

Two Ways to Live

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[0 : 00] I'm sure you've heard people say, you know, they begin like this, saying, there are two types of people in the world. Well, I want to inform you that there are two types of people in the world.

Those who divide the world into two types of people and those who don't. And it would seem, reading from today's passage, that Jesus, like me, falls in the same category, the first category.

For he divides his listeners into two types. Depending on how they respond to his teaching. And really what he lays out is rather challenging and confronting, isn't it?

The stakes are high. And unfortunately, we can't shy away from it. It's there in black and white, pretty stark in contrast.

But over four comparisons, all of which are connected, Jesus lays down his challenge to us. How are we going to respond to his teaching? Well, let's look first at the first comparison, beginning in verse 13.

[1 : 04] It says, Now, clearly, Jesus here is talking about his teaching as the narrow gate.

But notice, it's not just the entry point that's narrow, but the road beyond it as well. And conversely, the way to destruction begins with a wide gate, leading to a broad road.

So, what does the narrow gate and road mean? Well, Jesus says that it's only found by a few, whereas many enter through the wide gate.

The narrow gate, therefore, is perceived by many to be unappealing, unpopular. Now, why is that? Because as we've seen in Jesus' sermon, his teaching demands humility and repentance.

It requires us to recognize our poverty of spirit. If you recall, back in chapter 3, he began his ministry by proclaiming, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.

[2 : 17] So, the narrow way is not easy. But let's not get the wrong idea here. Narrow does not mean it's burdensome or joyless.

It doesn't mean there's no blessing or reward. After all, Jesus has already promised that those who seek will find, that God will reward those who practice kingdom values with good gifts and deep satisfaction.

So, narrow though it is, this road is worth pursuing because it leads to life, whereas the broad road leads to destruction.

It's just that if you choose this narrow path, there were times when it can feel lonely. We'll often be in the minority. Many may not understand why we've made these choices and may even mock us for it.

But we'll be called to trust God, to be patient and wait to see the fruit of our decision. So, how do we know that we've chosen this path correctly?

[3 : 26] Well, as Jesus goes on now to say, it begins with the type of teacher that we follow. And so, in the next comparison, Jesus warns us not to look just at what the teachers say, but how they live as well.

So, in Jesus' day, there were many who held themselves out as preachers of truth. It's funny, isn't it? But no false prophet ever comes saying, listen to me, I'm telling lies.

No, every prophet claims to be speaking the truth, to be from God. And often they claim a special revelation from God, that only they have, or a special way of interpreting the Bible.

But as Jesus says in verse 15, there are wolves in sheep's clothing. Watch out for them. Watch out for false prophets, Jesus says in verse 15. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

There is great danger in following them. They may appear appealing, even harmless, but they'll devour their followers like wolves, lead them into destruction, all the while without them even realizing it.

[4 : 38] They'll be loud into a false sense of security, wandering headlong into destruction without knowing it. Now friends, we must strike the right balance here.

On the one hand, as we saw last week, we need to be slow to judge. That means not being judgmental, being too quick to judge other Christians, or groups, or churches. And yet, we mustn't be naive either.

But, we're called to watch out for those who lead others into destruction. The stakes, as Jesus has been pointing out, are high.

So, is it wrong that a preacher or church is drawing a large crowd of following? No, not necessarily. But, we ought to be wary, shouldn't we?

It's so easy when things are popular, the next fashionable thing that comes along, we're always drawn to those things, aren't we? We want to check it out. And we're sometimes mesmerized by how amazing something is, or someone is.

[5 : 42] And when there's a big crowd, we think, oh wow, this must be good. But no, we ought to be wary, because broad is the way that leads to destruction. And so, how can we tell?

Well, Jesus continues, by the fruit of the teacher or leader. What does the character of the leader look like? Does he or she live according to Jesus' teaching?

And so, Jesus continues, by their fruit, you will recognize them. Do you people pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?

Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Thus, Jesus repeats again, by their fruit, you will recognize them. You see, all our lives, all of us, preachers, teachers, all of you, all of our lives will always bear the fruit of what we believe.

[6 : 49] There is no faking it. Just as you cannot go to a thorn bush to pick grapes, so the false teaching of a prophet will eventually reveal or show itself.

It may take a while, just like fruit takes a while to mature, but eventually, we'll see a person for what they are. And so, what kind of fruit are we to look for?

Well, again, the same things that involve walking the narrow road. The fruit of humility and repentance. The fruit of doing God's, doing things for God's reward, not for man's praise.

The fruit of forgiveness of others. The fruit of grace. These cannot be faked. So, don't be taken in by just what a preacher may say, but look at their lives as well.

How do they treat people? What happens when they are wrong? How do they speak to the weak and the powerless? How do they respond when there's conflict?

[7 : 51] All of these things reveal the character of a leader. And of course, what happens as well is what happens to the leader often filters down to the people that they lead.

The leader, in one sense, sets the culture and the behaviors of the group. And so, true and false teachers will eventually produce true and false disciples accordingly.

And so, Jesus now continues in verse 21. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the ones 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, in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?

Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me, you evil doers. Well, now Jesus shifts the attention from the leaders to the disciples and also to our own lives, to discerning our own behavior and conduct.

And so, the first question for ourselves is, how can we tell if we are truly following Jesus? You know, Jesus cannot be fooled. I hope you realize that. Just because you call him Lord doesn't mean he'll recognize you.

[9 : 07] If we just pay lip service to Jesus as Lord, then that's not enough. That's not sufficient to enter the kingdom of heaven. So for us, in our day, what might that look like?

Well, for a start, just coming to church and even mouthing the words of the songs that we sing or the prayers is not good enough.

Look for me, even preaching a powerful sermon or casting out demons in Jesus' name, which I've not done before, so rest assured, performing miracles.

That's not good enough. And that's saying quite something, isn't it? Because I bet you if someone came up here today and they could literally cast out demons, I bet we'll all be sitting up and taking notice, isn't it?

Particularly, they said that they're doing it in Jesus' name. But, if you remember in the days of Moses, there were the musicians in Pharaoh's court, wasn't there? They could do the same miracles as Moses, couldn't they?

[10 : 08] A large many of them. But they certainly weren't God's prophets, were they? And so Jesus, likewise, isn't fooled by what's on the outside. It could very well be the work of the devil.

He's the master of disguise, isn't he? He's the ultimate sheep in wolf's clothing. Instead, it all comes down to what's in the heart.

True discipleship, being a true disciple of Jesus, requires the transformation of the inner life. When no one else is looking, when it's just between you and God, what are you like?

That's the question. Is there genuine repentance? Is there true faith in his son Jesus? Is there a recognition that you need forgiveness of sins, and therefore, faith in Jesus and his work on the cross?

Now, I'm sure many of you know this already, but I'm going to say this for the benefit of those of you who might be new to the faith or still searching. If you are, this is where it starts.

[11 : 14] This is the narrow gate by which we all enter to begin our journey to life. It's the work of looking within ourselves, recognizing that we lack the righteousness to enter God's kingdom, and trusting Jesus to provide for us, to take the punishment for our sin.

As Jesus said, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. And once we've done that, then we continue, we've walked through the narrow gate, we continue on this narrow road.

And what does walking this narrow road look like? Well, that's the fourth comparison, which Jesus concludes with, verse 24. Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

The rain came, the streams rose, and the wind blew and beat against that house. Yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority and not as the teachers of the law.

[12 : 40] So, what's the key to eternal life? Plain and simple, isn't it? Hearing the words of Jesus and putting them into practice. Not hard.

I didn't have to preach it to you. It's right there in the passage. But notice very carefully what Jesus says about those who build on the rock and those on the sand. So, look again at verses 24 and 26.

What do both of them have in common? Verse 24 and verse 26. What's the common thing? Both hear the words of Jesus, isn't it?

So, it's not that the one who builds on the rock hears the word and the one who builds on the sand doesn't. No, both hear the words of Jesus. But what's the difference? It's the one who builds on the rock, he's the one that puts it into practice.

That's the difference. And so, here's a reminder to you when you come to church or when you go to your Bible studies. the point is not to listen to a good sermon and enjoy it.

[13 : 51] It's not even just to be encouraged or cheered by it. When you go to your Bible studies, the point isn't to understand the Bible only and to have the wonderful big idea all written out, which is good, which is necessary, but it's not enough.

Rather, the point is to understand and put it into practice. So, if you've been spoken to and challenged by God's word, what are you going to do with it?

Are you going to make concrete changes in your life? Are you going to stop doing what displeases God? That's putting it into practice.

Now, remember again the context of Jesus' words. He says to his listeners here, to put into practice these words of mine. So, the context then is the words of his sermon, but also more broadly all his words, the rest of the Gospels and ultimately the whole Bible because God has spoken by his Son, isn't it?

So, to put his words into practice isn't about hearing some voice in your head from Jesus or seeking some specific guidance or detail and putting that into practice.

[15 : 07] No, Jesus is talking about his words as revealed here in Scripture. Jesus' teaching is clear enough. The point is whether we'll put it into practice or not.

Now, granted, Jesus also says that this is a process because a house isn't built in a day, is it? But the point is, are we slowly but surely constructing our lives on the bedrock that is Christ's word by putting it into practice?

He is our foundation, isn't he? Every aspect of our life needs to be grounded in him and his word. The other thing to see is, of course, is to realize that, you know what?

The foolish man, he was building as well, wasn't he? We all build, don't we? Everything we do in life, we do for some aim or purpose.

We're all trying to make something of our lives, aren't we? So the foolish man builds too. It's not that he's not building, he is building, but what he doesn't realize is that he's building on sand.

[16 : 19] And you know, for a time, that house that he's built may stand, but what's the danger? That the rains will come, the winds will blow, and soon, no matter how grand these houses, it all gets washed away, and there's really nothing to show for it.

And we've seen that happen in real life, haven't we? You know, some of our fellow citizens up north in Sydney, they have beautiful oceanfront beaches, don't they?

Very popular, very expensive as well, but all along the coast, people pay a premium to live by the beach. These impressive palaces, aren't they? Envy of others.

But what's the problem? All of them, most of them, are built on sand, aren't they? And we've seen the shoreline get eroded. And so I've got a slide. This was in Coleroy, I think, northern beaches.

Even that multi-story apartment seems like it's so sturdy, but actually, that's at risk as well, isn't it? It doesn't matter how impressive the house is, is it?

[17 : 25] If it's built on sand, then when the rains come and the winds blow and the waves come, in this case, it will be washed away. And so likewise, there are many lives around us that may look successful and prosperous.

And let me even use a spiritual term. Many people that we look around in church may be blessed, even. But if it isn't blessing as Jesus describes it in his sermon, blessing that arises from thirst for righteousness or poverty of spirit, if we're not storing up treasure in heaven where maus and thieves cannot destroy, then it runs the risk of being washed away or, as Jesus used early in the passage, burnt at the end, isn't it?

And that's a similar picture that Bevan in Psalm 1, when he read that, described to us. Blessed is the one who shuns the broad road of following the wicked, but instead meditates and puts God's word into practice.

The psalmist says that these are like trees planted by water that thrives whether there's a drought or not. And by contrast, the wicked are like chaff, blown away.

They forfeit their place with the righteous at the judgment. And so, the choice really is rather clear, isn't it? Very stark, but very clear.

[18 : 55] I think as Christians, however, sometimes we try to have the best of both worlds, don't we? We want to have an each-way bet. You know, we have a bit of that fleeting pleasures of the broad road.

And then we hedge our bets and do a few things so that we, you know, maybe that's the narrow road that we try. So, for example, we may chase success and material blessing and then ask God for spiritual blessings as well.

Well, Jesus says it's not possible. It's not to say that the rich can't be blessed by God spiritually, but if getting rich or material success is your primary aim in life, getting ahead in the world is your main goal, then that will corrupt your heart.

And then, as Jesus has said in the sermon itself, you cannot serve both God and Mammon. You can't serve two masters. So, you need to choose. What will you build on? Put Jesus' words into practice fully and wholeheartedly?

Or, you know, just simply hear the words, maybe pick a few things to follow, you know, the more simple ones maybe, the ones that suit you? And that is building, isn't it, on shifty sand.

[20 : 07] So, we have a choice to make, don't we? Two ways to live, as the title says. One through a narrow gate and following the narrow road. The other through the wide gate and the broad road. And it starts right here and now, isn't it, for all of us and continues each and every day of our lives.

That's why you walk the road. It's not a one-time thing. Set and forget. That's a daily choice that we need to make.

So, you can't say, let me do this and that for myself for a bit and then, you know, later on, when all that's done, I'll follow Jesus and take his words seriously.

No. If you do that, then you've actually decided to enter through the wide gate and head down that wide road. On the other hand, God is gracious in it.

It's never too late. So, yes, if you may be on this broad road right now, you feel, but today, if you hear the challenge of the words of Jesus and you decide you want to turn away from the broad road, put your trust in Jesus by practicing what he preaches, the good thing is that you don't have to go backwards down that wide road and then find that narrow path and then go there.

[21 : 21] No, because what happens is that if you want to repent, voila, all of a sudden, the narrow gate just appears just off this broad road and you just need to step off the broad road here and now, enter that narrow gate and then keep walking on that narrow path.

That is the beautiful thing about repentance, isn't it, that you can do it anytime. It's never too late to repent. But don't think that you can do it later on.

It's always now. Now is the time to consider Jesus' words and repent. And so, what will each of us do? We have Jesus' words and so really the question is, have we been putting them into practice?

Are we building our house on the rock that is Christ Jesus? Let's pray. Father, give us the faith and humility to hear the words of Jesus and to put them into practice, not just today but every day of our lives.

May we build something that will last because it's grounded in Christ. May we build because it is you by the power of the Spirit that is erecting this building, this house that will stand firm as your work in us for eternity.

[22 : 44] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.