

We Have Come to a Fork in the Road

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[0 : 00] How do you react to the way the greatest preacher who ever lived ends the greatest sermon ever preached?

How do you respond to the way Jesus of Nazareth concludes his Sermon on the Mount? Arresting, to say the least. Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls it the great divide.

Others call it the parting of the ways. Whatever we call it, the way he concludes his Sermon poses a crisis.

The crisis has actually been building from the beginning of the Sermon. Given who this preacher is, how could it be otherwise?

Than to end with this crisis. In the way Jesus concludes his Sermon, I hear him saying, You have heard me announce my gospel.

[1 : 12] The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent. Turn around and put your weight on this good news. I hear him say, you have heard me develop the character traits, the behavior patterns, the movements of the heart, which emerge when the kingdom of God breaks into human lives.

And then I hear him saying, what are you going to do? Are you going to follow me into the kingdom of God or not?

Are you going to do what I said to do or not? We have come to a fork in the road.

Big time. Most of us would prefer that Jesus end his Sermon on the Mount on a different note. On a less demanding note.

Most people would prefer that Jesus would end his Sermon on the Mount with the golden rule. However you want people to treat you, so treat them. And then most people would want Jesus to, so to speak, throw it open for discussion.

[2 : 32] OK, folks, what do you think? Too idealistic? Out of touch with the real world? Any place where I should tone it down? Anything I should adjust to make it more palatable to the city?

Is that not, in fact, how the majority of people in Christendom have implicitly thought Jesus concluded? Have not most hearers of the Sermon on the Mount thought that we had the right to go back and pick and choose the sayings we like and leave the rest for the more dedicated folk among us?

And by dedicated, we usually mean the more unrealistic. Have not most hearers of the Sermon on the Mount felt that we had the right to now modify, Jesus saying, to accommodate them to the real world?

In no other portion of the Sermon on the Mount is the preacher on the Mount more self-revealing than in his conclusion. Here it becomes crystal clear that Jesus really thinks what he has taught us is workable.

Here it becomes crystal clear that Jesus really expects us to do it.

[4 : 00] The key to the conclusion of his sermon is found in the pronouns he uses. I, me, my, mine.

Matthew 721. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord. 721. The will of my father.

722. Many will say to me on that day. 722. Then I will say to them. 723. I never knew you. 723.

Away from me. 724.

Everyone who hears these words of mine. 726. Everyone who hears these words of mine. He uses the pronouns rather matter of factly. Unpretentiously. Almost.

Just modestly. But oh, how his use of pronouns reveals what he thinks about himself. For one thing, he identifies his words with the words of the one he calls father.

[4 : 59] For another, he calls the God of heaven and earth, my father. Something a first century rabbi would not dare to do. And still for another, he makes himself the central figure of judgment

day.

Did you hear that as John read the text? Jesus of Nazareth dares to make himself the central figure of judgment day. He says that he will be the judge on that day.

Many will say to me. He says that the judgment will be based on what people did with his words. Everyone who hears these words of mine. And then he says that the nature of the judgment on that day will be to be excluded from his presence.

Away from me. The whole sermon on the Mount, writes Albert Schweitzer. With this authoritative eye breaking through, bears witness to the high dignity which Jesus himself ascribed to himself. Did not this eye set people to thinking? Ask Schweitzer. What really set people to thinking was Jesus' use of the title Lord.

[6 : 12] Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord. Lord, Lord. In Greek, it is Kyrie, Kyrie. Yes, it sometimes means sir.

Yes, it is a term that a servant would use of her master or a student of his teacher. But this double Kyrie, Kyrie, clearly suggests that Jesus has much more in mind.

In the Greek world of the first century, the great political leaders of nations and empires were called Kyrios, Kyrie. Kyrie, Roman emperors were hailed as Kaiser Kyrios, meaning Caesar.

You are the sovereign in the world. In the Jewish world of the first century, this term meant even more. You might know that Jews of the first century did not want to pronounce out loud the sacred name of God, Yahweh.

And so when they were reading scripture out loud and came to a reference to Yahweh, they would substitute Adonai, which the Greeks then rendered as Kyrios. Kyrie, Kyrie.

[7 : 25] Lord, Lord. It means more than sir. It means more than master. It means sovereign of the land. It means living God. To call Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter turned preacher Kyrie, Kyrie is to say you have the final word in our land.

You have the final word over all I am and all I do and all I have. It is to say to Jesus, you are worthy of undivided allegiance.

You are worthy of my passionate worship. And the preacher on the mount, rather matter of factly, accepts that acclaim. He knows himself to be this great Kyrios.

Which is why he ends his sermon the way he does. Matthew tells us that after Jesus finished preaching, quote, the multitudes were amazed.

They were astonished at his teaching. Why were they amazed? For he was teaching them as one having authority. Authority. As I pointed out in our first sermon in this series on the Sermon on the Mount, the word authority, the word that he uses here is the word exousia.

[8 : 43] Exousia means out of being. Out of. Usia. Being. The crowds on the mountainside that day were amazed. Exousia.

Because although this man cut across the grain of everything they thought to be true, his words rang with usia. Exousia.

They resounded with the really real. The crowds since that day that this man had the right to speak the way he did.

Enter by the narrow gate, he says. It is not just friendly advice for confused people. It is not even an invitation.

It is a command. Enter by the narrow gate. And he says we either obey and live or we disobey and die. I mean, talk about a fork in the road.

[9 : 44] Jesus, the courier, the Lord of Lords, just puts it out there. He says that in the final analysis, there are two way gates and two roads.

One road leads to destruction, he says, and the other road leads to life. He does not play games with us. Jesus loves the human race too much to play games with us. He admits that his way is not going to be popular.

He admits that his way is not going to be endorsed by the culture. He admits with sadness, I think, that few are going to find it. That, by the way, should warn the church from being two number conscience.

Apparently, Jesus was prepared for his followers to be a minority movement within the city. Yes, he, as the apostle Paul says, desires that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

And yes, as Peter says, he does not wish for any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But here, Jesus, sadly, I think, acknowledges that few are going to find the narrow gate and few are going to

walk the narrow road.

[10:57] Now, what helps me at the end of Jesus' sermon is the insight by a man named Howard Skinner.

The narrow way, says Skinner, is not over on the edge. It's not over there separated by distance from the broad way. Rather, he says, the narrow way is smack dab right in the middle of the broad way.

It's just that it's going the other direction. I like that. The challenging way to which Jesus of Nazareth calls us to live is a life that is worked out right in the midst of the city.

It's just that it's going in the other direction. In the world, but not of it, as he says in other places. The narrow way runs down right down the middle of the broad way.

It's just that whereas the broad way is leading to death and destruction, the narrow way is leading to life and to freedom. Why?

[12:06] Because as I have tried to demonstrate throughout this whole series on the Sermon on the Mount, the narrow way is the inherently human way.

Say that again. The narrow way is the inherently human way. Exousia. The crowds were amazed of Jesus teaching because it was full of this exousia.

It came out of being. It came out of the really real. They realized that Jesus is not imposing something on the human species from outside the species.

Jesus narrow way is not an imposition on us. It's an exposition. It's an exposition of the way things really are. It's an exposition of who we were created to be.

The broad way is the imposition on the human species. Which is why the broad way is so pressurizing. Which is why on the broad way we get so afraid and tired and unhappy and unfulfilled.

[13:15] Which is why on the broad way so many people burn out. The broad way is not the human way. The broad way leads to destruction because it is not congruous with true humanity.

Festering anger that expresses itself in sarcastic and insulting words. Looking at others lustfully.

Saying one thing and meaning another. Seeking revenge eye for eye, tooth for tooth. Hating enemies. It all ruins life. It all destroys life and we all know that.

Throughout this series I've been reading from E. Stanley Jones. Who was a Methodist missionary to India in the 20th century. And I want to read one more time from him.

It's a paragraph that has impacted me more than I can articulate. Jones writes. I am persuaded that this narrow way is the way for which we were made.

[14:19] It is the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world. No, 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. In the very makeup of our being. Then Jones writes this. The man who announced the Sermon on the Mount had something to do with the makeup of our being. Duh.

He created us. Instead of being foreign laws. They are the very laws of our inherent being. And when we discover them.

We discover the most natural way to live. Get a hold of this. And Jesus narrow way becomes the only realistic way to live.

Anything else is unrealistic. In fact, anything else but Jesus narrow way turns out to be suicide. You see, Jesus does not say in the close of his Sermon on the Mount.

[15:27] He does not say. Does not say. Unless you walk the narrow way. I'm going to destroy you. He doesn't say that. He doesn't need to say that.

He just states the facts. The narrow way leads to life. The broad way leads to destruction. And he is validated all over the world today.

So what is the narrow way? It all lies in the little word do.

Three times in the close of his Sermon. He uses this word do. Matthew 7. 21. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. But the one who does the will of my father who is in heaven.

Verse 24. Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them is like the wise man who built his house upon the rock. And then verse 26. Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them is like the foolish man who built his house upon the sand.

[16:30] The narrow way involves hearing and speaking and singing and praying. But ultimately doing. Jesus brings this to a head with a little parable about foundations.

In the parable, both people. He's contrasting the wise and the foolish. Both people hear Jesus word. 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. And I would add both listen to Christian music on the Internet. The rains fall on both.

The floods rise up against both. And the wind blows against both. The only difference between these two sets of people is their foundation. And like the foundation of every building, any good building we know, the foundation is usually hidden.

And it only becomes obvious when the storm comes. According to Jesus, the kurios, there are only two foundations for our lives.

[17:43] Only two. We either hear his word and practice it. Or we hear his word and practice our own word.

Gail Bruner puts it this way. The house that crashes. You notice the end of the sermon is the house that crashes. The house that crashes is the house of the Christians who find Jesus' words important enough to hear, but not realistic enough to live.

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

Matthew 7, 22. 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 miracles in your name? And I will say to them, I never knew you.

[18:53] Depart from me, you antinomians, you lawless ones. Boy, is this a puzzling statement or what? For you would think, would you not, that prophesying, casting out demons and doing miracles are signs of putting Jesus' word into practice?

But here Jesus says that one can do all these things and do them in his name and not belong to him. I never knew you. In Matthew chapter 10, Jesus does give authority to his disciples to prophesy, to cast out demons and to do miracles.

But nowhere does Jesus say that doing these things is a sign that we belong to him. They are signs that he is present and he is active, but they are not signs that people doing these things belong to him.

Jesus the Kurios can speak the prophetic word through anyone. Just because one speaks a prophetic word does not necessarily mean that person belongs to Jesus.

After all, God spoke the prophetic word to Balaam and did so through Balaam's donkey. Jesus the Kurios can cast out demons through anyone or no one.

[20:12] And just because a person is used to do that does not mean that person belongs to him. Jesus the Kurios can perform miracles through anyone. He does it all the time through people who haven't got a clue they're being used.

God liberated Israel from Babylon through Cyrus, king of Persia. And Cyrus had no idea what was going on. Just because Jesus does a miracle through someone does not necessarily mean that person belongs to him.

The prophetic word, the act of deliverance, and the miracle simply demonstrate the power of Jesus' name. The proof that someone belongs to him is not how he uses them, but what they do with his word.

The issue is, has his word, his creative and performative word, produce fruit in us? You will know them by their fruits, says Jesus.

And what is the fruit? By context, it is the Sermon on the Mount. So let's review. Are the Beatitudes beginning to emerge in our lives?

[21:38] Is there poverty of spirit? That realization that in and of ourselves, we are utterly bankrupt? Is there that mourning?

That deep grief over the realization of our spiritual impotency? Is there that meekness? That profound sense of helplessness that issues in gentleness?

Is there a hunger and thirst for righteousness, for right relationship? Is there a hunger and thirst for justice for the poor, for the widow and for the orphan?

Is mercy replacing the desire to write people off? Is there a movement toward purity of heart? This intense seeking of the face of God?

Is there an eagerness to make peace in the city and in the church to bring people together? That is what Jesus is looking for in those who call him Lord, Lord.

[22 : 41] Is there a casting out of the demons of anger and bitterness? Is there a desire to discipline the eyes and not give in to all the surging power of lust?

Is there a commitment to the sanctity of marriage? Is there dignity in our speech? Yes means yes and no means no. Is there a growing renunciation of violence and revenge and seeking to respond to evil with good?

Is there a willingness to love the enemy and bless those who curse and to pray for those who persecute us? That is what Jesus is looking for in those who say, Lord, Lord. Is there a growing ability to give without needing applause?

Is there a desire to get into that secret place and meet in intimacy with the Father? Is there a desire to fast without anybody knowing it? Is that universal anxiety about what we eat and drink and wear giving worth, giving place to this seeking first of the kingdom and righteousness of God?

And is that judgmental spirit finally giving way to intercessory prayer? That is what Jesus is looking for in those who say, Lord, Lord.

[23 : 55] Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. But the one who does what I say to do. It's quite a fork in the road, isn't it?

Now, is Jesus' emphasis on do at the end of his sermon in conflict with the Apostle Paul's emphasis that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone?

Is Jesus' emphasis on do in contrast with this salvation by grace alone through faith alone? No, it is not. Jesus is simply saying that if we have faith in him, we will do what he says to do.

He's saying that faith in him is not faith in him unless and until we act. Consider this imaginary story. I've shared it with some of you in some other contexts. You are not feeling well. And so you go to the doctor. She checks you out. Because she is this brilliant doctor, she's a very confident doctor, she immediately diagnoses the problem and makes a great prescription.

[25 : 15] Here, she says, take two pills every day, knock off the candy, eat three vegetables every day, and walk one mile a day.

Okay? Okay? Okay? Okay? Two pills every day, no candy, eat three vegetables a day, and walk a mile a day. And you say, sounds good to me. And on your way out, you turn to the receptionist and you say to him, that doctor is the best doctor I've ever met.

She's really good. She makes me feel warm and cared for. Boy, am I glad I found this doctor. You go home. And the next day, you only take one of the two pills.

You sneak a handful of Smarties. You eat two of the three vegetables. And you walk only a half a mile. And you say to yourself, this will do.

And besides, I know myself better than the doctor does. And you continue in this vein for the rest of the week. At the end of the week, you go to the doctor. Good morning, she says.

[26 : 24] Good morning, you say. How are you doing? Not so good. Oh, dear. I'm surprised. The prescription I gave you usually works.

Did you do what I said to do? Sort of. Sort of. What does sort of mean?

Well, you know, sort of. Did you take two pills a day? Sort of. Sort of. I took one.

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

Sort of. Sort of. Sort of. Yeah, I snuck some smarties. Just a little handful. Just a little handful. I said no candy.

[27 : 24] Yeah, I know. Tell me, Daryl. Do you want to get well? Of course.

I wonder. Did you eat 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. And she says, Do you trust me?

Oh, yes. Of course I trust you. You are the best. Yeah, I heard you tell my receptionist that. If I am the best, why do you not trust me?

I do trust you. No, you do not. How can you say that to me? Why? Because you did not do what I told you to do.

[28 : 38] Not everyone who says, Lord, Lord. But the one who does. If in any given moment, I will not do what he clearly says to do, it simply means that at that moment, at that moment, I do not have faith in him as Lord.

At that moment, someone or something else is functioning as Lord. Not everyone who says, Lord, Lord, enters the kingdom.

But the one who does the will of my Father. You can see then that the great crisis posed by the ending of the Sermon on the Mount is the preacher on the Mount.

He stands right at this fork. He is the crisis. What are we going to do with him?

Is he good? Does he say what he says because he wants our best? Is he right?

[29 : 51] Does he know what he's talking about? Is he smart? Most people think he's naive.

Jesus is naive. He doesn't know where he's in. If we think he's good, if we believe he's right, if we believe he's smart, and if we confess him as Lord, then we will do what he says to do.

We cannot say he is good and right and smart and Lord and not do what he says to do. If we hear him speak and then do not do what we hear him say to do, at that moment, at that moment, someone or something else is Lord.

The culture, financial stability, comfort, glands, fear, fear, something else, but not Jesus of Nazareth. So, what are you going to do?

what am I going to do? Now that we follow Jesus all the way to the end of his sermon on the mount, what are we going to do?

[31 : 13] I will tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to go back to where the sermon on the mount began.

I'm going to go back to the opening line. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs and only theirs is the kingdom. Having heard how he concludes the sermon, I'm going back to the beginning.

Right on are the poor in spirit. Right on are those who know they don't have what it takes. That's what I'm going to do. The opening line of the sermon says that I'm not going to be able to do what he tells me to do unless I admit my utter helplessness.

The opening line of the sermon on the mount says I'm only going to be able to do if I throw myself on him and bank it all on his mercy and grace and power. And then I'm going to discover again.

That his commands turn out to be promises. Because he is who he is.

[32 : 26] What his word says comes into being. He brings into being what he commands. I am going to end up doing what he tells me to do.

Because this is the only inherent human way. Thank you.