

Taking the Hard Road

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Preacher: Dr. Wes Feltner

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Ass Ass Ass Well, I had planned on it being awful, so I guess I'll have to change my plans
now.

If you've got a Bible, turn to Matthew chapter 7. Matthew chapter 7. For those of you that didn't hear that rude comment, I was told I better make this good.

So, to which I said I'd planned to make it terrible. So, anyways, you came ready to sing tonight, and you have just already blessed me and encouraged me just to hear so many people singing out, I have decided to follow Jesus, and there is no turning back.

We've been studying the last several months the best sermon ever, which is not a sermon I've ever preached. It's the sermon that Jesus preached in Matthew chapter 5, 6, and 7.

We know it as the Sermon on the Mount. And we've spent the last several months, really, in this series looking at Jesus' words as he's teaching what it means to be a disciple, what it means to follow Christ and be a part of the kingdom of God, which looks very different than the culture of this world.

[1:50] And we have seen how that is cut time and time and time again. Well, here in Matthew chapter 7, we're at verse 13, and we're coming to what I believe is kind of the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus here starts to tie everything together and bring in this final main point, drive it home once again. And we'll spend a couple of more weeks looking at how Jesus ends the Sermon on the Mount.

So, Matthew chapter 7, beginning at verse 13. If you are able to stand, would you please do so as we honor the reading of God's Word. Matthew chapter 7, Jesus says this in verse 13.

He says, Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they're ravenous wolves.

You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? So every healthy tree bears good fruit, but a diseased tree bears bad fruit.

[3 : 15] A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Thus, you will recognize 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.

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 mighty works in your name?

And then I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

This is God's word for us tonight. Let's pray and ask him to talk to us as we look at this text. God, thank you for this opportunity now to preach your word.

[4 : 14] As I have prayed every week, I only want to say what Jesus means here. Help me do that to the degree that I err.

I pray that your spirit, who is the spirit of truth, would guide these people in truth. Because what we want is the truth that Jesus is teaching us here.

So Holy Spirit, guide us now into that truth and help us see clearly the path we're on. And we pray this in Jesus' name. And God's people said, Amen.

You may be seated. You may be seated. Well, Mark Jenkins either really loves adventure or he is certifiably insane. Mark and a group of others back in 1989, three other Americans and four Russians set out to be the first individuals to ever bike all the way across Siberia.

Now, I have no idea why one would want to be the first person to bike all the way across Siberia, but whatever. This is what Mark and his team set out to do.

[5 : 28] And what they did is they started at a little port town over the Pacific, around the Sea of Japan. And they ended up some 7,500 miles all the way in Leningrad.

And what was crazy about this was not just the distance of this trip, but the difficulty of this trip.

Mark actually describes all the challenges they faced in his book called Off the Map. For example, he talks about how a few weeks in, they ran out of road. I mean, 30 years ago, you didn't have a road that went all the way across Siberia.

In fact, one KGB escort who was traveling with them said, You can't go where there is no road. So they had the decision to make. They either had to hop on a train and bypass the countryside, or, which they were strongly encouraged to do, by the way, they had to make their own way.

And Mark and that group of individuals chose the hard way. They went where there was no road. And over the next few months, Mark describes how they made their way through an 800-mile swamp, mud so deep they had to carry their bikes, brutal winds at sub-zero temperatures.

[6 : 52] Some of the team members incurred injuries that needed medical attention. The team of Americans and Russians were constantly fighting with one another, hard to maintain any kind of unity, all the while surviving on potatoes, warm milk, and a few blocks of bread.

And this went on for five months! Five months they endured those conditions. Well, it was enough to land them in the Guinness Book of World Records.

Congratulations! And what was crazy again about this was not the enormous distance they traveled, but the enormous difficulty of the road they traveled.

Faith family, have you ever taken the hard road? Have you ever taken the hard road? I don't mean like the road of your stupidity, not that hard road. I'm talking about you made an intentional decision to take the hard road.

You didn't travel 7,500 miles through an 800-mile swamp across Siberia, but you intentionally and deliberately chose a path that very few people were willing to go down.

[8 : 10] You chose to travel a direction you knew at the outset was going to be laced with difficulty. Have you ever gone down the hard road?

Maybe for you, everybody told you to just quit. Give up! It's over! Don't you see? But you pressed on because you knew that this is what God had called you to do.

Or maybe everybody else went home after practice, but you stayed those extra hours and you put in more time and more training when no one else would.

Maybe everybody else was eating whatever they wanted to eat, but you disciplined your appetites in order to stay healthy, and you wouldn't do what everybody else was doing.

Maybe as a parent, when other parents would have let their kid get away with it, you made the difficult decision to train their heart, not just let them off the hook.

[9 : 06] And when the culture was going in one direction, you made the intentional decision, I am not going to follow the crowd. I am not going to go where everybody else is going. I'm not going to do what everybody else is doing.

I'm not going to believe what everybody else believes. And you knew that road would be laced with difficulty. You knew the easy thing would be to take the easy road, but you didn't because it was the right thing to do.

It's what God had called you to do. And you knew that in the end it would be worth it. Faith family, that is exactly what Jesus is calling you and I to at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount.

He is calling us to a hard road, a road that is going to be laced with many challenges. Look at what he says in verse 13. He says, enter by the narrow gate.

He's calling us down the narrow road. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction. And those who enter it are many.

[10 : 17] Most people go down that road. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life. And those who find it are few.

Now, most of you have probably heard this passage before. One of the things that we've been uncovering every week as we've gone through the Sermon on the Mount is so much of the Sermon on the Mount is familiar to us, but often is the case that it's taken out of context or we learned it in isolation, not in context of the entire sermon.

The same is true with this passage. Most of you have heard this taught this way. There are two roads. One is full of evil people that do wicked things.

There are people that have tattoos and they drink bush light. And they're, you know, because who would drink bush light, you know? And they go to pool halls and they listen to worldly music.

And, you know, there's all those wicked people and they're going to end up in hell. But then there's a different road. And on that road are good people. And it's the way to heaven.

[11 : 24] The people that go to church and give to the poor and they have home Bible studies and they know all the words to amazing grace. That's the road to heaven. Listen, that is not what Jesus is teaching.

That's what I was taught growing up. But this is not what Jesus is teaching here at all. Here's why. Because it doesn't fit with the Sermon on the Mount at all.

If you've been tracking with us over the last several weeks, you know that's not been the emphasis of Jesus in this sermon. Jesus here is bringing the Sermon on the Mount to a conclusion.

And you know that when you're concluding something, you don't veer off into an entirely different topic. You call people to take action on the main point. You don't give a lecture on the history of the Enlightenment and end with Spanish vocabulary words.

You don't teach others how to cook a meal and finish by reminding them to get an oil change. The conclusion wouldn't fit the point, do you see? So Jesus isn't kind of veering off here at the end with some strange metaphor about, you know, worldliness and all.

[12 : 35] No, no, no, no. He's driving home the main point that he's been teaching us all along. So what are these two roads? What are these two ways of living?

Well, before we look at that, have you noticed, for those of you that have kind of, and by the way, if you've missed some, you can go back online and you can catch back up in the series. But have you noticed that Jesus loves to make one big point by using lots of examples?

Are y'all with me tonight? He loves to, he's got one big idea that he wants to get across and he'll often give you several different examples to prove that main point. For example, in Matthew chapter five, Jesus is teaching the main point of the greater righteousness.

This is the righteousness that you know of, of the scribes and Pharisees. But I'm saying that you have to have a righteousness that exceeds that. And he gives six different examples.

You've heard it said, don't murder. I say you can't have anger. You've heard it said, don't commit adultery. I say you can't even have lust. You've heard it said, don't do oaths. I say your yes has to always be yes.

[13 : 40] You've heard an eye for an eye. I say, turn the other cheek. You've heard, love your neighbor. And I say, love your enemies. Are you with me? All those examples served the larger point, which is you are being called to a greater righteousness that you cannot do on your own and must therefore surrender to the one who fulfilled the law.

In Matthew chapter six, Jesus does a similar thing. And the main point was, don't practice your righteousness in front of others to look good. The point of practicing righteousness is because you love God.

Amen? And Jesus gives one example? No. Three examples to show this. When you give, when you pray, when you fast.

All three of those examples served to make the larger point that when you do acts of righteousness, don't do it to look good. Do it because you love God. So what I'm doing is I'm just laying that background, that context to say this.

Jesus is doing the same thing here. He's giving you a list of metaphors. They seem random. They seem fortune cookie. It's like, I'm supposed to follow a road and then be careful because there might be sheep that on the inside are ravenous wolves.

[15 : 05] And by the way, there might be trees that have bad fruit on them. What is he talking about? He's changing metaphors like every other verse. And it's hard for me to keep up. What is he trying to say?

I'm going to give you the main point in two parts. And here's the first. You ready? See, the hard road is the heart road. I'll let that land.

The hard road that Jesus is calling us to is the heart road. Let me explain. The metaphor of road, of course, is very common in just about any society and certainly in the ancient Near East.

In the ancient Near East, there were nice, smooth roads made by the Romans. And it was made for very easy travel. And so you may look at that and say, that looks bumpy.

But yeah, for those days, that was quite a smooth road. It made travel quite faster and easier to do. But of course, there would also be kind of an off-road or what we might call like a dirt path that would often be traveled, say, with oxen and animals.

[16 : 11] And it would become bumpy and hilly. And there would be rocks mixed in. And it was a very hard road to be able to travel down. So Jesus is using this very, very common thing that they could relate to to say, this is like life.

This is like the kingdom of God. There is an easy way to travel. And that ends in destruction. And there is a hard way to travel. And that ends in life.

And this idea of there being two paths, two ways to travel is not just a common example in society. It's actually a common example in Scripture. Sure. I'll give you just one, though.

My goodness, I could give you multiple ones. Think of Psalm 1, verse 1. Blessed is the man. Blessed is the one who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Blessed is the one who doesn't walk in the way of scoffers, but walks in the way of God's law. Do you see? And there's multiple ones in Proverbs.

[17 : 17] These different paths or roads that you can take. So what does Jesus mean here by these two roads that he's pointing out? It's not that he's contrasting, you know, those good people that go to church, and then those bad people that drink bush light.

You're going to probably get tired of that example. He's not comparing honky-tonks and church choirs. Jesus is this. Come in, come in, come in, come in.

Listen, listen, listen. He's contrasting those who only love God with their hands, external things, and those who love God with their heart.

That's the contrast. It's not good people, bad people, church people, non-church people. It's those who are relying on their external deeds versus those who love God with their heart.

And has this not been the entire point of Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount? Might I review it for you quickly? Blessed are the poor in spirit.

[18 : 24] Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are those whose posture is one of meekness. Blessed are those who hunger inwardly for righteousness. Blessed are those who are not content to say, I've never committed murder with my hands, but I want to root out anger in my heart.

It's those that would say, I'm not just concerned with public righteousness, that is what others think, to look good, but I'm concerned about a personal righteousness, one that is done in secret because it's done out of love for God.

Those that aren't worried about life because internally they have come to trust God as their father and treasure him. People that don't judge, and do you know why they don't judge?

Because they're aware of their own struggle much more than they are someone else's. Can I get an amen? The whole point that Jesus has been in example after example, teaching after teaching, is he's going after your heart.

Jesus is acknowledging here that the road he's calling you down, the road that looks to the heart, works on the heart, cultivates the heart, is the really, really hard road.

[19 : 42] This is really hard work, faith family, to work on this in our lives. And that's why, are you listening? It's the road most people won't take.

It's the road most people won't take. Because it's hard work. And yet, according to Jesus, it's the only road that ends in life. Now, think about this for just a moment.

Is it not true that the hard road is the heart road? That is, to deal with the heart, to work on the heart, is far more difficult than just external things.

So let me ask you this, okay? Here's a little quiz. Which is harder? Demanding your rights from others, or being meek towards other people, which one's harder?

Meek's harder, absolutely. Which is harder, getting an eye in return for the eye they took from you, or turning your other cheek?

[20 : 47] Which is harder, faith family, sulking in your suffering, or shining like the light of the world when you suffer? Oh, sulking is far easier.

Trust me, I do it all the time, and you do too, right? Which is harder, pointing out the problem in somebody else's life, or being honest about your own? I know which one of those is harder.

We love to point out everybody else's problems. Which is harder, loving a friend, or loving an enemy? Some of you might say, it depends on which friend, right? But the point being, it's harder to love our enemy.

So what I'm saying, faith family, is if you really take seriously what Jesus has been teaching throughout the Sermon on the Mount, you're going to see this. The heart road's the hard road.

Jesus is calling us down a very difficult path. In fact, it's why Jesus tells us last week, this was the sermon last week, that the only way you're even going to be able to travel this road of greater righteousness is through persistent prayer.

[21 : 53] The only way this has a chance of actually happening in your life is if you ask and keep on asking, and seek and keep on seeking, and knock and keep on knocking, and God will give you what you need.

Amen? Amen. So, the hard road is the heart road. I hope that I've faithfully shown you that. Here's the next question.

Then what's the easy road? Okay, if the narrow road is the road that deals with the heart, cultivates a heart for God, what's the easy road?

Look at verses 15 through 23, and these are the three different examples that Jesus gives. First, beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, and inwardly, they're ravenous wolves.

You'll recognize them by their fruit, so here's a second metaphor. Grapes are gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles. So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but a diseased tree bears bad fruit.

[22 : 51] Healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, you will recognize them by their fruits. Third example, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of the Father who is in heaven.

On that day, many will say to me, Lord, look at what we did. We prophesied in your name. We cast demons out in your name. We did many mighty works in your name. And then I will declare to them, but I never knew you.

Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. What does all that mean? What are these three different metaphors that Jesus is bringing up here at the conclusion?

Wolves in sheep's clothing, trees with bad fruit, rejecting people who have done great and miraculous things. I don't get it. What's the point? Here it is. Everybody right here.

This is huge. Please, please listen to me tonight. If the hard road is the heart road, then the easy road is the external road.

[23 : 58] The easy path, the easy road is the external road. Think of the illustrations again. You have a wolf that is dressed like a sheep.

Most people are quick to say that this is referring to like false teaching and that's fine. But what makes false teaching problematic in the first place? It has the external appearance of truth, but the inward core is what?

A lie. It's an anti-gospel teaching wrapped in something that looks like good news. Do you see? In other words, the external looks good, looks right, but inside it's off.

Second example, a tree and its fruit. Again, the emphasis here is on what you see and the external reality of the fruit.

Verse 21 through 23, Jesus speaks of those who did external things. I mean, how many of you would be like, look at this, how awesome this is if you came in here tonight and you said, guess what?

[25 : 07] I have the ability to prophesy in God's name and I have done great works for God, including casting out a demon. How many of you would want to share testimony tonight?

Pastor, I cast a demon out of my daughter, right? I just want to share that with everybody. You'd be like, look what I did for God. In other words, you have people that are boasting about all the external things they've done and yet what does God say?

But I don't know you. I don't have your heart. You've conformed really well.

You know how to go to church every week and you know how to dress for church and you know the right words to say at church and you know the right actions to do and you know all the disciplines to have.

Look at all you've done. But that's an easy road. Anybody can just conform to external things and God not still have their heart.

[26 : 20] Where you're cultivating a greater righteousness and the power of the Spirit of God.

You're doing the hard work of heart work not just showing up and writing a check. Do you see what Jesus is saying here?

This is so insightful and if you don't think this is the right interpretation, I would invite you to consider two things. First, the concern Jesus had back in Matthew 6. Namely, this has already been a concern of Jesus when He says you give and you pray and you fast to look good.

To put on an external show. But you never in private pray. You never in secret give. Whenever you fast, you make everybody know how much suffering you're going through.

Why? It's because you don't have a heart for God. It's all a show. It's all external. You're taking good fruit and duct taping it on your life to try to make everybody think, man, that's a righteous person.

[27 : 33] Jesus is saying, that way of living is easy and deadly. That's the easy road and so many people go down it.

The second reason why I would ask you to consider this as the right interpretation is because how true is this practically? Again, which is harder? Not committing murder or not having anger in your heart?

Talk to me, faith family. Which is easier? To say, I've never murdered anybody or I've never been angry at anybody. Who votes anger is the harder, not murdering is the easier.

In other words, the point is it's easy to say, oh look, I haven't murdered but it's hard to say, I'm no longer angry at them. It's easier to say or to not do the thing with your hands, it's harder to say, I forgive them in my heart.

I mean, just as a practical example, I mean, how many of you, it's easy to not send the email. Come on, you know I'm talking about you. You want to click so bad?

[28 : 50] You want to shoot that dagger off to them? You want to fire back at them? It's easier to not send it than it is to walk away and over the next few days do the heart work of truly loving them.

This is what Jesus is saying. Notice this on the screen. It's far more easy to settle for an external religious conformity than to cultivate a heart for God.

And there are so, I'm really glad you're here tonight because this is one of the things Faith Family is based on. We are not here to do religious activity. We are here to have God grip our hearts and change our hearts and transform our hearts into the image of Christ.

If you want religion, go elsewhere. Actually, if you want religion, repent and come to Jesus and stay here. All right? Where we want to give you Jesus.

Jesus. Jesus. Secondly, notice it on the screen. The easy road, this is what I'm summarizing. The easy road is conforming to religion. The hard road is cultivating a relationship.

[30 : 03] It's just, and you know the backdrop here with the Pharisees, right? You can smell this in Jesus' teaching. The Pharisees are going to lead you down a path that is far easier.

Just give this and just pray that and just whatever. Okay? It doesn't mean it's not difficult at all. It just means, hey, I can at least do that. Jesus is calling you to something far more difficult.

He's going to unpack your heart. And in the process, change you and transform you along the way. And painful it will be.

I thought about how many of you growing up watched, some of you were like, I wasn't growing up, I was 45. Remember Wile E. Coyote? Do you remember Wile E. Coyote?

Wasn't Wile E. Coyote the best? Always trying to catch the road runner. Do you remember how you would always like paint things to look like a mirage, you know? Like you come to the end of the cliff, but it looks like it just keeps going on and on and on.

[31 : 01] Because what he's trying to do is trick the road runner into seeing something external that looks right, looks good, and so he runs after it and ends up in his death.

Of course, that never happens, so the metaphor breaks down just a little bit, all right? Never mind. The idea here is that this is what religion does. This is what the Pharisees do, is they give you this kind of external thing, right?

Just go to church every week and be on this Bible plan and give this percentage and like, okay, all right, so if I can just externally conform to those things, then I get to go to heaven.

But that's not how it works. The heavenly road is a heart road where you give your heart to God and you love Him.

And when you fall short, as you will, He works on your heart. And when you judge, He works on your heart to not judge lest you be judged. And when you act back at others, He works on your heart to be more meek towards others.

[32 : 11] And as you ask and seek and knock, He works on your heart to do what you in your own strength can't do. That's the kingdom of God.

This is biblical Christianity. Let me give you Paul's example of this and then we'll wrap it up. 1 Corinthians 13, verse 1. The Apostle Paul says this.

It's the same point. If I could speak in the tongues of men and of angels, he's being hyperbolic here. This is hyperbole.

If I had the tongues of men and of angels, wouldn't you be impressed? I'm a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

If I had prophetic powers, if I could come up here and do unbelievable external things like cast demons out of people, you would be so impressed.

[33 : 13] If I could understand all mysteries and all knowledge, if I had all faith so that I could move mountains and you would be really impressed with all of my abilities, but have not love, I'm nothing.

If I gave everything I had away, if I delivered up my body to be burned, all external, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is, and think about the beatitudes, love is patient and kind.

It doesn't envy or boast. It's not arrogant or rude. It doesn't insist on its own way. Why? Because it's meek. It's not irritable or resentful.

It doesn't rejoice at wrongdoing. It rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

You know that passage, Faith Family. What is Paul saying? If you had all the impressive external things that you didn't have love, none of it matters.

[34 : 25] The hard road is the heart road. The easy road is the external road.

And religion will pull you down the easy road straight to death. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

So Faith Family, in a very real way, you could say there are three roads before you. Really just two, but we'll call it three. The first is the wide path, number one.

Those are people with no faith. the people who drink bush light. Amen.

These are people with no faith at all. These are people that they are outwardly wicked. They have no faith in God. There is no desire for anything related to God.

[35 : 28] They are on a wide path that leads to destruction. That is true. But that is not the wide path Jesus is talking about. Jesus is talking about the wide path, number two, what you might call religious faith.

It has all the external appearances of Christianity. It has learned to conform and play the game. It knows what words to say, how to pray impressively, how to give generously, how to fast amazingly, but it has no heart.

And that road will send a whole lot of people to destruction. the third path, the narrow path, is the path of true faith where you have a heart for God.

Where you have a heart for God. And I skipped this and let's look at it real quick and we'll close because I think this is important to Faith Family. I wrote this, I said, here at Faith Family we're more concerned with people who want to look righteous but their heart is off than those who struggle but are trying to love God with all their heart.

If you're just here to look righteous, we're really concerned for you. But if you're here and you're like, Pastor, I keep screwing up.

[37 : 05] Man, on this narrow path I'm falling on my face all the time. But I love God with all my heart.

and I'm asking and I'm seeking and I'm knocking, God, would you help me do what it's clear I don't have the power to do. Pastor, I'm really struggling but I genuinely love God.

You are welcome here. You are welcome in this place because that, though it's a hard road, is the only road of which we should be on.

And God's people said, Amen. Faith family, Mark Jenkins is not the first person to ever take the hard road. There is one who took a much more difficult road than that of biking across Siberia.

He is the one who carried a cross all the way to Calvary. And on that road, on the Calvary road, it would have been so easy to fight back.

[38 : 13] it would have been so easy to come down off the cross. It would have been so much easier to not face the Father's wrath.

But it was Jesus' joy to take the hard road. And because Jesus took the hard road, your road can end not in destruction, but in everlasting life.

How? Go the way. What's the way? Jesus said, I am the way.

And no one comes to the Father, but through me. And all God's people said, Amen. Let's pray together. Let's pray. God, thank you for teaching us tonight.

I, again, trust that this has been taught faithfully to what Jesus intended here. Not a good people versus bad people, but a religious people versus those who truly have a heart for you.

[39 : 26] We're not just about the external. Look at me as I raise my hands, and look at me as I pray this prayer. We're walking a road that loves you, God, and we're tripping and falling and asking and seeking and knocking for your help on this road because it's hard.

It's really hard because the more aware I am of my sin, of my being prone to wonder, the harder it is for, God, your surgery on my heart to get it where it needs to be.

But that's the life road. that's the good road. That's the good path. The path of cultivating a relationship with you, not following some religion about you.

And I would just pray this as I close this prayer, God. There are some people here tonight, I don't know who they are, but you do by your spirit. I just pray, God, that you would ask them by your spirit, is this just a Christian game that ends in I never knew you?

I know you did this, and I know you went there, and I know you gave that, but I never knew you. If that is anybody in this place, tonight is the night for them to say, Lord, by faith, I give you my heart.

[40 : 53] I give you my heart. that may be one of the hardest things they've ever done, but it's the only way they'll find life.

In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Amen.