

A Bundle of Contrasts

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn together now to Matthew and chapter 7. Tonight we're going to look at the passage beginning at verse 13, right through to the end of the chapter, these four sections that you find there, four or five sections in Matthew's Gospel.

Or down to verse 27 at least, you have four passages that we want to look at. And we could say that this really is the epilogue to Christ's Sermon on the Mount, beginning at the beginning there of chapter 5, where we read that he went up to the Mount and he opened his mouth and taught his disciples saying.

And in other words, the rest of that discourse as it takes up these three chapters is really an account of what Jesus proclaimed and taught on that occasion. And of course it's very rightly become such a famous section of Scripture and such a famous feature in relation to the life of Jesus Christ as well.

When you come to this part of chapter 7, it's really the way that Jesus comes to finish off or round off that sermon by this kind of epilogue, if you like, where he brings out these contrasts using various types of imagery there from the natural world, such as the trees and the building and so on.

He uses that, as he often did, to illustrate his teaching and to illustrate things that are so important for us in spiritual terms as well. There are four categories in verses 13 to 27, and each of these four categories is made up of two contrasting types.

[1 : 5 1] So you find two types of gate, two types of tree, two types of confession, and then finishing off with two types of builder.

Not just of buildings, but of builder. The emphasis is on the builder rather than the building. And in these two types, for each of those, we find the Lord deliberately showing a contrast so as to show up the big difference between the one and the other in each of those types.

And the important thing, or one of the important things to note, of course, is as we're going through it, as you read through it, as he's using all of these images from life around, it's important to realize always that he's talking about people.

When he talks there about one tree bearing good fruit, another tree bearing bad fruit, he's talking about people. And it's people that he has in mind in terms of their different reaction to his word, especially, all the way through these passages.

Let's look briefly at them then together. Firstly, two types of gate, verses 13 and 14. Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

[3 : 1 4] For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, or difficult, that leads to life, and those who find it are few. The wide gate is the one that we all prefer naturally.

The wide gate is the one that we think of as sinners, that really is our preferred choice. Because we don't like to think, as we are in our own natural state, we don't like to think of God restricting us beyond what we think is itself appropriate or preferable for us.

And indeed, you go right back to the beginning of the Bible and to the beginning of creation, certainly of human life, and you find that this, essentially, is the first temptation.

The first temptation that came to human beings before they sinned, through the serpent, that which the serpent laid before Eve and then brought to Adam, was precisely that.

Has God indeed said, you may not eat of all the trees of the garden? In other words, what the devil was really saying to Adam and to Eve, beginning with Eve, what he was really saying to them is, you know, God is being far too restrictive on you.

[4 : 33] Why didn't he give you permission to access all the trees of the garden? Why did he leave one out of the total that you were not allowed and that he commanded you not to actually go to and eat of its fruit?

God was being too restrictive, is what the devil was saying. In other words, he had made the gate too narrow. It would have been better if the gate had been somewhat wider.

And that's really, essentially, what much of the opposition to the gospel today amounts to. Not talking about so much opposition from the likes of other faiths or types of belief, but opposition to the gospel, sometimes from within the church itself or certainly from those who have no kind of religion at all and just live as they think themselves, anyway, with a secularist, humanist mind, no time for any religion.

And what they inevitably say, especially about the Christian religion, which really draws most of their venom, is that it is so restrictive that it is just destructive of human development mentally or psychologically or spiritually.

And, of course, you'll find that that is something that's constantly put before God's believing people as a temptation. And I'm not suggesting by any means that this will be from this pulpit declared by you in days to come, as I hope it hasn't been since I've been with you.

[6 : 06] But you will come across it and you have come across it and you do come across it in many other pronouncements and anything, things that you maybe read, things that you actually hear, other kind of, other versions, if you like, of what the gospel's teaching is.

Because that's what liberal theology does, especially the kind of theology that really doesn't see the Bible as inspired by God or to be taken just at face value.

What that is really doing is exactly the same thing. It's saying, make the gate wider. Why make it so narrow? Why not actually broaden it out in today's world?

Maybe it was alright for the days of the apostles and the days when Jesus lived. That's the culture of the time that dictated that. But we're a different culture.

We're a different cultural setting. Always watch that the culture around you does not set the tone of your life. That the culture around you is not that which dictates to you as to how to live your life and how broad and how narrow the gate into life should be.

[7 : 17] God has done that. And God maintains that specification and these dimensions right down through time and on to the end of the world.

This gate is not going to get any wider unless you believe that God changes his mind. That's essentially what it's about. And you can see that even from the likes of Peter himself.

When he, in chapter 16, as you remember, a famous point in the ministry of Jesus where he came to be confessed by Peter as the Christ, the son of the living God.

And then from there, he began to talk about his going to be the one who suffered and would die and be suffered by the chief priests, the elders, and be killed on the third day and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him saying, Be it far from you, Lord.

This shall not happen to you. There is Peter, one of the disciples, actually coming to the Lord and it says quite clearly that he began to rebuke Christ.

[8 : 32] It's as if he was saying to Christ, Lord, you're making this far too narrow for yourself. This is not going to happen to you. Jesus turned to him and said, You get behind me, Satan.

Just imagine that. There's a disciple who would later become one of the chief apostles, one of the most influential people ever as a leader of the church.

And yet at that specific point, he's acting unwittingly or unwillingly and unknowingly as an agent of Satan. And that's why Jesus says to him, Get behind me, Satan.

You are a hindrance to me for you are not set in your mind on the things of God but on the things of men. And that really is how we ourselves must be very conscious of maintaining God's specifications as to what does and does not constitute the way into life.

Because you notice what he's saying here about the narrow gate. And he says the opposite about the wide gate. For he says, The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few.

[9 : 48] And the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter by it are many. We need to put that to ourselves very often, friends.

I need to put it myself very often. As a minister of the gospel you need to put it to yourself as a Christian because what we're saying is this temptation to widen the gate to broaden the horizons to let more into your definition of what constitutes the life of a Christian that's the temptation.

That's constantly something that you face up to and must resist and must overcome. Because what he's saying always remains as it is. The gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction.

You don't have to do very much at all except just stay the way you are. But the way is narrow. The gate is narrow and the way is hard or difficult that leads to life.

And of course he's not saying that so that any of us would be put off coming to enter by the narrow gate and find ourselves in the path to life.

[11 : 08] What he's doing is really just differentiating between what you need to avoid and what you need to choose. What you need to actually go through and what you need to turn away from.

And that's really something that remains and will remain for us as long as we live as a principle and precept to put to ourselves. The way is narrow as the gate is narrow.

You see when you get into living the life of a Christian you don't come into a regime where you're under some sort of tyrannous control.

That's not the kind of thing that's meant by the way being narrow and the gate being narrow that you can just squeeze through and the way is narrow that then leads on from that.

It's not saying that to us at all in terms of it being such a harsh and hard way as if you were living your life as a slave of the Lord. Once you're through this gate and once you've committed your life to the Lord you don't want any other.

[12 : 13] You're glad you've not gone through the wide gate. You're glad that the Lord has made you see sense that this is the way in which life is set out for us.

After all when we come to think about success in ordinary terms you don't find a successful businessman or businesswoman that hasn't really applied themselves properly and energetically to their business.

Their business is not going to really be worth much and it's not going to be very successful if they just go about things loosely as we'll see when we come to think about the difference between the two builders.

And if we're prepared as we must to apply ourselves and look at all the different specifications for a successful life whether it's in business or in whatever career we've chosen it takes application.

You have to keep to certain specifications. You can't just broaden it out and expect that things will go with you come what may. And how much more is that with the Christian life?

[13 : 23] So this is the first thing and if you like as we as I think about my final occasions with you you might say that this is really something that I'm putting before you as someone who's been trying to preach the gospel to you as something that you should bear in mind and will I'm sure bear in mind in the days to come.

Think about the difference between the wide gate and the narrow gate. Avoid the wide one. It's far more attractive to us naturally but it leads to the easy way and that leads to destruction.

And do what he says here. Enter by the narrow gate. Live by God's terms. Don't be tempted to change them. Don't try to add to them, to widen them out.

Look at his wisdom. as he has specified this for us. So the two types of gate. Secondly, there are two types of trees.

Now he begins that in verse 15. That takes us down to verse 20. Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

[14 : 41] You will recognize them by their fruits, grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles, and so on. And he brings out this difference, this absolute difference, this big difference between the healthy tree that bears good fruit and the diseased tree, as it's put there, that doesn't bear good fruit, that cannot bear good fruit, but bad fruit.

Now it's important to realize that he's actually saying to his disciples, be careful, be careful what teachings you accept, be careful that you don't actually embrace false prophets.

Prophets in that context would be people with a message which purported to be from God, which they said would be from God, and actually all the way through the epistles of the New Testament, following on from the ministry of Jesus, as he instructed his disciples, and as through the Holy Spirit they were actually directed in what they would say to these churches that Paul and Peter and John wrote to.

Again and again you will come across this, and it shows you how important it was to these apostles as the founders under Christ of the New Testament church, beware of false prophets.

Don't think that everything that is presented to you as God's truth is God's truth. That's why you and I really need to know our Bibles well.

[16 : 15] really need to digest the doctrines of the gospel, really need to know especially the core essential things of the gospel, like how do we come to be right with God, what's required of us to be right with God, and that Jesus himself is the one in whom God's salvation is deposited, that nothing else is required from us to contribute to our salvation, it's all in Christ already, we need to receive it, we need to believe in him, to trust in him, and receive him to ourselves, and therefore receive that righteousness, things like that.

Because in very subtle ways, you'll find that the most basic foundational things of the gospel will be twisted, and will be diverted to other emphases, other things added to them, or just taken away, and what he's telling the disciples there is beware of false prophets, you see he's saying to them, they come to you in sheep's clothing, they appear genuine, they'll be very convincing in what they have to say, they'll be able to demonstrate things, and it follows on into the next passage, they'll be able to demonstrate things that seem to say, well these people must be from God, but the Lord is saying, inwardly, they are ravenous wolves, how do you know them?

Well he says you know them by their fruits, by their lives, now many false prophets, many false teachers will in fact have a very decent way of life, but you'll be able to tell them by what they make of the essential doctrines of the gospel for one thing, and you'll be able to tell them if for example they primarily look for your money, and say well we need your money to support the gospel, that's not the primary emphasis of preaching the gospel at all, that's not what Paul said when as we read this morning to the Thessalonians, he was actually saying to them, we're not in this for gain financially, or in terms of prestige, or anything like that, we're not in this to actually be able to buy for ourselves luxurious mansions, even if you might think the Knock Free Church mans is not far short of that, and it feels a bit like that to live in it, and that's due to your care of us, but it's very different to the kind of things that you find the tele-evangelists when they have their own private jets, and their own large houses all over the place, million pound, million dollar houses, and billions of dollars coming into their coffers, and making that a primary emphasis in their ministry, beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, and inwardly they are ravenous wolves, you will recognize them by their fruits, because he says every healthy tree bears good fruit, and every bad tree or diseased tree cannot bear good fruit, you see what he's saying, this diseased tree, you see these false prophets, this adjustment or aberration of the gospel and its teaching, or of the

Christian life and what it consists of, this in fact is not just superficial, you don't just, it's not talking about a tree that's just got some things growing on it, on the outer side of it, on the bark, some sort of parasitic growth which doesn't really make any difference to the tree itself, he's talking about something as rotten at the core, something that's really deficient from the very heart of it, a diseased tree, a tree that has rottenness right through from its very roots, through its trunk and onto its branches, that's what false teaching is like, that's what a spurious gospel is like, that's what widening the gate is like, that's a rotten thing, it's a dangerous thing, it damages people's souls, and when people's souls are damaged, they're damaged unless God intervenes, they're damaged eternally, these are issues that bear upon the eternity of course of each one of us, and there's no overlap you see, between the diseased tree and the healthy tree, what it's really saying is that the diseased tree cannot bear good fruit, nor the healthy tree, it cannot bear bad fruit, it's impossible for a good healthy tree to bear bad fruit, if it's bearing bad fruit, it's not a healthy tree, it's impossible for a diseased tree, a bad tree to bear good fruit, it just doesn't happen, and you've come across it yourselves with plants or with bushes, fruit bushes, trees, whatever, that you expect to bear fruit, and then something happens, and they don't bear good fruit, and the fruit goes rotten, it's a disease, it's come to enter into the very growth of that tree, and this is spiritually what the Lord is saying, and indeed you could say that all of this corresponds as we say to human life anyway, and what he's dealing with is a contrast that's really absolute, there is no overlap between them, it's either one or the other, and it's the same in the sense of what he says, what Jesus said to Nicodemus in that famous interview or discourse, where Nicodemus was coming to him quite confident that while, yes, he had things that he wanted

Jesus to say about himself, but nowhere do you find to begin with that Nicodemus shows any hesitation or lack of confidence as to whether or not he is in the kingdom of God, but that's what Jesus addresses, Nicodemus has his own starting point, no man can do these miracles that you are doing unless God be with him, Jesus is just as if he hasn't even heard that, truly, truly, I say to you, except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God, that's the narrow gate, that's the condition that God himself is laying down, that's the specification that God himself has measured, except a man be born again, except a man be born, he says later, of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God, and then he follows by saying, that which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which is born of the spirit is spirit, there's no overlap, tonight you and I are either flesh or we are spirit, we are either living or else we're dead, we're either diseased or else we're healthy spiritually, we're dead, we're not in

[23 : 38] Christ, we're unregenerate, we've not come to accept salvation in him, don't expect your life to bear good fruit, the kind of fruit that God approves of, but if you're in Christ, whatever anybody thinks of you, whatever versions of the gospel you need to overcome, one thing remains true, as a healthy tree, as a healthy person spiritually, it's impossible you bear bad fruit, all of us of course have failures, you can't not see the limitations of the illustration, but he is making this distinction, and you notice what he's saying about the diseased tree, every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire, and the Lord said that in John chapter 15 as well when he used the illustration of the vine and the branches of the vine and the bearing of clusters of grapes, all the branches that fail to bear fruit are taken away, they're cut off, and he says people gather them into a bundle and they burn them, and friends, you and I cannot but take God seriously, if God says that the destiny of the lost is hell, then that's what it is, there's no way around that, that remains a truth, but there is a way of avoiding it, as you well know, by coming to Christ, by having

Christ as your Savior, by giving your life to Him, by receiving Him as He's offering Himself in the gospel, go through the narrow gate, and in going through the narrow gate, beware of the wide gate, beware of all offers that contradict the terms of Christ Himself, and beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, let me say again, I'm not suggesting for a single moment that you're going to have anything like that from this pulpit in days to come, but there are other sources, and other sources will have access to your life, access to your life as an individual, as a Christian, and as someone who wants to be right with God.

Thirdly, he makes a distinction between two types of confession. There's the words-only version, and there's the doing God's will version, as he says in verses 21 to 23.

And I think this follows on actually from what he said about the false prophets that he's asking them to beware of. It follows naturally into this part of it, this passage, 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.

[26 : 57] Of course, he doesn't mean by that he didn't know about them. That's another instance of the word know or knew being used for a communion, for having a fellowship and a proper relationship, a personal relationship is what he means.

Depart from me, I never had this relationship with you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. Now you see something very solemn there.

There are people, and if we say that they are the false prophets that are following in, but he's not saying exactly that that's what he's saying, what he's just saying is anyone who says, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven.

On that day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and so on. And that's really telling, and that's really solemn, and that's something you and I have to take note of, that Jesus himself at this stage says, this is how it will be at the end of things when he comes.

Many will say to me, Lord, Lord, we did this in your name, and yet I will say to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

[28 : 16] You see, they're saying, these works that we have done in your name, we've prophesied in your name, we taught in your name, we even cast out demons in your name, Lord, surely we belong to your kingdom, Lord, Lord.

But he says, no, you're workers of lawlessness. You depended on your own abilities, on your own ingenuities. You depended on these great works that you were able to do.

preaching and casting out demons. You relied on these as an entrance to the kingdom, but I'm saying to you, you've been workers of lawlessness.

In other words, our confession has to be more than just a words-only version, not even if it's a words-only words accompanied with certain works version. Our confession has to be the one where this lies at the heart of it, the one who does the will of my father, who is in heaven.

That's the person who is accepted by him and will be approved of by him. What is it to do, the will of Christ's father, the will of our father in heaven?

[29 : 35] Well, it's very simply a matter of obedience. obedience. Obedience to his will as expressed in the scriptures. Obedience to his word as his word sets before you all the things that define what a Christian life is about, what a saved person is or is not, what it is to actually be a true disciple of Christ.

It's the one who does the will of my father who is in heaven. Nothing is tonight more important to us than that. You see, that's what Jesus is saying. You can have all this other stuff, but without this, you and I are still lost and will be condemned by Jesus at the end of the day.

So, friends, let's see to it that this is what we continue to put before ourselves also. That we continue to think about these two gates, the wide and the narrow one.

Choose the narrow one that leads to life. That we beware of the false prophets, the false teachings, the deviations from the gospel that will damage our own souls.

That we will be healthy trees for the Lord, planted by his grace that bear fruit to his glory. That our confession will be not one that relies on our own ability, even if that ability be great and even if it could extend to the casting out demons.

[31 : 09] We assume from the Bible that Judas Iscariot was able to do miracles like the other disciples. Jesus sent him out with the rest and he gave them this power to work these types of miracles like casting out demons.

But you know what Judas Iscariot was like. He's the man who ultimately betrayed Jesus and sold him for 30 pieces of silver.

He was indeed the man of lostness or perdition, who despite all his outward abilities, nevertheless he was known by his fruits, which is why the Bible tells us he always had the money back.

He always took control of the finances. He always showed what his priorities were and they weren't those of doing the will of God. not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but doing the will of God, doing the will of my Father who is in heaven.

And finally, fourthly, he has two types of builder. Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

[32 : 37] The rain fell and the floods came and so on. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. Now, we're all aware of the term cowboy builders, aren't we?

Even if we've never had any personal experience of them, nevertheless, you've seen I'm sure programs on your television about what are generally called cowboy builders. People who just set themselves up as builders, have no expertise or skill or training or anything, and just dupe people into giving away their money and then they come and throw things together, and of course, in a very short time, either it falls to bits or it's leaking or whatever, and it has to be mostly destroyed and rebuilt by somebody who knows what they're doing.

And Jesus is saying here, everyone who actually does not hear, who hears my words but does not do them. That's following on from doing the will of the Father.

All of these passages really flow the one into the next one. And as he finishes here, he's saying, well, this is what the person is like who hears my words but does not do them, does not put them into practice.

It's still like a cowboy builder. Here's this man described as somebody who came along and foolishly built his house on the sand. He didn't take account of the stresses that that house needed to actually endure and put up with and resist.

[34 : 00] And it wasn't built on rock, it was built on sand. It was inevitable that sooner rather than later, really at the first test, that house would just come crashing down. Whereas the other one is the proper tradesman, if you like, or somebody who uses proper tradesman to build something permanent and secure.

He built his house on a rock and the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house but it did not fall. Because it had been founded on the rock.

That's the person who hears my words, Jesus said, and does them. I will liken him to this man. And you see what he's saying about the one that fell.

It fell and great was the fall of it. It was a write-off. You couldn't do anything to repair it.

You just had to get the stuff away and start again. And that reminds us too of what a total ruin human life will be without salvation in Christ.

[35 : 14] It's a write-off. God himself is not going to repair it.

If we die without Christ that's it. it's a write-off. It's a wreck. It's an eternal ruin. Build on the rock.

Build your life on Christ himself. Don't be afraid of the consequences of that. Of the way in which that will attract certain viewpoints from the world, from your pals, from whoever you're familiar with.

Build upon the rock come what may. Because unless your life is founded on that rock, when that wind comes to blow on the judgment of God, and the rains come in the deluge of that wrath of God, as 1 Thessalonians reminds us is coming, you'll have a total ruin on your hands.

But if you build on the rock, it's going to be secured forever. Jesus is nothing less than that to us, our eternal security.

[36 : 35] You know, when you come to look at a building, and you see that building as just thrown together in a shoddy piece of work, when you find a proper tradesman coming along looking at that, the first thing he'll say to you is not about the building itself, what he'll say is, who on earth built that?

What kind of person really put that up? You see, it's the builder. It's the builder that's mentioned by Jesus.

And the building work shows the character of the builder, whether it's a good house or one that's just a rake. It's the character of the builder that's shown up by it.

and when you have your house well built, it's happened with ourselves in the man's.

People have come along and done the necessary repairs and especially when we had the major renovations done quite a number of years ago now. But the number of tradesmen that came into the house to do their work and commented on, well, the people that built this house knew what they were doing.

[37 : 53] See, it's not the house itself, though they admire the workmanship and everything else. It comes back at the end of the day to the builder. And that's what your human life is like, friends.

Because God is one day going to test how you and I have built our lives. Whether we've built them on the rock that is Jesus, or whether we've not built them on sand.

the building shows what the builder has been like. Two types of gate. Two types of three. Two types of confession. Two types of builder. Jesus, finishing his sermon with that emphasis.

Go through the narrow gate. Walk the narrow way. be the healthy tree. Avoid the confession that has just words and deeds on which you trust.

[38 : 56] Do the will of God. Build well for eternity. Let's pray. Lord, again we give thanks for the words that you give us, the direction that your own word has given to us even this night.

We thank you that all of these things point us to eternity, to your own person as the Lord of your church and of our lives. We pray, Lord, that you would help us to build our lives aright by faith and trust in you so that when we come to the end of our course, we will not come to be characterized by ruin, but rather by permanent security forever.

We ask that you would receive us now, hear our prayers, and accept us for Jesus' sake. Amen. God for us.

See you