

Warnings of the Kingdom

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[0 : 00] They say that I hear a rumour that some people think preachers go too long. I find that hard to believe. After a 30 minute sermon you could ask a preacher, how long did you go for?

He'd probably say, oh, about 20 minutes. You ask a listener, he'd probably say, oh, he went over an hour, you know, angrily. Well, we are here in the end of the most famous sermon of the most important man of history and therefore the most important preacher of history, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Sermon on the Mount is so important and it's a long sermon and in fact it's taken us most of this year to work through it carefully and it's been a great ride, I think.

It takes up three chapters of Matthew's Gospel which if you think even about just in Bible terms and Gospel terms, that's a lot of space to devote in a Gospel to one message.

And I'm not claiming that this therefore gives preachers kind of precedent to preach long sermons though I put that to you for reflection. I've been subject to some long sermons and I've often thought you listen to a over long sermon, not in this fine building, but you listen to a really long sermon and you get to a point and there's a pause you think, oh, that would be a great spot to end.

[1 : 28] Then he keeps going, you know. Do you know that feeling? Well, you could kind of do that with Jesus. You could do, we could have done that last week. We could have ended the whole series. I mean, how is this for an ending to the Sermon on the Mount?

Chapter 7 verse 11 he says about prayer, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him? Amen, Jesus.

And a little inspirational ditty to end it. In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you for this is the law and the prophets. Amen. And you could just see people clapping but starting to think about lunch and wanting to go home.

But that would have been a nice, a poetic end to the Sermon on the Mount but Jesus hasn't finished. He hasn't finished. And if the Sermon on the Mount is a meal, it's actually a banquet, Jesus has more food to give.

He has more things to bring out for us to feast on. But I've got to warn you, the last course of the Sermon on the Mount has a bit of bite to it.

[2 : 33] The master chef is bringing out the conclusion to his masterpiece and the last course has a distinct flavour of warning, a distinct flavour of judgement and it's a surprising way in our day and age to end a message but let's take him seriously and reflect on this last course of the banquet.

I mean you'll taste it already in verse 13 and 14 and the gates. Enter through the narrow gate for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction and there are many who take it.

On the other hand, for the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life and there are few who find it. Jesus seems to be assuming that if you have been listening to his sermon, you will want to follow him but he doesn't want anyone to be under a delusion that that's an obvious or easy course to take.

In fact, he's saying it's not an easy course to take and it's certainly not the default course of the crowds. When the sermon started, it was Jesus taking just a group of disciples up to the mountain for the Sermon on the Mount but when we get to the end, we see there's multitudes there that somehow crowds have come but he's saying if you want the blessings of the kingdom, it doesn't come by default.

In fact, don't assume, Jesus is teaching, that everyone is in harmony with God. Don't assume that everyone is in sync with Jesus. The default is that people are on the wide easy road and that road leads to destruction.

[4 : 15] That is what Jesus is clearly teaching and there are many who take it. Therefore, he's teaching what we need to do is explicitly give our lives to Jesus, explicitly commit ourselves to the gate, to enter, to change roads and to choose to enter the narrow gate that is Jesus.

You have to consciously do it. If you know people that are kind of nice people that haven't consciously put their faith in Christ, don't assume they're on the narrow road.

Don't assume they're going to heaven. We need to encourage them to put their trust in Christ, to love Jesus, to commit themselves to him. Jesus' whole tone is a contradiction to the tone of our age.

The attitudes of our culture are therapeutic. You can't make people feel bad. Our culture is a permissive culture. You have to pat people on the back.

You can't tell people to stop and turn around. In our age, no one is wrong. Everyone's just a victim. Everyone just needs understanding. But to that, Jesus says, no, no.

[5 : 33] The default road that people are on is the wide road, is rebellion from God. We are all sons of Adam. We're all born into rebellion. We all live out that rebellion. The natural gravity of our hearts is to shun God.

God's response to that is to sort of judge us and to let us not only push him away, but to be judged by him, and that's the destruction. The only way around it is Jesus.

The only way around it is the narrow gate. See, what we would like to think, I think, is this, that there's this whole neutral space and then there's a Jesus road, a good road, and a bad road, and people sort of have to choose which way they go, but that's not how he talks.

There's no neutral space. The default is the wide road and we need people to choose Jesus. If you have not chosen Jesus, choose him. Put your faith in him.

Know him now before it's too late. Now he says, few find, he says, few find the narrow road, but many find the wide road.

[6 : 42] That's a very hard teaching and I want to qualify that with the conclusion of another sermon of Jesus in the same gospel in the Great Commission.

Because we've got to take all Jesus' teachings and put them together and I don't want this one teaching just to become the dominant paradigm lest we be comfortable as kind of a holy, tiny club, you know, you know, oh for, you know, 50 tongues to sing while the rest of society goes down the gurgler.

At the end of the Great Commission, Jesus has these words to end another message. He says, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. So, Jesus taught that the default road was wide, but then he said, go into all nations and make disciples of me. That is, not just go to all nations and go for pockets of people, but try and convert whole nations.

And so, to combine the two images, I think what he's teaching is that he wants us to try and get everyone in the world globally to cross over to the narrow road.

[7 : 52] Do you know what I mean? He wants us to fill it and his death on the cross is enough. You know, he can handle it, but will we preach the gospel is his challenge. So, I don't want us to be ambiguous.

The default road is to hell. C.S. Lewis put it this way. C.S. Lewis, the great Christian author from the last century, he said, the most common road to hell is the safe, gradual road.

You know, he's saying, people don't just sort of throw a fit and turn their back on God and choose hell. That's not how they do it. They just, he talks about the gentle slope, the soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.

People just gradually just drift away and find themselves on the road to destruction. They don't choose it, but that's where they are because they've rebelled from God. So, what we want to do is take Jesus' warning and take his commission and get as many people onto the narrow road.

And this is so important. One of the dangers that Jesus is going to show us in a minute is that there are going to be people who think they are on the narrow road when on the wide road.

[9 : 07] That makes it even more complicated, doesn't it? That people who think they've crossed over but they haven't because they've been led astray by false prophets. This is verse 15 onwards. Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

You will know them by their fruits are grapes gathered from thorns or figs from thistles in the same way every good tree bears good fruit but the bad tree bears bad fruit.

And I'll keep going. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Again, that image of destruction, he adds the image of fire to that punishment.

Thus you will know them by their fruits. So what is Jesus telling us to be aware of today? Well, he's telling us there are people out there who are claiming to be Christian who are not.

Now, they may know what they're doing or they may be actually self-deluded. He'll talk in a minute about people who claim Lord, Lord who think they're in but they're not. But they are ravenous wolves and they are dangerous because they will help, they will make people think they're on the narrow road when they're actually being led on the wide road to destruction.

[10:26] Now, what would you do if you want to be such a person? Well, he's clearly not talking about say something like atheism. He's not talking about atheism. Atheists don't pretend to be Christians and lead Christians astray.

Atheists are sort of a clear enemy of the gospel, an open enemy of the gospel. What he's talking about are people who feign to be Christian, who pretend to be evangelical but aren't, aren't of the gospel.

So, what would they look like? What would the sheep's clothing be? Do you imagine that such a wolf would wear or act? Well, I imagine and I've seen such people, these people are nice.

These people are likeable. We're not looking for a kind of pantomime wolf. These people are actually respectable, well-dressed, maybe ordained, maybe consecrated as a bishop.

They carry Bibles, they open them, they know the kind of Christian talk. This is dangerous, isn't it? It takes discernment to spot such people and sometimes there'll be teachers, you just might have your doubts and therefore you need to keep away from them.

[11:32] You may not know for sure that they're wolves but things aren't quite right. On the day of judgment, Jesus here in the sermon shows us that he is the judge and he talks about what will happen when they are exposed and those who have been duped by them.

He says, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven but only the one who does the will of my Father 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 deeds of power in your name and I will declare to them, says Jesus, I never knew you.

Go away from me, you evil doers. So here Jesus is warning us don't let charismatic, miraculous gifts con you. The evil one can create those as well.

I mean, God does heal and God does do those things but just because they happen don't just unconditionally assume that that means they're a Christian teacher. They may be a wolf in sheep's clothing.

They may cast out demons but Jesus says, I never knew you. It's dangerous, isn't it? Let me give you two sets of tests that I would use to test a Christian leader.

[12:46] See, here what we're talking about is not how you measure the faith of the person in the pew next to you. You want to be generous with the person in the pew next to you but we're talking about testing teachers and it's probably mindful to keep in mind when we've got a new vicar coming.

I know he's been well chosen and well vetted but we still need to be discerning, don't we? We need to be on our guard. Well, here are two sets of tests. The first test is do they know and love and obey Jesus?

Do they know and love Jesus? You know, because Jesus says to the false ones, I never knew you. You've got to watch people very closely who are leaders. How do they respond when they have to suffer for Jesus?

Do they like to suffer for the name of Jesus? Are they willing to suffer humiliation for Jesus because they know and love Jesus? Are they prayerful, dependent upon their Father in Heaven, wanting to do the will of their Father in Heaven?

Do they talk about Jesus all the time or are they kind of exalting themselves or something else? Are they greedy, self-seeking or do they want just Jesus to be honoured? You know, we need to scratch the surface of what we see in our leaders and just check what's underneath.

[14:02] Are they doers of evil? Are they serious, unconfessed, harboured sins that disqualify them from leadership and from even the faith?

So, do they know and love Jesus and can you see that in obedience? The second area of questioning I would use to test a teacher comes from the next bit of the sermon about building a house on the rock because the rock Jesus would talk about is his own teaching, his own word. We have to ask of our teachers, do they love the words of Jesus? Do they love and teach and read and use the Bible as the word of God? Is the Bible their daily bread?

Is the Bible their primary weapon of ministry or do they rely on their own insights, their own intelligence, their own cleverness, their own kind of ways of kind of packaging things together or do they use the Bible?

Is the Bible the content of all that they teach or is the Bible kind of just like a jumping board to jump off to get to their own ideas? Do they have a deep knowledge of the Bible or just a shallow kind of referencing?

[15:09] So do they know and love Jesus and do they love and know and use the Bible? They are two great tests for teachers and we need to be very thorough about this as a church.

Jesus says it's very serious. These false teachers may be deluded and two eternal roads are at stake. We need to look for the fruits in our teachers.

We need to look for the fruits of love for Jesus and the Word in their life. We need to look at their households. Are their households godly or their households in bitter disarray?

Are there hidden acts of evil in their life? So at one level I'm encouraging us to be discerning even with a new vicar that we know to be well tested already.

But on the other hand I want to make a positive point about a new vicar because there's eternal things at stake. If you find a godly vicar who loves the Word of God and loves Jesus hold on to them and love them and respect them.

[16:13] If you find such a person and I believe Andrew it is that person follow him and look after him. It's great that we're looking after his house for example to bless him and let's not choose to resent the fact that the new vicar is different or that doesn't like our hobby horses or are stamped on them or changes things we don't want changed.

False teachers have the power to send people to hell to deceive people. When we find a faithful teacher we want to thank God for that and make the most of it.

Let's look at the final image that Jesus challenges us with about building your life on the rock. Will you build your life on the rock? Hear his words. He says everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his life on rock.

The image is not quite saying Jesus is not saying I'm the rock. He's saying if you build your life on my words that's the rock. It's actually because otherwise you could say hearing Jesus you're on the rock.

No, it's hearing and doing. He goes on if you're on the rock the rain fell the floods came the winds blew and beat on that house but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock.

[17:40] Again Jesus is no prosperity preacher. He's not promising guaranteed healing. He's not promising no suffering. The wind will beat on you.

The floods will come but what he's promising is if you build your life on him and his teaching you will stand unlike the fools everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

The rain fell, the floods came, the same things, the wind blew and beat against that house and it fell and great was its fall. Now what is Jesus demanding here?

What kind of loyalty is he demanding? Well I want to challenge you to think what he's not saying is be a nice eastern suburbs person.

He's not saying that's the kind of thing to live by. What he's challenging us to is not morality but to put him and his kingdom teaching first.

[18:43] That's building your life on the rock. Because if you survey the teaching of Jesus there's not a lot that's just merely be nice and be good.

In the Sermon on the Mount and in all the gospels Jesus is fundamentally teaching about his own kingdom his own coming death and resurrection the need for mercy the need for to be forgiven and rescued from sin that's the teaching you build your life on that's the gospel you obey and whenever Jesus does talk morals and he does and there are moral implications to being a disciple he doesn't just talk about it in terms of a nice private school nice kids nice job nice green lawn kind of stuff in Doncaster he talks about being against anger and against lust of the eyes and against self

righteousness and loving your enemies and exceeding the righteousness of the Pharisees in their middle classness he talks about morals on a whole different level to the rest of our society so friends don't be a fool be wise Jesus teaches there are many fools who have heard the teaching of Jesus and then reduced it to something totally foreign and then thinking that they are on the rock when they are not and great are their fools you know you don't have to be intelligent to follow Jesus and you don't have to be unintelligent to be a fool either you know there are many shameful intelligent failures who had access to the gospel but did not build their life on it and thought that they could just take it as sort of a condiment to flavor their life and great was their fall and the fall of maybe those they influenced you know but the fruits of following Jesus are that you'll be on the rock you'll be on the rock well let me conclude Jesus decides to finish his sermon with warnings in his wisdom he decides that we need warnings to finish the sermon on the mount and so there are all these couples like two roads two gates two types of sheep two types of trees bearing two types of fruit there are two foundations to build your house on you know that's very challenging in our time to think that there's not just one path but there's two paths and one is good and leads to life and one leads to destruction in our society in our therapeutic soft permissive society it's seen as unloving to talk like that people would say the loving thing to say is that we're all on a journey together and different places on the journey and they all kind of end up in the same nice place and our society would say only a hateful person would divide humanity up into two only a hateful unloving person would do that so that's not

Jesus is it by society standards Jesus could almost be charged for a hate crime under current laws if not ones to come but let me turn this on its head what if God has made the world such that in humanity there are two destinies and that some will be punished and some will receive eternal life wouldn't the most loving thing to do be to tell people that if it's true if it's true wouldn't the most loving thing to do would be for God to send his son so that people could get off the wide easy road to destruction and get on the road to life wouldn't that be the most loving thing to do and I put it to you it is the most loving thing to do because that is reality and it's actually a wicked thing to lie and pretend as if we're all on the same journey that ends in a nice place because it's not true if that were true Jesus would not have to die if that were true he would not have to die in our place and rise in our place warnings are acts of love and this is a loving ending to the Sermon on the Mount isn't it it's a loving ending

Jesus issues threats because he loves you and he doesn't want to end on some kind of inspirational placable kind of thing to put up on your dining room wall he ends on warning because Jesus knows the danger and he was sent to get us out of it he was sent to be a doctor he was sent to rescue to be a redeemer and finally when Jesus finishes the sermon it's interesting all attention is on him so when he finishes the sermon it's not that they go oh that was really interesting we need to chew that over they're all just going who is this guy listen to it verse 28 now when Jesus had finished saying these things the crowd were astounded at his teaching that is I think astounded at him for he taught them as one having authority and not as their scribes so it's not just about the content but it's about that he could demand all this who is he and the way that he delivered it who is he that he has such authority that is outstanding and so what we are left to come to grips with is not some tick off sheet of commands that we can tick off but actually a person the son of God made man the Lord

[24 : 25] Jesus Christ he is the one that you must come to grips with in the sermon on the mount you know it's more than just the amazing ethical challenges it's the amazing authority of the one who demands it from you that you must come to grips with so the question is have you come to grips with the sermon on the mount in your life and the deeper question behind that is have you come to grips with the author of the sermon on the mount have you come to grips with the man of the sermon on the mount the Lord Jesus Christ have you given yourself over to him and are you on his road do you know him are you doing his will are you seeking the will of your father in heaven have you established him as the one with complete authority in your life that is the demand of the sermon on the mount that is the demand of Jesus don't anger him by trying to reduce it to anything moralistic or achievable or something that you can just use as a flavouring of life without actually giving your life over to him

Jesus you know he's lord of all or he's lord of nothing at all that's the sort of end point of the sermon on the mount Jesus kingdom has come and he demands of that radical disciples who will give their whole life over to him over to his kingdom and over to his kingdom teaching so I pray that that will

be the place where you will be and that you are ready to be in the days ahead why don't we pray now and I'm going to pray that we will be faithful in this Lord Jesus we love you and thank you for your authority and power to us through your word we thank you for the sermon on the mount we thank you that it cuts us down that we see we cannot do anything of ourselves but we pray Lord Jesus you would lift us up forgive us through your death and resurrection fill us with your spirit to live the radical life described in this message of the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5 6 and 7 Lord Jesus help us to build our lives on the rock and help us to be truly fearful of falling and of being caught on that wide road help us to do everything every day to be on the narrow road and entering through the gate which is you we pray this in your name Lord Jesus Amen