

# Matthew 7:13-20

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning, friends. My name is Dave. I'm one of Shoreline's pastors.

Now, if you asked me what my favorite Bible verse is, my favorite passage in Scripture, it is typically whatever I'm preaching right now because I get to spend more time with it, lots of time with it throughout the week.

And so my heart is full of joy in the Sermon on the Mount, and I am grieving today. Because verses 13 and 14 are essentially the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount.

And then Jesus gives us a few closing examples and illustrations. And so I am grieving today. I really don't want to stop preaching this because I love it so much.

I want to go right back to chapter 5 and begin proclaiming it all over again. But this week and next, we will conclude our series in the Sermon on the Mount.

[ 1 : 33 ] And then in the month of August, we are going to pause our series in the book of Matthew. And we are going to spend a little bit of time asking the question, what does God say and how do we walk through a life of suffering and grief as Christians?

I'm very excited for that. It's a weird thing to be excited about grief. But I'm excited to look at what God has to say, that he has not pretended that we have this life of roses.

We live in a very broken world. And he has intervened in a mighty way in the lives of his people.

Last week, we heard Jesus gather together all of the threads in the Sermon on the Mount that direct us towards one another, how we are to treat one another.

And he said that they could be summarized in the golden rule to do to others what we desire that they would do for us. And he showed us how that can only come from a new relationship with God, specifically having God as our Father.

And those are the two main points of the whole Sermon on the Mount, aren't they? A new kind of relationship with God where the Father becomes our Father through the ministry of his Son.

[ 3 : 02 ] And as children of the Most High God, he empowers us by his Spirit to love others with his selfsame love. Now, that is not the kind of message that we can hear and then say, what a nice speech.

It's not the kind of message you can hear and simply say, oh, I'm very inspired now. That's the kind of message that demands a response, requires it.

And in truth, everyone who hears Jesus' words does respond, one way or the other. And that is exactly how he concludes the Sermon on the Mount, 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. For the gate is narrow, and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

No matter what, each of us will respond to this Sermon on the Mount. We might reject it, ignore it, or by God's grace, we might hear and follow him in humble faith.

[ 4 : 30 ] Let's pray. O Lord, our God, who is worthy to open your word and hear from you?

Certainly not me. But Lord, in your great grace, you have made us worthy in your Son. In your great love, you have spoken.

So Lord, will you help us here today? Will you speak a message better than my words to our hearts?

We pray that. We ask that. We depend on that. In Jesus' name. Amen. There is no middle ground with God.

You can respond to this message of his in only a couple ways. We can respond positively in repentance in faith, or we can respond negatively by ignoring him or dismissing him or contradicting him.

[ 5 : 42 ] But we all respond. We are not neutral. There is no neutral. To ignore Jesus or to put him off to the side is to deny him, is to respond.

And what he is saying here is that every human being who has ever lived is on one of two paths. One path is wide and easy and leads to destruction. The other is narrow and hard and it leads to life. Now, when Jesus says that the way is narrow, the road is hard, we might get the impression that we have to accomplish a lot for Jesus over a long course in order to present ourselves worthy to enter the gate that leads to life.

In fact, that's actually one of the mindsets of the broad way. The narrow gate is narrow because while every other path in the world, every religion, philosophy, every person's own way leads to the wide gate, there is exactly one way to enter the gate that leads to life with Christ.

It's narrow because there is only one direction we can point. And the way is hard because while the broad gate allows us to choose any path that suits our preferences, and that's easy, the path to the narrow gate looks like the opposite of easy.

[ 7 : 20 ] Not in terms of great striving and effort. It's hard because it looks like dying. Shortly after this, in Matthew 16, Jesus is going to say, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Becoming Christ's, entering the narrow gate that leads to life means that I am not my own and that is hard.

Not because we have to accomplish so many things for him to accept us. That's not the gospel. The gospel means I die to self and proclaim his lordship over my life.

That's hard. And for beginning to end, Jesus has been showing us these two paths in the Sermon on the Mount the whole way through. There's a way that leads to life and a way that leads to destruction.

When he says destruction, he means eternal, conscious damnation in hell. He began the Sermon on the Mount back in chapter 5 in the Beatitudes only expressing the positive side.

[ 8 : 46 ] He pronounced blessings on the humble, the pure in spirit, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. And some marched to the wide gate saying, I don't need that.

Some marched to the wide gate saying, I don't want that. Some marched to the wide gate saying, I'm going to ignore that. And some, with more pride than all of them together, say, I've got it.

And some who see the Beatitudes and the heart revealed there are crushed to the ground by the weight of the standard of true righteousness that he shows us.

And in humble repentance, cry out, Lord, I don't have that and I need it. have mercy on me, a sinner.

God looks on that person and with a fatherly smile says, welcome to the narrow gate, my child. Enter into life.

[ 10 : 10 ] every person alive, every one of us was born on the broad path and we choose it naturally.

It looks a little different for each of us. We all choose the path in keeping with our preferences and our life's pressures. others. And whether it looks like ignoring or rejecting or defying or pretending we could impress God, we are all born headed for a broad gate and eternal destruction.

And there would be no hope of entering the narrow gate if it were up to us and choosing and up to us to walk that path with our own feet.

In our first step on the broad road, we earn for ourselves that destruction. And there's no getting back on our own accord, on our own strength, on our own power.

But Jesus still offers life. He did not come only to teach. He did not come and preach the Sermon on the Mount and then go back to heaven.

[ 11 : 38 ] He is the one who made the narrow gate because He is the life. He never stepped one step on the broad road Himself. But on Good Friday, Jesus carried a cross, an instrument of death and destruction, up a hill where wicked sinners like us crucified Him.

And He bore the weight of destruction. The destruction owed us. And the story doesn't end there because He is the life.

He rose to life that first Easter Sunday. And for all who repent of their sins, believe in His victory, and cry out to Him for mercy, they have, in doing that, already walked the narrow path and have been received at the narrow gate by Jesus Christ Himself.

And He has taken their guilt and its penalty and extinguished it forever and made them His own and given them life everlasting.

So friends, if you've not done that, if that has not described your journey, may I invite you today to do that. To cry out to Christ for salvation and He will make you new.

[ 13 : 12 ] And for those who have this new life in Christ, He says, beware at the beginning of verse 15.

He wants us to beware of two things, false prophets and false confidence. The false prophets convince those on the broad path they're actually headed to life.

And they derail those who have already found eternal life. They can't take their life away, but they can get them spinning their wheels, making no progress, and get them very turned about in their life of faith.

And that's what we'll look at this week. And next week, Jesus is going to tell us to beware of false confidence, believing I've already entered the gate of life when I'm actually on the road of destruction.

Jesus says in verse 15, beware of false prophets that come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits, are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles.

[ 14 : 31 ] So every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 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.

Jesus is drawing together here two biblical themes that his Jewish audience would have recognized pretty quickly. The false prophets and the ravenous wolves.

Here's the picture we get from that. First, the false prophets. We live in a performance based society.

In theory, America is a meritocracy. Results are what matter. Your ability is what matters.

[ 15 : 39 ] Even if you drop out of college, those formal equivalent things, even if you drop out of college, if you invent Facebook, you get celebrated whether you have the certifications or not.

leaders. We evaluate leaders not on their family line and their titles, but by their output and their abilities, by the numbers they produce, the money they bring in, how many followers they have.

You want to know what God thinks about that. in Deuteronomy chapter 13, he talks about successful leaders. Deuteronomy 13, 1, if a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you, gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and we'll just pause there.

How is that for success? Imagine if I could tell you exactly what a stock's price would be next week. Or imagine if I could give you a sign or a wonder. How is that for success? Would that impress you? Would you follow me? What if I had a perfect track record?

[ 17 : 05 ] That's what he's talking about here. Should we follow that person? They have success, gifting, ability, a perfect record. We would say, yes, follow that person.

God's not so easily impressed because he continues. That leader, if he says, let us go after other gods which you have not known and let us serve them, you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams.

Even if someone has every measure of success and ability and gifting and attractiveness, everything that we look for in the leader, if they point us anywhere but to God, that's a false prophet and we must not listen to that.

no matter how gifted or successful or attractive, so you have nothing to worry about with me, it doesn't matter what a leader can accomplish, it matters what he proclaims, even if he can work miracles, if he teaches anything other than the pure word of Christ, saying, let us follow hard after the Lord, he is pointing to the broad gate that leads to destruction.

What does a ravenous wolf look like? this again has to do with leaders among God's people. We see the wolf motif arise in Ezekiel chapter 22.

[ 18 : 58 ] Ezekiel was prophesying during a time when God was disciplining his people by allowing them to be conquered and put into captivity and he explained why in Ezekiel chapter 22.

Ezekiel chapter 22 verse 23 reads, And the word of the Lord came to me, Son of man, say to her, that is Israel, you are a land that is not cleansed or rained upon in the day of indignation.

And that means that they're under God's discipline and here is why, verse 25, the conspiracy of her prophets in her midst is like a roaring lion, tearing the prey.

They have devoured human lives. They have taken treasure and precious things. They have made many widows in her midst. Verse 27, Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain.

God is calling his people's leaders roaring lions and wolves. Why?

[ 20 : 16 ] Why? they may, and in fact, many of the prophets attest to, speak the right things, say true things about God and his word, but they themselves are evil.

And they use their positions of authority and power to enrich themselves. that's the dishonest gain. And so Jesus is trying these two themes together here.

The false prophets, who even if they do great things, even miracles, if they tell us to do anything other than follow hard after Christ, they are pointing us to the wide gate that leads to destruction.

And he's also taking this picture of the wolves, that even if they have great prominence and prestige, and even if they have the right words to say, if a leader demonstrates by their fruit, that is, their behavior in their life, that they themselves are walking on the easy path, the road that leads to destruction, Jesus says, if you've walked the path to the narrow gate and entered into life, don't follow those kinds of leaders.

so I want to take our remaining time today to help you beware, as he says, of false prophets, to become a fruit inspector, as it were, to examine carefully what the prophets in our day say and how they live so you won't be deceived and led astray.

[ 22 : 05 ] this is part of all of our growth in Christian maturity and discernment. And actually the first false prophets I want to warn you against aren't the people who speak falsely about God.

It's the prophets who ignore God entirely and want you to do so as well. The first prophets I want to talk to you about don't claim to be prophets at all.

they're advertisers. But advertising is prophecy. Let me explain.

Some advertisers will say we're having a sale come on down. That's amateur hour in the world of advertising. The really good ones the really effective advertisers don't sell you a product they don't pitch savings schemes.

They're selling a world view. Think about an Apple ad you've seen. Not the fruit, the computer company. Apple shows you images of a completely decluttered world.

[ 23 : 28 ] There are a lot of families with young children here who really want that. people are people who are in the world. It's a completely decluttered world filled with music and artists and innovation and inspiration.

Who doesn't want that? Right? at the end of their ad that reality fades out into their clean and simple logo. What's being sold there?

Someone spent a lot of time figuring out what Apple's target audience aspires to and gave them a concentrated dose of it.

and then they embedded a promise. You too can have this world we've just set before your eyes if you buy this product.

If that's not prophecy I don't know what is. When you thumb through a magazine or turn on the television when you see the advertisements ask yourself what is on sale here?

[ 24 : 40 ] What version of the good life am I being shown? Is that good life on the easy broad path or the difficult and narrow path?

Can the product they're pitching me even deliver the world they're tempting me with? I would say to you that a phone or a laptop probably cannot deliver on the promise that Apple made you in that ad. I like to run a little test. I call it the buy my product test. Trademark pending. I like to look at an ad and as if I'm the company who's selling the product I say buy my product and it's a little game I play I try to fill in the blank I try to complete that thought by saying out loud the vision of reality they're tempting me with.

This test is good for both your heart and your wallet. With a magazine buy my watch and you too could sail this yacht right?

I can't even afford a ride on the yacht after the price I paid for your watch. Buy my beer and you too could party with beautiful people.

[ 26 : 18 ] In fact I'm more likely to get fat drinking your high calorie product. buy my car and you too could have the freedom of the open road.

The freedom of the open road saddled with a car loan. The most absurd of all must be fragrance ads which often feature people in various states of undress.

Buy my perfume or my cologne and you too could forget where your clothes are. Now it is humorous and I like playing this game I find fun in it but seriously this is world view exposition and examination.

They are pitching something to you and it is not Christ. Advertisers are false prophets. the best ones the ones who are the best at their game are promising us things they cannot deliver and they make us believe it because we want to and they will encourage us to store up treasures on earth. And closely related are entertainment products like movies and television. in a very similar way they present a world view.

[ 27 : 53 ] They make statements not overtly but through the characters and the drama about what's valuable about who we are about what the good life looks like about the way we should go about achieving our goals and dreams.

And by implication they show us these characters going after these things and then they imply that we should too.

They set an example for us. Now I'm not saying throw out your TV we live in the 21st century it's nearly impossible to avoid advertisements And television instead I'm saying submit all things to Christ and he says beware So when you watch a show ask it the same kinds of questions don't shut your mind off ask it the same kinds of questions that we would ask of an ad stories are built on conflict there's nothing to resolve you just have characters sitting in a room ask what is the nature of the conflict here characters always aspire to something what is it that they want where is their treasure what does this story tell me is the biggest problem of all is that the biggest problem of all what values are being showcased here do they affirm or do they rebel against

God's word is the idea of God anywhere in this story in a secular society like ours the majority of false prophets aren't trying to get you to sin they have their focus on earthly things and they want ours there too from advertising to politics to entertainment to personal finance they treat life as if God doesn't exist at all and if we enter that conversation without first heeding Jesus' command to be where will have walked right into their worldview and given them the power there are false prophets out there Jesus says there will be false prophets in here as well the apostle Paul in Acts chapter 20 was visiting with the church in Ephesus and as he departed he addressed the elders the pastors of that church and in Acts chapter 20 verses 29 and 30 he tells them something scary he says I know that after my departure fierce wolves remember that language fierce wolves will come in among you not sparing the flock and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them that is scary there are all kinds of ways we can go wrong and ways we can go false and I think it's important for us to distinguish between honest error and confusion sometimes pastors just mess up and then there are false prophets who on purpose lead his people astray the difference is pretty easy to find it's repentance if a pastor or a teacher in the church is wrong on something and they're correctable there you go that person is in error and may not be fit for teaching but is not a false prophet false prophets deny basic elements of the

[ 32 : 39 ] Christian faith there is one God in three persons and the Trinity is very difficult to understand past our full comprehension but it is not something that we just leave on the side you know like oh we don't really talk about that because it matters very much who this God is that we follow we cannot love him we cannot follow him if we do not know who he is and so we must affirm that there is one God who exists eternally in three persons and that Jesus is God the Son who assumed a human nature when he was born of a virgin he is true God and true man that he died for our sins on the cross and that he rose bodily from the grave and that he offers eternal life to those who come to him in repentant faith there are some false prophets who deny that there is a broad gate that leads to destruction there are some teachers who blame their own sinful acts and that they excuse the acts of their congregation on the devil you know that old phrase the devil made me do it there really is in some parts of the world some in the

United States actually that I've heard of a whole movement of teachers who say you need to cast out that demon of anger when Jesus has just told us to kill our own sinful anger there is a difference between our own sin and the devil made me do it that is false prophecy the most famous white pastor in the United States preaches the prosperity gospel that God's true joy is to make us all healthy and wealthy and his particular flavor of it is happy he is just like those ravenous wolves and

false prophets very attractive on the outside he looks super successful he is so pretty that he looks fake his church is so big it is a small city he has a gracious affect and he is a wonderful speaker and his gospel if you believe it will send you to hell one of the most famous black pastors in the United States denies the trinity his gospel if you believe it will send you to hell don't count on Christian bookstores to provide only solid Christian material one of the best selling genres Christian bookstores are the heaven tourism books stories of people telling you how they went to heaven and came back and they'll tell you about it for \$14.99 ravenous wolves another popular genre in Christian bookstores are people who are telling you that Jesus speaks to them so clearly and so often that they put it down into a daily devotional for you so you can hear new revelations for God if you're bored of hearing his true word in the

Bible the most popular among those is written by a middle-aged suburban white woman and it is incredible that the Jesus she hears from sounds absolutely nothing like the Jesus who just preached the Sermon on the Mount to us it's incredible how much he sounds exactly like a sappy middle-aged suburban white woman with a steady diet of American pop psychology if you think Jesus sounds like you you have not heard Jesus but that hasn't stopped that book from selling millions of copies the list goes on and on I literally could not even come close to listing out all of the heresies and grievous errors that could be proclaimed and have been through the centuries which means we need to know the truth so we can spot error our first line of defense is discipleship the process by which

Christians grow in the knowledge and practice of our faith so we can even heed his words beware you can't beware of false prophets if you don't know what the truth is one theologian put it this way if you don't invest in the story of the Bible and its doctrine you will be shaped by the story and doctrines of Madison Avenue that it's selling you every day that you're getting from CNN or MSNBC or Fox they're going to tell you who you are and it's not going to be in Christ I myself cannot make you spiritually mature that only comes from each person's individual investment in their own spiritual life there is no substitute for regularly sitting under the preaching of

[ 39 : 24 ] God's word studying it yourself praying to him yourself studying biblical doctrine yourself there is no substitute I cannot make you mature and able to beware of those who would make a shipwreck of your faith but Jesus has not left us alone individually in our fight when Paul was speaking to those elders in Ephesus to watch for fierce wolves even from among themselves he gave them an answer and it involves the church as a family and in fact you can probably hear it in the way that he spoke to them right he was speaking to the collected group not to one on one the verses around that and I don't think we have them up on the screen but the verses around that he says pay careful this is to the!

elders! pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God which he obtained with his own blood therefore be alert remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears and now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified what is his answer Paul emphasizes the whole church and he emphasizes the leaders of the church and he emphasizes the word of God and he emphasizes being built up that is growing in our knowledge of

Christ and of his word and so he starts by talking to the elders pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock the qualifications for a leader in God's church the elders the pastors you can find them in several places in Paul's letters we'll look today at Titus chapter 1 verses 6 through 8 if anyone is above reproach the husband of one wife and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination for an overseer as God's steward must be above reproach he must not be arrogant or quick tempered or drunkard or violent or greedy for gain but hospitable a lover of good self controlled upright holy and disciplined what are all of those fruit by their fruit you will know them all of that is an examination of a man's life has he walked the hard narrow road and cried out in repentance and been received into the narrow gate and been given new life in

Christ as he live it the primary qualifications for being a pastor and an elder in God's church and we take that to be the same office here at Shoreline the first and chief quality is not how gifted and talented a man is but by how much he evidences being born of Christ so the members of every church ours included have a high obligation to the Lord and to their brothers and sisters in Christ to examine their leaders lives so all the elders are here at

Shoreline we're in community groups do we show evidence of regeneration do we love the Lord or do we love having a title do we love his word or do we like to pontificate about other things are we ourselves putting sin to death in our own lives do we repent when we sin are we in love with the Lord or with this world where are our treasures and if our lives do not align with that we have no business preaching his word to you!

[ 45 : 07 ] He follows that with one verse of their role the qualification of their role he must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradicted you must not take my word for anything if I am here telling you what I think then I am a false teacher if anything I say doesn't come from God then I am not speaking for God even Paul who wrote large sections of the New Testament who performed many miracles who was one of the greatest evangelists perhaps the greatest evangelist the world has ever known commended others when they went to the scriptures to check him out his doctrine when he went to

Berea Acts chapter 17 the Christians there received his word with all eagerness examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so that must be our position as people in Christ even the apostle was subjected his teaching was subjected by the church of Christ to the measure and standard of God's word we must do no less which is why Shoreline's membership affirmation if you are a member of this congregation you have affirmed!

This I am a steward of Shoreline's gospel witness if any leader begins to teach a false gospel I will act I will examine the scriptures and consult that leader in the spirit of reconciliation found in Matthew chapter 18 and if further intervention is necessary I will bring it to the elders you are a member of this church you have a weighty responsibility because you are a steward of this congregation's gospel witness the last thing I'll say we all know about pastors with their hobby horses some will some pastors they hate one particular sin in particular sin in particular some pastors make it super clear that they hate one particular sin in particular and it gets its way into every single sermon some can't stop talking about that one pet doctrine the stereotype of a Baptist preacher is I have two points today about today's passage and one point about believers baptism I want to tell you pastors and churches should have a hobby horse it should be Christ and his cross and his empty tomb friends let's pray Lord thank you that you sent your son Jesus to rescue us from the broad and easy and destructive path that we were on and that we wanted for ourselves thank you that he bore the weight and the cost of that himself Lord for any who today have never been made new and received new life in Christ

I pray that they would see in him a loving savior and run to him and thank you Lord that you have not left us defenseless against the enemy and false prophets but have given us a church family and established leaders and established restraints upon those leaders so that your church may be built up so that we will be able to flee the snare of false teachers and ravenous wolves Lord will you make that our mission so that we do not stumble we pray these things in the name of Jesus

[ 51 : 08 ] Christ who makes them all possible amen to them them to them to them! to