from the Sermon on the Mount that provide a vision for Christ Church and its coming years.

You know, according to the old ancient King James Version, Christmas was announced by angels filling the skies and in song proclaiming glory to God in the highest and goodwill toward men with those with whom he is well pleased.

Christmas, the goodwill of God. Christmas, God's goodwill toward us.

Christmas, God has something good for you. It was Aristotle who first recognized through this word goodwill, the important characteristic that anybody speaking to those who are listening must possess.

[3 : 0 4] If the speaker did not possess goodwill toward those to whom he or she spoke, they would have little effect on actually being heard or understood or their message embraced.

And goodwill, according to Aristotle, actually required the speaker to say things which must be said, even if they were hard sayings that weren't likely or wanted to be heard.

Goodwill means the things that are good for us, even if they're not the things that would like to be heard by us. Welcome to Mark 7, 13 to 23, where Jesus begins to fulfill the angelic proclamation of goodwill toward men.

Good words, true words, essential words, all for your good. God's word for us today.

God's word for us today.

[5 : 0 8] To recognize that God has sequestered this local church into the privacy of our homes to prepare us for an explosive witness when once again gathered.

And these are the warnings that he would have you consider to be prepared to rightly walk out the door as Christ's church. First, the path we must take.

Verses 13 and 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 is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. It's almost as though this goodwill word from Christ puts two ways to live before our church.

Two paths that we could walk. Indeed, paths that are open and available to any church. Two paths to take, each marked out by its own gate, one narrow, one wide.

[6 : 27] One leading to the delight of entrance into the kingdom of heaven. The other leading downward, like finding yourself on flagstone steps that are already disintegrating into destruction.

I wondered in reading the text this week, certainly many of Jesus' hearers, if it wasn't in his own mind, his own hearers would have been familiar with Xenophon's work and retelling of Hercules at the crossroads.

It was a well-known story in the ancient Roman world. And it speaks of Hercules passing from boyhood to youth.

And I think of so many of us listening today who are yet young and ready, and yet most of your life is before you. And like you, Hercules came to a path of virtue or a path of vice.

And he sat pondering which road to take. Many of you, within the sound of my voice, stand as I did when I was 17, aware of the two paths.

[7 : 46] In fact, I was converted. Pulled off one path and set on another. In that moment, when it became clear to me, through a friend, that one would lead to destruction and the other would lead to life, and that the one I was on, there was no guarantee after hearing his voice, that I would not be too far along to ever come back.

Indeed, I was told, not everybody turns back. You can imagine this ancient story then in the Greco-Roman world of Hercules and two paths before him, and he's considering which one to take.

And many of us are considering the same thing in this very morning. And he's met by vice. And Hercules is there, and vice says to him, I see you're in doubt about which path to take.

Make me your friend. Follow me. I will lead you along the pleasantest and easiest road. You shall taste all the sweets of life and hardship you shall never know.

Now, when Hercules heard this, he asked, Lady, pray, what is your name? My friends call me happiness. She said, but among those who hate me, I am nicknamed vice.

[9 : 18] Meantime, the other had drawn near virtue, that is, and she said, I too am come to you, Hercules. I know your parents, and I have taken note of your character during the time of your education.

Therefore, I hope that if you take the road that leads to me, you will turn out a right and good doer of high and noble deeds, and I shall be highly honored and more illustrious for the blessings I bestow. But I will not deceive you with a pleasant prelude. I will rather tell you truly the things that are. That's the mark of goodwill. As the gods have ordained me, for of all things good and fair, the gods give nothing to man without toil and effort.

And vice says, Hercules, mark you how hard and long is that road to joy of which this woman tells you. But I will lead you by a short and easy road of happiness.

Christ Church Chicago, Christian listening to me today, junior higher, grade schooler, high schooler, early university student, you know the two roads that are before you.

[10 : 36] And Jesus declares to you that wide is the one that leads to destruction. Narrow is the one that leads to life. And your eternal destiny stands upon whether you walk in the difficult way or tumble over the wall into some approach toward God that fails to understand this truth.

Spurgeon put it this way, people go to ruin along the turnpike road, but the way to heaven is a bridle path. Lewis put it this way, indeed the safest road to hell is the gradual one, the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turning, without milestone, and without signposts.

And that is exactly what is told us by many today, to rid your life of the milestones in the signposts and the ancient wisdom of that which your parents have spoken to you or a generation of churches before you and to set out on something that is always barefoot, always in sand, always warm, and let leads to the waters of ever-encompassing death and your own drowning.

The way is hard. As Christ's church prepares to set out, may we know now the way will be hard. It's promised to be difficult, and yet it will lead to life. This will be anything but your best life now.

[12 : 35] I think of how important these two verses have been in literature over the centuries and how important it was in my own conversion.

And I think even of John Bunyan, no more than a second-grade education, put in jail and writing Pilgrim's Progress and publishing it in 1676 or whatever it was.

And he has Christian arrive at the Wicket Gate and he is met, ironically, at the door by one named Goodwill.

And Goodwill brings him into a home of interpreter where there are warnings that are laid out before the journey ever begins.

And when Christian is there, Bunyan writes, I look then after Christian to see him go up the hill where I perceived he fell from running to going and from going to clamoring upon his hands and his knees because of the steepness of the place.

[13 : 58] Let this be an encouragement to those of you who are in the midst of life's most difficult moment. And you begin to wonder, is this the way?

Am I in the way? It is too steep. Death of some. The departure of loved ones.

The isolation, given your convictions in Christ. A determination of your mind to love God, walk with God. This is, in one sense, a very indication that God is with you or that you are still with God.

Do not step out of the way. But may it also be an exhortation. Many of you are hearing right now the voices at the crossroads of life.

And you don't have any Herculean strength. But Jesus, the word of Christ to you today, not me talking about Jesus, the word of Jesus to you today, is do not listen to those who hold out promises and yet jettison the ancient boundaries of the Christian faith.

[15 : 19] Let me put it differently the way my mentor Kent Hughes would have put it. Truth does not run on the tyranny of democratic consensus.

The word of Christ is singular. True Christianity will be tough. There are two paths. And there are churches all across the globe in every generation who run on the shelf of the rocks because they have embraced the widened way.

And Christ's church, this is our path. The second Christmas word of goodwill from Christ is not the two paths before us, but the two pastors who speak to us.

Take a look at verses 15 through 20. Beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits.

Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? So every healthy tree bears good fruit. But the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.

[16 : 52] Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down, thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. If the first warning is for us as we set out on a road together, this warning concerns the greatest danger we face all along the way.

I don't want to underestimate this. As I read the text, the greatest danger facing Christ Church Chicago all along the way will not be the racial discord in the city in which we live.

It will not be the means by which we can fund a city that functions. It will not be the differences that we have with one another on how to handle COVID.

It will not be whether or not it's even possible to assemble a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, socio-economically diverse people.

These will not be our greatest difficulties or obstacles or dangers. The greatest difficulty for this church over the next 50 years is the pastors who we hire, the people who we listen to who are preaching, the elders that are ordained, the community group leaders who speak God's word to you in a home, the Sunday school teachers who stand before men and women and children, the youth leaders, the volunteers, the testimony of our lips that tell others the very word of God is the greatest danger.

[19 : 05] Jude calls upon the church to contend for the faith.

Why? Because certain ones have come into our midst unannounced. Look at the two word pictures he brings forth to describe false prophets.

Pictures that harness the podcasts that you're listening to, the 20 minutes a day of teaching you're receiving from someone, anyone, anywhere, at any time.

The pictures are of a ravenous wolf and of a diseased tree. The pictures come from animal life and plant life.

And the first that he likens it to is someone who will come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are a ravenous wolf. The pastors that this church hires over the next 50 years to promote the gospel of Jesus Christ will look like you, talk like you, act like you, love like you, be happy like you, but among some of them they will reject the word of Christ.

[20 : 58] They will compromise the truth for an everly, an ever increasingly prevailing cultural mode. They will damn the church and the children.

They will harness their mind and enslave yours to a word that is not of Christ. I mean, Jude also picks up on these two very images.

In verse 11 he will talk about shepherds who are in your midst and he will also liken them to non-fruit bearing trees that are reserved for the waters of judgment everlastingly so by God. And the mark of their fruits in the work of Jude consistent with the word of Christ that is meant to warn you concerning our future is that they will compromise turning the grace of God into a licentious form, sexuality in particular in the book of Jude and they will deny our Lord and Master. They will commit the sin of Korah who believes that anyone teaching anything has the same authoritative appeal in your presence. They will take the priesthood of believers and they will undo the very word of Christ.

[22 : 27] They will take the sin of Balaam who lowered the sexual standards of purity within the community of faith. They will jettison the ancient road and they will sweep churches in their wake and it says here by Jesus they will be cut down.

This is something we need to remember because we live in an hour right now where the church is ensconced on discussions of sexual ethics and on the reality of self-serving economics.

I mean just think about the conversations we have on any given week. A lot of it can come back to sexual ethics and self-serving economics and these are what false teachers will begin to turn the scriptures teaching and there will be plenty who will hear it and the Lord says he is going to actually cut down those individuals.

Who we hire who you listen to is one of the most important things you do every day and every Lord's Day of the week.

Christ's church as long as I am vertical will contend for the faith in love but on edge.

[24 : 05] There are two kinds of preachers and the ravenous wolf is dangerous and the accommodating voice is diseased just as we learned already that the path would be difficult and without it our own destruction.

Third, are you getting the good will of Christ that you thought Christmas was on about? I'll tell you what it did do is that he is taking the sentimentality of Christmas away from you for this season and he's taking it away so that you can hear his word.

The angel said good will toward men. He's here and now he's here and this is his teaching. Good will. He is not withholding from you all that he knows to be truly good even though hard to hear.

Two paths, two pastors, and here finally the kind of people we must not become. Look at 21 to the end.

Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and do mighty works in your name and I will declare to them I never knew you.

[25 : 40] Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. If the two paths indicates a warning on how we set out and the two pastors indicate the danger along the way, we now come to two kinds of people who are arriving now at home, standing as it were in the text before the very gate of heaven and finding out from there, from there, that they were self deluded, self deceived in entrance into the eternal good, holy, healthy life with their

Lord will not be afforded to them. the broad road led to destruction, the false pastor led to being cut down, but the kind of people who would arrive and hear the word depart from me for I never knew you, you worker of wickedness, is the most horrific, tragic, fearful paragraph perhaps, in all the scriptures.

It is for me. The truth behind this text then means that we are deluded to think that we can do self-assessment on our own with success.

You cannot successfully navigate your spiritual state on your own. I cannot.

do this is ironic because everyone who wants to talk about the words of Christ back to 7 verse 12, do unto others as you would have them do unto you, they embrace the teachings of Christ.

[28 : 02] Here we find that Christ in those teachings, in all of his loving, is nevertheless the one who is going to say depart from me.

and he is going to make a great separation at the end. So how, how can you and I walk together over the next years fearfully working out our salvation lest any of us come to this horrific truth experientially?

It's going to come down to this difference of doing. For the one, verse 21, he does the will of my father.

For the other, verse 22, they are merely doing mighty works in his name. Doing God's will in distinction from doing great works.

works. There's only one other time in Matthew that this phrase, do the will of my father comes up with this clarity.

[29 : 16] And I want you to see it because I think it explains what will help us arrive at heaven and gain entrance rather than an eternal exit.

Matthew chapter 12, verse 50. Jesus says, for whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and my sister and mother.

So the literary context of that quote on doing the will of the father is in the midst what of verse 46, when people his family was coming to him and he replied to them, who are my mother and who are my brothers?

And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, here they are. Who were they? the ones who are doing the will of the father are the ones who are seated in community around his word.

And therefore, self-assessment, let me put it to you this way, you want to do Christian life on your own outside of community, you don't feel that a community group is an important, essential element for your own progress and development.

[30 : 44] You don't think that gathering regularly with one another, wrestling with one another through text is critical. You're just going to do it all on your own. Just have that picture in Jesus' arms.

Here are the ones who are doing the will of my father. Who are they? They're the ones who are deciding to live in community under his word.

They're not the ones who are just charismatically engaged in doing mighty works all around the world. It's interesting how vision talk normally leads us to that which we are going to do together. But here, the vision for us to arrive together and gain entrance requires that we live in community, and under his word.

And note it. It will be Christ's word who will separate. This stunned me this week. I mean, just look at that verse back again in chapter seven.

[31 : 53] Not everyone who says to me, verse 22, on that day, many will say to me.

Verse 23, and then I will declare to them, Jesus is the everlasting judge who will, he's the door through whom you enter the gates of everlasting life.

It's interesting, and I'm about done. He quotes here in verse 23, Psalm 6, verse 9.

There was a time in the life of David, God's anointed savior king, where he wrote a song on the effect of things that would emerge after his season of suffering was done.

And then after seeing God deliver him, says David, after I see God deliver me from my sufferings, I will say, depart, you worker of lawlessness.

[33 : 35] In other words, David claimed in a temporal moment, a moment in miniature, that he was under it, but that God would rescue him.

And when he did, he would, in the words of Spurgeon, sweep God's house of all unrighteousness. When Jesus quotes that, he is indicating that as it was for David in a temporary moment with a few, so it will be for me on that day.

Have you ever thought of it? When you arrive at heaven's gates, when we arrive as a church at that gate together, when we stand there on the day of judgment, it will not be St.

Peter at the gate. It will not be your beloved at the gate. You won't have eyes to see what's beyond the door until you get through Jesus, and what will he have in his hand?

A broom sweeping the everlasting house of God and his kingdom, lest there be any wicked who would enter.

[34 : 56] This is a terrifying, exalted, glorious, humbling picture. he's quoting what God promised through David to be true of the everlasting king.

Good will, says Jesus. Merry Christmas. I'm not, I love you so much, I'm not going to withhold from you anything that is good for you, although it will be hard unto you.

Two paths. Two pastors. Two people. Lord, Lord, Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy on your soul. May the Lord be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his hand upon you and give you peace.

Peace. May we have it forever more. Our Heavenly Father, Christmas is coming and the day of consummation is to encourage each one here who set out with you and is finding it really difficult in the strangest of ways.

[37 : 13] May this word encourage their hearts. May word encourage their hearts. help this church, oh God, to remain faithful and to have discernment in an evil day and help each one of us to be saved from the self-deluding thoughts that we're the best arbiter of our own condition.

May your word cut us and heal us, mend us, bring us closer to one another so that we are truly ready for your arrival.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.