

The road map to the Kingdom of Heaven

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[0 : 00] Well, today we arrive at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, the conclusion. But in some ways, this is just the beginning for us.

Some say this conclusion by Jesus includes possibly the scariest reading for Christians in the Bible. Others say that Jesus is at his most passionate in these last verses.

But what is clear is that in Jesus' final words here in Matthew chapter 7, he asserts an ultimate authority that calls, that demands us to respond and answer to who he is and whether we want the kingdom that he offers.

So arriving at Jesus' conclusion, we need to hold that in mind as his final words here, a call for faith, a call to faith for unbelievers, and a call to discipleship for believers.

So when we hear this, I think we really need to consider what is Jesus saying about where we start our journey? What does he mean when he says the easy path isn't the safe path?

[1 : 11] And probably the key question, does Jesus know us and do we know him? Do we know that he's our sure foundation for the journey home? So we're given like a few images.

We're given these images. There's two gates we can enter, as Don just talked about. There's two journeys we can see marked by those who follow false teachers or false prophets and also those who are counterfeit Christians.

But then there's another journey, a journey of the authentic disciple or believer. And then finally, we see two foundations that show where they will land. And only the authentic disciple following Christ will stand.

So these words, they mean so much because Jesus calls for radical commitment, nothing less, and says there is only one way. And it's so personal in this, which is why I think we hear Jesus talk so passionately.

What's at stake is either life with him or death and separation without him. And Jesus says to us, there is a cost to be part of his kingdom.

[2 : 20] And he gives us a really serious warning if we're not going to be part of that kingdom that he offers. A few years ago, prior to all this COVID stuff happening, when we could actually travel, Alex, Anna and I traveled over to the UK.

And as part of our trip, we went to an area in the north of UK called the Lakes District. Now, before we'd arrived at the Lakes District at this place, we'd heard it was meant to be one of the most beautiful parts of the country.

It's filled with, well, lakes, lots of lakes, mountains that over there they call fells. They're like really big hills. Lush trees, native wildlife like badgers, all this stuff.

And then there's all this history to it. So William Wordsworth, the famous poet, lived just around the corner from the place where we stayed. And you've heard the stories of Beatrix Potter and Peter Rabbit.

They were all inspired by this area. So I woke up the next morning, first night we'd stayed. It was really early. No one else is awake. And I thought, I'm just going to go out for a walk and see what this experience is about.

[3 : 23] And straight as I got out of the place, we stayed straight behind the place was what's called one of these fells, one of these big mountains or hills. And I looked at it straight away. I just had this urge.

I was like, I've got to climb that. I've got to get to it. So I walked up a road and I started scouting for a gate. I knew I just needed to find a gate that could get me up the hill.

I knew most fells had a gate that could get you up. But to be honest, I became a bit frustrated. I kept going up areas where I thought I could get access. But as it turned out, they didn't lead the way.

And just when I was about to give up, I found this little road that led to a path that led to a track that just seemed to be up this hill. As I moved, I had to go through the first gate.

Track continued. And I had to follow up with gate after gate after gate to continue getting up that fell. As I looked back down the track as I climbed up and up, it became very obvious to me then that there was no other track that could take me up the fell as much as I tried to get up all these other tracks.

[4 : 25] So if you've got your Bibles there, look at chapter 7, verse 13. It says this. Just like my experience that day, coming across many tracks to enter to get to the top of that fell, but none leading the right direction.

Jesus says there is only one gate, only one way to life. And he also says there's many other gates that look good to us because they seem easy.

But the truth is they end in disaster and ultimately our destruction. In fact, a lot of those gates just look easy, the easy way. They don't even require any change.

One of these gates that is wide on the way to destruction is the just you do you attitude in our world. It's everywhere in our culture. By the way, have you ever noticed how easy it is to buy into that attitude, into that culture?

See, C.S. Lewis, famous writer, everyone knows C.S. Lewis. He noticed this in himself at a young age and he said it like this. He said, I was soon altering, I believe, to one does feel and oh, the relief of it.

[5 : 50] From the tyrannous noon of revelation, I passed into the cool evening twilight of higher thought where there was nothing to be obeyed and nothing to be believed except what was either comforting or exciting.

It's just so tempting, isn't it, just to follow what we feel, do whatever is natural to us or whatever we desire. So what is Jesus calling for that's actually different?

And I guess another question, are we meant to just do the opposite? Do we just like work hard, put in effort to get through this gate and just resist what we feel?

I think it's important we don't take away from today that Jesus is asking us to search harder to find the entry for the gate as if we can really make it by our own effort.

In fact, the beauty of this metaphor Jesus gives is he's showing us that he is the gate. And just like it says in John 14, verse 6, and we've already heard Don read it.

[6 : 53] I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. So there can only be one way to the kingdom of heaven. It has to be through Jesus Christ who provided a way for us to enter because there's his death for our sins, not our effort.

Jesus was showing to the crowd that day in front of him and a much bigger audience ever since that he was coming to fulfill his mission of being the gate to enter into relationship with the Father.

He was coming to ultimately fulfill what the law and the prophets spoke of. The picture of the gate, it's not just the start point.

As you know, once you've entered a gate, there is always a road leading somewhere. So in our picture today, the gate and the path are simply just a metaphor that explain how what we believe and what we put our faith in leads us on a road to a particular destination.

And what Jesus does, he starts with the gate, but then he moves us from looking at the big picture of where we are outside the gate. And then he brings it closer to home and he turns the focus to those who say they follow him, the ones that say they are in the gate and on the path to the kingdom of heaven.

[8 : 15] Now, if you look at verse 15 with me, Jesus makes a simply a standing claim. And he says this, he says, not everyone who teaches about his kingdom are in his kingdom.

He even goes as far to say there are those who are disguised and say they proclaim the truth, but are actually deceitful at heart.

Just let that sink in for a moment. That's a really big warning. This is serious business. He then gives us a second warning and follows up in verses 21 to 23 about how we need to be careful of self-deception ourselves.

Jesus is saying it's true. There are counterfeit Christians. In other words, there are people who say that they follow God, but they actually don't really know God and they don't show real fruit.

In other words, they're pretending they can fake it until they make it. So why does Jesus warn us about this right at the end of his sermon? Well, let's go through some observations that Jesus

makes.

[9 : 28] So turn with me to verse 15 and let's start with the false teachers. Firstly, notice Jesus already assumes false teachers are present. And not only are they present, but it also says later in the New Testament that they're going to be prevalent.

Listen to what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11, verse 13 to 15. He says this, For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So again, they will be deceitful and they will be disguised. There is also another observation we need to make.

And that is there is an objective standard of truth that we can tell them apart by. And Jesus doesn't mince words. He's saying light and darkness cannot be the same.

Or truth and falsehood exclude each other. They do not say the same thing and they don't lead the same direction. So these false teachers look like they're saying the right thing, but the truth isn't really in their words.

[10 : 37] What I find probably the most confronting observation that Jesus makes about false teachers is this. It's that their fruits will actually distinguish them. So it doesn't matter.

It really doesn't matter how many degrees someone has, whether they are a professor, a bishop or some other dressed up title. The truth is written by what comes out of their life.

And this, Jesus says, can help us discern, are they a sheep or are they a wolf? Throughout Jesus' beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount throughout this whole series we've been going through, we've heard some really clear differences of what this good and bad fruit looks like.

And the bad is ugly. For example, this is those who are simply interested in self-gain, self-promotion and seeking the praise of others.

Whereas those who show good fruit, these are the guys who are prepared to stand on God's agenda, deny themselves and follow him whatever the cost.

[11 : 44] They say the truth, even when it costs something. And they are prepared to do that in love. They practice showing love to their enemies. You see, the fruit is the key.

It's the key for us to recognize who they are, who the false teachers are. And it shows because the fruit shows the values they live by underneath.

The things we cannot see shows those values. Jesus' whole Sermon on the Mount, and again, just gives example after example of this fruit. And it comes from those who share the good fruit, it comes from those who share the values and principles that he does in his kingdom.

So see, whatever values we hold underneath and are determined to choose to live by every day, it shows through our words, attitudes and actions to others.

What I find about these verses, as confronting as they are, is isn't it just a gift of grace that Jesus gives us these words? It actually gives us the freedom to observe and interact with what we hear and what we listen to.

[12 : 51] Now, that's a bit scary as a teacher, but that's an act of love of God, that he keeps teachers accountable by their very words. And in God's economy, it shows he cares about every word we take in.

Jesus does not want his sacrifice and suffering to be in vain for us to be misled away from his very words of life. I think we just need to stop and ask ourselves some questions at this point.

Practically, are we taking on board things that just appeal to our natural anything goes desires in us? And, you know, I'm not just talking about listening to teaching here.

False prophets or false teachers work their way around in many ways, not just through a church service. So let me ask it like this. What music do you let yourself listen to? I think if I'm honest, in my own life, particularly when I was a lot younger, I really underestimated the impact of falsehood and deceit that could be shared through some forms of music.

Just like God's amazing power and grace can also be shared in music. And I really struggled listening to particular music that I liked the tune to, but the words spoke very differently to what I knew the gospel said.

[14 : 10] And in some ways, shockingly, it felt natural for me to listen to this stuff. Can't explain it, right? But I knew deep down it wasn't any good for my heart. And I think sadly, to some extent, this also had an impact on how I acted and treated others.

Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not saying we can't enjoy music that isn't overtly Christian. Of course not. In fact, and I've borrowed this saying from a friend, but just tweaked it a bit.

And that is Christian, really Christian music is like underwear, isn't it? No matter how good the quality, neither were designed to be used for 25 days straight. At least I think that's kind of true. So music is just one area we need to consider. What about, and let's go somewhere else. What about friends and mates around you that speak truths different to Jesus' truth?

Do you give weight and value to what they say? Do you really take on board what they say and believe it? Or what about, how do you engage with social media, especially in lockdown?

[15:12] Everyone's on social media. How do you wisely filter messages coming through with the light of the gospel? We've just heard this morning just how much division can even be in Christian communities over COVID.

So how do we filter this through the gospel? And I suppose, step back from that. Let's ask ourselves these questions. Are these influences helping my walk with Christ get deeper with their messages? Or do these messages undermine the authority of Christ and his truth working through my life? Something to think about. So as Jesus gives us an example of what good fruit and rotten fruit look like with false teaching, he also draws us into thinking about how we need to take care not to be deceived ourselves.

And this is it. This is arguably one of the scariest passages of Scripture for Christians. Matthew 7, verse 21 to 23. Now, I pray for all of us we understand that Jesus loves to comfort us.

And these verses are not here to create doubt. But it is a test to help us answer whether we are on the broad or the easy road or the narrow and the hard road.

[16:32] Notice here, firstly, it's actually not a question of how much faith we have. Again and again, we're reminded through the Bible of weak and ordinary characters that God transforms by his powerful grace.

Even remember, just back in chapter 6, verse 30, it says, But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown in the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

So who are these unsound hearers or these counterfeit Christians? And what can we learn about them? Well, according to Tim Keller, there are three traits that authentic Christians and these counterfeit Christians share.

First, notice in verse 21 where it says, 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.

So these counterfeit Christians come and they say, Lord, on the last day. They know he is God and they may even believe that he's the divine son of God, the Messiah. So in other words, they share orthodox doctrine with authentic Christians.

[17:51] The second trait is that they are really emotionally involved. They're emotionally invested. They don't just say Lord. They say, Lord, Lord, twice. And that's really significant in the text of the passage.

In the writing, it actually indicates a real intensity, a real emotion, a real investment. The third trait is these guys are really active in service.

I mean, they're deeply involved in ministry in the church. And yet on the last day, Jesus says, I never knew you. So. It's a couple of keys to unlocking this passage.

First, Jesus makes it clear that those who do the will of his father will enter the kingdom of heaven in verse 21. And second, those who Jesus never knew in verse 23, he will command out of his presence.

See, Jesus was set. He was set on earth on doing the will of his father. He loved his father and he wanted to please him.

[19:04] And Jesus did exactly that. So he could become the go-between and the mediator for us to know God as our father. But Jesus, it was personal.

He surrendered. He surrendered his will to please the father. So when Jesus says the mark of an authentic Christian, someone who does the will of my father, he's saying this is a person who is surrendering their will to him.

This is someone who gives the control and choice in their life to God. They are not the God of their own life. It's just so easy.

We can be tempted that through our own efforts will please the will of the father. So tempting, isn't it? It's almost like we sometimes can believe we need to be more moral and more self-controlled.

And that's enough for God. But it's just self-deception. We can't please God and enter the kingdom and enter the narrow gate through our effort on our own merit.

[20 : 04] It's salvation on our terms. It cheapens God's grace. And it's deadly. The scary thing is Jesus says this moral effort, it can look good. It can look really good.

I mean, like being part of a church or even knowing your stuff and what to say when it comes to the Bible. You know, know the creeds, say the right doctrine and have the appearance of being a disciple, yet still not having surrendered to the control of the father's will.

Okay, so come with me now. What's missing in the counterfeit Christians' words? Because there is no sign of true character or deep values of the kingdom in these words.

In fact, they just justify themselves by presenting the shiny kind of polished image of what they've done for Jesus. They talked about God, but they didn't know God.

For me, as I went through this passage, and I'll be honest, I felt scared when I was going through it. It's like these are big truths to handle. And as I was doing my reading, I came across just a little sentence in John MacArthur's commentary.

[21 : 10] And it just grabbed me. So I just want to share it with you. So he has this to say about what the shape of true surrender and obedience looks like. And he says it like this. Only one built on the foundation of obedience to God's word stands.

This obedience calls for repentance, rejection of salvation by works, and trust in God's grace to save through his merciful provision.

Say that last part again. This obedience calls for repentance, rejection of salvation by works, and trust in God's grace to save through his merciful provision.

So authentic Christians are always in a posture of dependence on Jesus, their king. And Jesus knows his sheep.

The counterfeit Christians are marked by their independence, trusting in their own works to make it, their knowledge and words to save them, and spiritual intensity further as some kind of mark of maturity.

[22 : 15] But it's just lip service. Their hearts are so far from God, and they are running straight down the wide path to destruction. If we stop and think about that for a moment, this is where it gets real.

It's so awful. It's so awful. You can hear the despising tone in Jesus' voice. I never knew you. Depart from me. He wasn't fooled.

He wasn't fooled by their facade. They might have even fooled others, even authentic Christians. But Jesus isn't fooled and won't be on the day when we all give account.

These are confronting words that search us, and you just cannot put a silver lining on eternal separation from Jesus. But I'm glad he doesn't leave us here.

We move on. Because as we've been through, Jesus is the only one true gate and way. And when we look to Jesus, and there is a true repentance, it produces, doesn't it, a deep love for others that just cannot be gimmicked.

[23 : 22] See, genuine disciples have words and actions that seek to please their father. It's not about getting an immediate reward from pleasing others. And that is it.

This is a mark of genuine discipleship in us. It's the growth of a genuine daily walk, wanting to know God more and more and be like our father more and more.

And we get to this final picture that Jesus gives us. Final picture in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus shows us that the type of person we are is like two builders who build their houses very similar.

Either we are a wise builder, meaning an authentic believer, or a foolish builder. That is the counter for Christian. And the walls these builders are building are what others can see in us.

So service to others, the words we speak, our actions. In some, it's a picture of our religious life. It makes that point in verse 24. But there's a big difference.

[24 : 28] The wise builder is the one who hears words, Jesus' words, and does them. And that kind of begs the question, what are the words Jesus is talking about here?

What is the wise builder listening to him doing? Well, it's the words that he's just told them in the Sermon on the Mount. He's asking, have you heard? Have you heard what I've said? And will you really obey?

Will you do what I've spoken to you today? No doubt about it. Jesus really smacks in the face the religious elite and the false disciples that day.

And ever since. He sees, he actually sees, they understand that not resisting our natural inclinations, our natural desires can be a dangerous thing.

The thing is, though, even many non-Christians realize that in part. The problem with the false disciples or the foolish builder is that they actually believe they can strive by their own effort to build a religious life.

[25 : 25] There simply isn't that posture of dependence or surrender to Jesus and to God as a father. There is simply no relationship. And Jesus does not know them.

Their house is just moral activity and effort for them. Deep down, they're not teachable in the things of the gospel. They don't know the grace on offer because they don't think they need it.

And most importantly, they don't show the mark of repentance needed in every authentic believer's life. The beauty of this image Jesus gives is it's so close to reality and so close to home for us because the test is coming and it's really only a matter of time.

Any builder knows that a house is only as good as a foundation it is built on. And Jesus was a company and he knew this better than anyone else. The storms of life and ultimately the final judgment day will show our true colors of what we're building on.

So have we listened? Have we repented? Is our life marked by emptying ourselves and leaning on Jesus? Realizing our natural inclinations lead down the path to destruction?

[26 : 39] That's the unshakable life as the unshakable life is resting on Jesus as the rock underneath our feet. Jesus' message that day captivated the crowd because of the absolute authority with which he spoke.

And Jesus assumed he was speaking absolute truth. Words of life that showed the only true path to the kingdom of heaven. And his words, they live today.

They're timeless and they're universal. That day that Jesus stood before them, the crowd responded in awe at his authority.

How are we prepared to respond today? Our story began with only one gate that enters to the kingdom of heaven. One journey that surrenders to the Father's will and only one foundation that we can stand on.

Jesus Christ alone. The storms of life are coming. And for many of us, they're already here. You might be facing lockdown, loneliness, uncertainty about the future, lost income, or you might just be desperately missing friends and family or even have loved ones, as we heard this morning, who are affected by COVID.

[28 : 04] So what anchors you in the storm? What is your strong foundation? It can be so easy just to put trust in what the world tells us.

More possessions will fill the emptiness. Judge those who don't agree with you about our changing world. Fill your life with more knowledge and don't believe anyone who tells you they know what is best for you.

What about the cheap tricks we can bind to as Christians? Fill your life with more service or more spiritual words that sound right, like it's a duty.

But are your feet resting on the unshakable, unshakable rock of Jesus? Are you talking to him daily about your struggles and pains, hopes and dreams?

We need to every day and it's no more needed than right now. Are we like the wise builder looking at his foundation and walls around him?

[29 : 08] Are you looking at the beauty of grace around you about what Jesus is doing and has done in your life? Are you prepared to accept that he is for you and his grace abounds your future?

When we rest secure in Jesus every day and let him change us and work through us, we can take confidence that we're not going to fall.

He works out every detail and we don't even need to be confronted. We don't even need to be overwhelmed when we're confronted by our own sin. Because of grace, we can see a greater picture of what God is doing in our life.

He's changing us, even when we are shaken and rattled and making us into the perfect picture of his grace. And he's drawing us, he's drawing us to be more righteous like he is, like our father.

And the beauty of it is, he gives us all the resources we need on our walking journey. He gets it. He understands our loneliness, our pain, our frustration, our temptations like no one else can.

[30 : 24] It's one choice. Or will you take the option where you just pursue what the world tells you? Do whatever feels good to you. Or what about the counterfeit Christian? False teachers.

More effort, more hard yards. Just breeds hypocrisy and legalism. The world's way, the false teacher and the counterfeit Christian way lead down the wide path to destruction.
So, on what road, on what foundation are you standing on today? Okay.