

The Great Divide

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Date: 02 July 1995

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[0 : 00] Today we conclude, for now anyway, our series in the Sermon on the Mount. We've taken 26 weeks in the Sermon on the Mount. I can still remember the first Sunday of January when I announced that we were going to take 26 weeks.

A number of people went, oh, no. Well, here we are. We're done. For now. The for now means that, in my experience, you have to come back to the Sermon on the Mount again and again and again. So I've tentatively planned to do another series in the Sermon on the Mount in 10 years, or 5 years. In 5 years' time only. That time it will take us 52 weeks. We'll take it a little slower.

The text today is the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew chapter 7, beginning at verse 13 and reading through verse 29. If you are able, will you stand for the reading of the Gospel? Jesus is speaking to us. Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who find it.

[1 : 12] For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it. Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.

A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know 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 my Father who is in heaven.

Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons, and in your name perform many miracles? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you.

[2 : 19] Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness. Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts upon them may be compared to a wise man who built his house upon the rock.

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house, and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act upon them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand.

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house, and it fell, and great was its fall. The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one having authority and not as their scribes.

Spirit of the living God, we believe that you inspired Matthew the tax collector to write these words down on the page long ago now.

I pray that you would now, in your mercy and grace, take these words off the page and write them on our minds and hearts and wills as never before.

[3 : 42] For we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated. Surely you knew it would come to this.

From the way he began the sermon, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, with the implication theirs and only theirs, we could sense it, could we not?

We could sense that it would eventually come to something like this. As the sermon unfolded, especially as the preacher announced six times, you have heard it was said, but I say to you, you have heard it was said, but I say to you, we sensed it, didn't we?

Did you believe that it was moving towards something like this parting of the ways? Surely you knew it had to come to this, to what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls the great divide.

Most of us would have preferred that Jesus end his great sermon on a different note, on a less demanding note, on a less absolute note.

[5 : 14] Most of us would have preferred that Jesus end his sermon with his golden rule. However you want people to treat you, so treat them, and then throw it open for discussion.

Well, folks, what do you think? Too idealistic? Out of touch? Should I tone anything down the next time I preach it? Should I back off anywhere the next time I preach it?

Is that not, in fact, how most of Christendom has implicitly thought Jesus ended the sermon? Hasn't most of Christendom implicitly thought that Jesus ended the sermon, and then threw it open for discussion?

Have not most hearers of the Sermon on the Mount felt that they had the right to pick and choose from Jesus' saying what they liked, and then leave the rest of the sayings for the more dedicated folks among us, i.e., the more unrealistic folks among us.

Have not most hearers of the Sermon on the Mount felt that they had the right to modify Jesus' saying, to doctor them, to help them fit into the so-called real world?

[6 : 28] Surely you knew that it had to come to this, to this razor-sharp divide. In no other portion of his sermon is the preacher as self-revealing as he is in his conclusion.

Here it becomes crystal clear that Jesus really thinks that what he has been teaching us is workable. And here it becomes crystal clear that Jesus really means for us to do it.

The key to the conclusion of the sermon, indeed the key to the whole of the sermon, is the way Jesus uses the pronouns, I, me, my, mine.

Listen again. Verse 21. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord. Verse 21. The will of my Father. Verse 22. Many will say to me on that day.

Verse 22. And I will say to them. Verse 23. I never knew you. Verse 23. Away from me. Verse 24. Everyone who hears these words of mine. He uses the pronouns rather matter-of-factly, unpretentiously, almost modestly.

[7 : 47] But oh, what he reveals through his use of these pronouns. For one thing, he identifies his words as the will of the one he calls Father.

For another, he calls the God of heaven and earth, my Father. Something no rabbi of the first century would dare ever to do.

And for still another, he makes himself the central figure on judgment day. Did you see that as we read the text? He says that he will be the judge.

On that day, many will say to me. He claims that the judgment will be based upon what people have done with his words, everyone who hears these words of mine.

And then he says that the nature of the judgment will be to be excluded from his presence, away from me. The whole of the Sermon on the Mount, wrote Albert Schweitzer, with this authoritative eye breaking through, bears witness to the high dignity which Jesus ascribed to himself.

[8 : 54] Did not this eye set people to thinking? What really set people to thinking was the way Jesus used the title Lord.

Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord. Now, we in the church have become so accustomed to this title that we forget how startling, how audacious, how scandalous it is on the lips of this carpenter-turned-preacher.

Lord, Lord. In Greek, it is Kyrie, Kyrie. Kyrie. Yes, sometimes Kyrie simply means sir. And yes, sometimes Kyrie is the word that a slave would use of her master or a student of his teacher.

But this double Kyrie, Kyrie points to higher levels of meaning. For instance, in the Gentile world of the first century, the great political leaders were referred to as Kyrie.

Kyrie. Thus, the Roman emperors were addressed as Kaiser Kurios, meaning you, Caesar, are the sovereign ruler of the land. And in the Jewish world of the first century, this term meant even more.

[10 : 09] No one dared utter the sacred name of God, the name Yahweh. People feared taking that name in vain. And so whenever they were reading Scripture out loud and came across that sacred name Yahweh, they would substitute the term Adonai.

Which the Greeks rendered with Kyrie or Kurios. Kyrie, Kyrie. Lord, Lord. It means more than sir. It means more than master.

It means sovereign ruler. It means living God. To call Jesus of Nazareth Kyrie, Kyrie is to say, You, Jesus, have the final word in this land.

You are sovereign over all that I am and have and do. To say to Jesus of Nazareth Kyrie, Kyrie is to say, You are worthy of my undivided allegiance and my passionate worship.

The preacher on the mount, matter-of-factly, unpretentiously accepts this affirmation. He calls himself Kurios. And that is why he speaks the way he does in this sermon.

[11:19] Matthew tells us that after Jesus finished preaching, the multitudes were astonished at his teaching, for he was preaching as one who had authority. Authority.

I pointed out that when we began this series 26 weeks ago, the word that Matthew uses is the word exousia. Exousia. Exousia literally means out of being.

Ek, out of, uzia, being. The crowds on the mountaintops were amazed. They were dumbfounded because although Jesus' words were cutting across the grain of everything they knew, his words rang with exousia.

They rang with the really real. They sensed that this was life and they sensed that he had the right to speak the way he does. Enter by the narrow gate, he says.

It is not a friendly suggestion to people who happen to be confused. It is not an invitation. It is a command.

[12:24] And he says that either we do and live or we do not and die. Surely you knew it would come to this.

Jesus, the kurios, the Lord of life, just puts it out there. He says that in the final analysis, there are only two gates and two roads.

He does not play games with us. One road leads to destruction. The other road leads to life. He admits that his road is not popular. He admits in this text, sadly, I am sure that few find it.

I don't think there is a verse in Scripture that scares the willies out of me more than that. Few find it.

That should warn the church that we must never be too number conscious.

Apparently, Jesus expected his followers to be a minority movement in the world. Yes, as Paul says, Jesus desires that all people be saved and come to repentance and come to the knowledge of the truth.

[13:38] And yes, Jesus does, as Peter says, not wish that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But here, Jesus, sadly, I am sure, acknowledges that few will find the narrow gate and few will walk the narrow path.

Surely you knew it would come to this. What helps me is the insight of a man named Howard Skinner. The narrow way, says Skinner, is not over at the edge, separated by distance from the broad way, but it is right smack in the middle of the broad way, just headed in the other direction. I like that. The challenging life to which Jesus calls us is a life that is worked out right in the middle of the world. It's just that it's heading in a different direction.

In the world, but not of it, says Jesus in another place. The narrow way runs right down the middle of the broad way. It's just as whereas the broad way leads to destruction and bondage, the narrow way leads to life and freedom.

Why? Because, and this is what I have been trying to demonstrate throughout this whole series, the narrow way is the inherent way. The narrow way is the inherent way.

[15:08] Exousia, says Matthew. The crowds were amazed at Jesus' teaching because it was full of exousia. It came out of being. It came out of reality. They realized that Jesus was not imposing something on the human species from outside.

Jesus' narrow way is not an imposition on the species. It is an exposition of how the species was created to live.

You see, it's the broad way that has been imposed on us, which is why the broad way feels so pressurizing, and which is why the majority who live on broad way are so unhappy, unfulfilled, afraid, and anxious.

That's why there's so much burnout on broad way. It does not fit the species. The broad way is the way to destruction because it is not congruent with who we were made to be.

Festering anger that turns into words of insult, looking at others lustfully, saying one thing but meaning another, seeking vengeance, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hating enemies.

[16:22] It all ruins life. It all destroys life, and we all know it. One of my most trusted mentors is E. Stanley Jones.

I never met him in person, but I've read just about everything he has written. I have quoted from him often. Let me read a paragraph which helps me more than I can possibly articulate.

Listen carefully. Jones writes, I am persuaded that this narrow way is the way for which we were made. It is the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world.

Note, from the foundation of the world. It is not an afterthought imposed on life. Rather, it is written in the very constitution of things, in the very makeup of our universe, and of our being.

The man who announced the Sermon on the Mount had something to do with the makeup of our being. Instead of being foreign laws, they are the very laws of our inmost being.

[17 : 23] When we discover these laws, we discover the natural way to live. The natural way. Everything is unnatural. Now, we get a hold on this then, and then Jesus' narrow way in the Sermon on the Mount becomes the only realistic way to live.

Everything else is suicide. Jesus does not say here in the text, well, if you don't walk the narrow way, I'm going to destroy you.

He doesn't say that. He doesn't need to. He just states the facts. The narrow way leads to life. The broad way leads to destruction. That is the way it is, and there is evidence in abundance for all of us to see that.

Surely you knew. Surely you knew. It was coming to this. What is the narrow way?

It lies in the little word do. Verse 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.

[18 : 49] Verse 24, everyone who hears these words of mine and does them is like the wise man. Verse 26, everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them is like the foolish man.

The narrow way involves hearing and saying, but ultimately doing. He intends for us to do this.

Surely you knew it would come to this.

In Jesus' little parable about the foundations, the end of the sermon, both people hear Jesus' word.

That is really crucial to see about that parable.

Both people hear Jesus' words. As John Stott observes, both builders are members of the visible Christian community. Both read the Bible, both go to church, both listen to sermons, both buy Christian literature, both listen to Christian tapes.

The rain falls on both, the floods come against both, the winds blow against both. The only difference between them is their foundation. And like the foundation of any building, it is hidden until trouble comes.

[20 : 11] According to Jesus the Kurios, Lord of Lords, there are only two options for the foundation of our lives. Hear His word and put it into practice, or hear His word and keep putting into practice our own word.

The house that crashes, writes Dale Bruner, is the house of the Christians who find Jesus' words important enough to hear but not realistic enough to live.

I have to say that again. The house that crashes is the house of the Christians who find Jesus' words important enough to hear but not realistic enough to live.

Surely, you knew it would come to this. Many on that day will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name?

Did we not cast out demons in Your name? Did we not do many miracles in Your name? And I will say to them plainly, I never knew you. Depart from me, you antinomians, you lawless ones.

[21 : 31] Boy, that is a puzzling statement, is it not? For you would think, would you not, that prophesying, casting out demons, doing miracles are signs of putting Jesus' word into practice?

You would think that, wouldn't you? But here Jesus says that one can do these things and do them in His name and not belong to Him.

I never knew you. According to Matthew 10, Jesus gives His disciples the authority to prophesy, to cast out demons and to do miracles.

But nowhere does Jesus say that these are the signs of belonging to Him. They are the signs that He is present and that He is at work, but they are not the signs that people belong to Him.

You see, Jesus the Kurios can speak His word through anyone. Just because He employs a person to speak a prophetic word is no guarantee that that person is one of His disciples.

[22 : 45] God spoke the prophetic word to Balaam through Balaam's donkey, after all. You see? Jesus the Kurios can cast out demons through anyone or without anyone.

Just because He uses a person to do so is no guarantee that that person is His disciple. Jesus the Kurios can perform miracles through anyone.

God liberated Israel from Babylon through Cyrus, the king of Persia, and Cyrus didn't even have a clue of what was going on. Just because God does a miracle through a person is no guarantee that that person is Jesus' disciple.

Are you with me? The prophetic word, the casting out of demons, the miracle, simply demonstrates the power of Jesus' name. The proof that we are His is not how He uses us, but what we do with His word.

The issue is, has His word, His creative, performative word, produced its fruit in us?

[23 : 58] By their fruits, you shall know them. Oh, surely you knew it would come to this.

are the Beatitudes beginning to emerge in our lives? Is there poverty of spirit?

This sense of the utter dependency upon the living God. Is there that mourning, that deep sorrow over our poverty of spirit?

spirit? Is there a meekness, that profound sense of helplessness which gives birth to gentleness? Is there a hunger and thirst for righteousness, for right relatedness?

Is there a hunger and thirst for justice for the poor and the widow and the orphan? Is mercy replacing the desire to get even? Is there a movement toward purity of heart, to this obsession to know God?

[25 : 05] Is there an eagerness to bring peace between people and nations? That is what Jesus is looking for in those who call him Lord, Lord. Is there a casting out of the demons of anger and bitterness?

Is there a desire to discipline the eyes, to watch for those dominoes of lust? Is there a commitment to the sanctity of marriage? Is there integrity in speech? Yes means yes, no means no.

Is there a renouncing of revenge and the ability to return good for evil? Is there a willingness to love the enemy, to bless those who curse us and to pray for those who persecute us?

That is what Jesus is looking for in those who say to him, Lord, Lord. Is there a growing ability to give without needing applause? Is there a desire to get into the secret place of communion with the Father?

Is there freedom to fast without anyone noticing? Is that universal anxiety about what we eat and drink and sleep being replaced with a passion for the kingdom and righteousness of God?

[26 : 09] Is the judgmental spirit giving way to intercessory prayer? You see, that is what Jesus is looking for in those who say to him, Lord, Lord.

Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does what I said to do.

Is Jesus' emphasis on do contrary to the Apostle Paul's emphasis on salvation by grace alone through faith alone?

No, it is not. Jesus is saying that if we have faith in him, we will do what he tells us to do.

Faith in him is not faith unless and until it acts. Surely, you knew it would come to this.

[27 : 17] You're not feeling well. So you go to the doctor. She checks you out. Because she's such a competent doctor, she immediately diagnoses the problem and prescribes the cure.

Here, she says, take two of these pills every day, do not eat any candy bars, eat three kinds of vegetables every day, and walk a mile a day.

You say, okay, sounds good to me. On your way out of the office, you turn to the receptionist and you say to him, she is the finest doctor I have ever met. She is good. She cares for me.

I can trust her. I'm glad I found her. You go home. The next day, you take only one of the two pills. You sneak a bite of Snicker bars.

You eat only two of the three kinds of vegetables and you walk only a half a mile. This will do, you say, besides, I know myself better than the doctor does.

[28 : 20] You continue in this vein for the whole week. At the end of the week, you return to the doctor's office. Good morning, she says. Good morning, you say. How are you feeling? Well, not so good. Oh dear, I'm surprised.

Every time I've given this prescription to other people, they felt better. Did you do what I said to do? Sort of. Sort of.

What means this, sort of? Well, you know, sort of. Well, did you take two pills each day? Sort of. Sort of. Yeah, I took one.

One? Yeah, one. I said to take two. Yeah, I know. Well, did you knock off the candy bars? Sort of. Sort of.

Well, I snuck a bite of Snickers every day. I said, no bites. Yeah, I know. Tell me, Daryl, do you want to get well? Of course.

[29 : 20] I wonder. Did you eat the three kinds of vegetables? Well, don't tell me, sort of, right? Yeah. I only ate two kinds.

Did you walk one mile? No. Only a half a mile. Then she says, don't you trust me? Oh, yes, of course I do.

You're the best. You're the greatest. Yeah, I heard you tell my receptionist that the other day. If I am the best, why don't you trust me? I do trust you.

No, you don't. How can you say that? Because you did not do what I told you to do. You don't trust me.

Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does. If at any given moment I will not do what he says, it simply means that at that moment, anyway, I do not have faith in him as Lord.

[30 : 28] At that moment, someone or something else is Lord. The way Jesus ends his sermon on the mount goes to the heart of one of the prevailing ills of our time.

Princeton sociologist Robert Withno says that there has been for decades now a bifurcation of values and behavior.

Withno calls it the fracture in the soul of America. The fracture in the soul of America. The notion that belief and action which were once inseparable are now relatively unrelated.

You can believe one thing and act in another way. According to one of the recent Gallup polls, most Americans say they believe in God, most Americans affirm the divinity of Jesus.

Most Americans trust the Bible as the rule of faith and yet this very poll reveals a paradox. Statistics show that half of those who say that the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount are their ethics do not know who preached the Sermon on the Mount.

[31 : 46] George Gallup writes, we revere the Bible but we don't read it. We believe the Ten Commandments to be the rules of living although we can't name them. we believe in God but this God is a totally affirming one.

He does not command our total allegiance. He lets us have other gods before him. Gallup argues that we must attack head on. Those are his words. George Gallup attack head on the gap between what we say we believe and how we behave.

not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven but the one who does what I said to do. Surely you knew.

Surely you knew that it had to come to this. You can see then that the great crisis of the Sermon on the Mount is the preacher on the Mount.

What are we going to do with this preacher? Is he good? Does he say what he says because he has our best interest in mind? Is he right?

[32 : 59] Does he know what he is talking about? If I believe he is good if I believe he is right if I believe he is Lord then I will do what he says to do. I cannot say he is good I cannot say he is right I cannot say he is Lord and then not do what he says to do.

Ultimate oxymoron. If I hear him speak and then do not do what he tells me to do and I know what that is like if I hear him speak and then do not do what he tells me to do at that moment anyway someone or something else is my Lord culture financial security comfort my glands my brokenness my fears but not Jesus the courius surely you knew it would come to this so what do we do?

here is what I am going to do I am going to go back to the first line of the sermon on the mount I am going to go back to the place where he began blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven blessed are the poor in spirit blessed are the poor in spirit congratulations you lucky bums blessed are those who know that you do not have what it takes to do what I told you to do that's where I'm going we can only do what he says to do when we first admit that we do not have the power to do it and then throw ourselves on the mercy and grace and power of Jesus and then once again we make the discovery that Jesus word of command is a word of promise because he is who he is his word of command will always be fulfilled in us

I sense the presence of the preacher do you do you I sense that he is standing in front of each one of us do you and I sense he is saying to each one of us so Daryl what are you going to do with my words are you going to follow me in the narrow way or not and I sense that he expects an answer today surely you knew it had come to this we and I and I