

The Way That Leads to Life

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Preacher: Dave Nannery

[0 : 0 0] Well, it's a privilege to be preaching to you once again for those who are new here. My name is Dave. I'm one of the pastors here along with BK and Chris, one of our elders as well.

And it's a blessing to be able to preach here and to, I think, to build on something that BK spoke on last week. So what I'm going to do is begin with prayer and then we're going to be taking a look at Matthew chapter 7, the passage that Carl read for us earlier in this service.

So let me pray for us first. Our God and our Father, I thank you that your word is true and it is good, that it is precious and full of wisdom.

Lord, I can say with truth that I know when I go beyond your word, I often end up regretting it. When I hold to it, there are riches there.

And so I pray, Lord God, this morning, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. I ask for all of us, Lord, that you may give us your eyes to see what you are seeing.

[1 : 1 3] Give us your ears to hear what you're hearing. Give us your heart to receive your understanding. Lord, may we have, as we have those ears to hear, Lord God, may you help us.

Let us see clearly the way that you would have us walk. Amen. Well, last week, we learned from Romans chapter 2.

We talked about an aspect of God that often makes people quite uncomfortable because it sort of puts an emphasis on places and on directions that we don't often want to think in.

And yet, at some time in our lives, we are brought to think of these things. That is, we have a God who created this world and a God who calls all things into judgment.

This is a God whose judgment is inescapable. His judgment is righteous. His judgment is impartial. And reflecting on that this week with the help of some friends in my growth group, I couldn't help but think of Jesus' words in Matthew chapter 7 because Jesus Christ himself spoke a lot about the judgment of God.

[2 : 2 7] It's very interesting because we have a culture that loves to speak well of Jesus, likes to speak well of Jesus, but also doesn't like to think about the judgment of God.

And yet, Jesus spoke a lot about the judgment of God. If God truly is the sort of judge we talked about last week, then it is true that what Jesus says is the case, that there are two ways to live.

There is a path that leads to life and there is a path that leads to destruction. That is the warning that he gives in Matthew chapter 7, verses 13 through 14. So I invite you to turn there if you haven't already.

As we work our way from verse 13 down through verse 29, this section at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, one of the most famous passages in all of Scripture in which Jesus lays out this picture of the kingdom of God and how we are to live in the kingdom of God.

And this final section is how we are brought into judgment by God. And he begins in verses 13 and 14 by telling us, enter by the narrow gate.

[3 : 38] So he is picturing us walking into a city as though we are entering the city where God dwells and he says, you 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. Now Jesus says these words to us not because he is cruel and intolerant and thoughtless, but because he loves us.

Because he wants to warn us. If someone who cares for your soul, someone who wants to shepherd you, really loves you, they will speak words of warning to you.

In honor of Mother's Day, we love talking about the good that we see in our mothers. And one of sort of the underrated goods that our mothers bring to us is that they speak words of warning to us.

Believe it or not, your life has probably been saved many, many a time by your mother speaking words of warning to you. Don't run out into the street. Don't stick a fork into the power outlet.

[4 : 54] You know, all these things that as kids you would be happy to do, thinking it's a great idea. And your mother warned you, don't do that. She has saved your life on many occasions.

And that's the same heart that Jesus has for us. He wants to keep us from walking down a dangerous road, a dangerous pathway. He tells us the truth. There is a way that leads to life.

And then he says those who find it are few. We don't by default drift into the way of life. We by default drift into the way of destruction.

That's the way that Jesus thinks. That's the way that he speaks. That's the very reason that BK, that's why BK last week preached and told us that God's judgment is inescapable and righteous and impartial because God is not fooled.

God cannot be bribed. And God, unlike earthly judges, has all the evidence laid out before him. He sees not just all that we have done, but he sees right into our hearts.

[6 : 02] He knows you better than you know yourself. Right down to the very bone. In light of these things, as Jesus continues in Matthew chapter 7, he uses several rather colorful illustrations to show us the difference between the way that leads to life and the way that leads to destruction.

And as Jesus begins, I can't help but notice there's a couple features about the way he thinks about these things. We want to have, as a Christian, you want to have the same mindset that Jesus Christ had.

You want your mind to start looking like his, thinking the way he thinks, feeling the way he feels. And so it's helpful to see what mentality does Jesus have as he talks about these things.

First of all, it's very interesting. Jesus reduces this down to an either-or choice. Now, that's important because we live in a world that, as you may have noticed, gets very complicated sometimes.

This is not some sort of neat comic book fantasy with simple heroes and villains and a simple right and wrong. There's endless complexity. There's shades of gray. There's flawed heroes.

[7 : 14] There's villains who maybe aren't as bad as they might first seem. It takes a lot of wisdom to sort out good and bad. And Jesus never denies that.

I mean, there are whole books in the Bible all about wisdom, how you sift through these things. But if we think about all of that chaos, all those shades of gray, as being the stormy and chaotic surface of an ocean, what Jesus is doing in this passage is he is diving underneath that surface, down to the depths of the human soul, and way under that surface, down in the waters, there is a binary choice between two ways.

There is the way of life and the way of destruction. There is a fundamental distinction between the two. And Jesus wants you to make a choice about which way, which pathway you are aligning yourself with.

So there is an either or choice, first of all. Second of all, Jesus is concerned, deeply concerned, about which voices you listen to. We sometimes have a tendency to think that I can just listen willy-nilly, I can passively take in whatever I want, and it won't affect me.

But Jesus issues warnings. He says he holds us responsible, as he is about to say, to beware of false prophets, of ravenous wolves, to watch out for workers of lawlessness.

[8 : 41] And it's common, I find, that there are Christians who think just about anybody who sounds like a Christian is a trustworthy voice. But that's not true. One of the things I work with people and training them in counseling is I encourage them, we need to know God's word well so that we know what the voice of our master sounds like, so that we know to pay attention to his words.

Third, Jesus is concerned not just about which voices we listen to, but whether you will heed the voice that you listen to. One of the most common refrains in Jesus' teaching is, he who has ears to hear, let him hear.

He says that over and over and over throughout his ministry. Jesus is assuming that we can have his words go in one ear and out the other. In fact, he assumes that is the default state of the human heart, that Jesus' words are going to go in one ear and out the other.

He assumes that many people, the majority, will not understand and not put into practice the thing he says. That is a very clear and consistent way that he speaks throughout all of his parables, throughout all of his teaching.

But the way that leads to life is not one in which you listen to Jesus for your own amusement. You listen with an attentive ear to know how to live.

[10 : 10] And so we ought to be wise about listening, wise about following the way that leads to life. We ought to be wise about who we choose as guides to lead us on that way. And that's why Jesus gives us three warnings in the following verses.

And these are the three warnings, like those motherly warnings of love, that keep us on the way that leads to life. So here's the first warning that Jesus gives us.

The first warning is this, beware of rotten fruit. Beware of rotten fruit. Now, that's a very practical warning. And maybe for those of you mothers, if your family decide to make you breakfast this morning and deliver to you a nice fruit cup, you probably would be like, you know, give it a little sniff first and make sure that they did a good job of picking out the rotten fruit.

And Jesus tells us to do the same. It's a warning that there are teachers who will use spiritual language, even quote Bible verses. They'll look and smell like good Christian brothers and sisters.

They may appear thoughtful or well-spoken or charismatic and good teachers. And they may seem to have your best interests in mind. They may run big ministries and be very successful.

[11 : 22] But in their hearts, there's something that's going wrong. Here's what Jesus says, starting in verse 15. Beware of false prophets who 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? 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. So Jesus is teaching a principle that is sometimes known as root and fruit. Root and fruit.

The idea is that good fruit comes from a tree with a good root. Bad fruit comes from a tree with a bad root. And that's a common theme throughout the Bible.

[12 : 30] So it is with trees, and so it is with us. How do you know whether someone has a right heart? Over time, you watch how they conduct themselves.

And in particular, how do they treat others when they have nothing to gain from them? How do they respond to those who mistreat them?

How do they relate to God in their private lives when nobody's watching? It's one thing for me to pray and to sound all spiritual up here on stage. What about when I'm not on the stage?

You know the root by the fruit. That's significant. We have a tendency to think that, oh, if I do bad things, I'm just having a bad day.

Whereas when another person does bad things because they're a bad person, right? But I do bad things because I've got a problem in here. Bad fruit comes from a bad root.

[13 : 34] And so it's important, not just that this is a problem within us, but it's important to look at the people that we are patterning our lives after.

You and I are imitators by nature. You did not get to where you are in life without doing a lot of imitation. How else did you learn how to speak?

How else did you learn how to walk? How did you learn how to do math? Those of you who are mothers, have you ever had a moment when you have been speaking to your children and then this thought occurs to you as you're telling, you know, maybe you're telling your children not to put the fork in the electric outlet and all of a sudden you hear, I sound like my mother.

And this horrifying realization that you're becoming your own mom. It's true. We tend to take on the characteristics of those whose voice we listen to. We begin to imitate their way of life.

And in time, we become who we listen to. We become what we imitate. The more you're attentive to someone, the more you become like them.

[14 : 47] If we imitate what we think is a sheep, but it turns out to be a ravenous wolf in sheep's clothing, then in time, we become a ravenous wolf as well.

If we model ourselves in someone who is a diseased tree, in time, we become diseased trees ourselves. And so that's why Jesus is saying, beware of rotten fruit.

Look out for it in yourself and in others. It's important to look out and positively speaking, look for guides, look for teachers, look for fathers and mothers who when you look at their life, not just who they are on stage, but who they are in person.

When you look at their life, you can see good fruit. You can see things that are happening only by the grace of God. You can see the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control coming out of them.

Model yourself, pattern yourself on such people. So beware of rotten fruit. That's the first warning Jesus gives us to keep us on the way that leads to life. And here's a second warning that Jesus gives us.

[16 : 06] He says that he wants us to beware of lawless bargains. Beware of lawless bargains. The way that leads to life is not a pathway in which we walk by making our own bargains with God.

Here's what Jesus says in verses 21 through 23. 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 will I declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. Now I want to spend a little extra time on this point because this is a warning that is intended for a particular kind of person.

And unfortunately, I've talked to the number of people who read a verse like this and become terrified when they shouldn't be. Some of us, and some of us here even, have very sensitive and very scrupulous consciences that are very quick to shame and accuse.

[17 : 27] Sort of like someone drops a pin and you feel guilty. Right? And such a person, I find, tends to read these verses and becomes anxious and frightened and they think, oh no, oh no, what if I'm one of these people who isn't really saved?

What if I'm professing faith in Christ but I don't have real faith? After all, look at all the sin in my life. I don't always do God's will. What if I'm not really a Christian? Oh no, oh no.

I find that people like that tend to get lost in a spiral of self-examination, of self-obsession, desperately trying to confess away all their sins to beat God to the punch, to judge themselves before God can get to them.

And if that's you, then listen to me. Jesus isn't talking to you. These verses aren't for you. They don't apply to you in that way.

How do I know that? Because look at the way that the false Christians speak in these verses. When Jesus denies them entry into the kingdom of heaven, they aren't like, oh I knew it, I knew it, I always knew I wasn't really the real thing, I always had my doubts.

[18 : 39] Quite the opposite. They are shocked. Lord, what? Did we not do this? Did we not do that? Look at our resume. Look at all the things we did.

And we did it all in your name. They've been utterly self-deceived. They're extremely confident they're the real deal. And why? Because of all the great things they did for Jesus.

These are the kind of people strutting up to the pearly gates with a 50-page resume. They had no difficulty writing that resume. But underneath that impressive resume, there was something darker going on in the heart.

Because what these individuals have done is they've decided to make a one-sided bargain with God. I'll do a lot of good things for Jesus and in turn I don't really have to give him my whole heart.

I'll do a lot of really good things for Jesus and I don't have to give him my whole heart. I can keep some things back for me. I see this happen even with some celebrity pastors who in time are revealed as having lied and manipulated, abused, committing sexual sin, whatever.

[20 : 01] But it's all okay because they're doing big things for Jesus. Giving him big money. Running big ministries. Performed having many baptisms.

A big growing church. Big gestures of virtue. And what is Jesus' judgment? I never knew you. Depart from me. What is his assessment of all the amazing things they did for him?

He calls it lawlessness. They did many wonderful things in his name but they never were concerned with what Jesus wanted.

Imagine, imagine you are for some reason in a car dealership and you are sitting in the waiting area and you watch as a car salesman goes up to the owner and starts bragging that he has just sold one of the cars on the lot and the owner replies, first of all, who are you?

You don't even work here. Second of all, I never asked you to do that. Do you think the owner is pleased with that sort of lawlessness? Well, no.

[21 : 11] Certainly not. Or to use another illustration since this is Mother's Day, suppose one of you mothers has a bit of a thick-headed husband. I know that can't possibly be true but let's imagine for the sake of imagination and this husband announces to you this morning, he's got a surprise for you.

He blindfolds you and leads you out the front door to the driveway. He tears the blindfold off and they're sitting in your driveway underneath a giant red Bose. It's a brand new Ford F-150 Lightning.

All decked out, all the packages, all the accoutrements, a \$90,000 vehicle which he has spontaneously bought as a gift for you out of love.

Don't ask where the money came from. Don't find out about the reverse mortgage you just took on your home to make that happen. Right? Are you pleased? Do you mothers think, what a wonderful thing, what a great moment in our marriage.

This is wonderful. No, I think what's probably going to happen is I'm going to get a phone call for crisis counseling in a marriage and rightly so. Right? Real life isn't like the commercials, it turns out.

[22 : 27] Is this not a foolish man who thinks himself wise, who thinks that he can just give any sort of gift and win favor without ever thinking about, what does my wife actually want?

That's an illustration of what we might call a lawless bargain. It's where we make a deal with the other person but we don't actually consult them. It's a one-sided deal that we invent ourselves and then we expect them to be happy with it.

If we want to please another person, we don't set the terms of the agreement ourselves and then expect them to just go along with it. Rather, we pay attention to them.

We listen to them. We find out what pleases and honors them and we take heed of it. Anything else is just plain foolish. Yet, for some reason, we think that will work with the Lord.

We actually treat him with less respect than we would treat another human being. There's been a parade of public Christian ministries led by people who led big, spectacular ministries for God, confident the big things they were doing for the Lord were pleasing to him, confident that the Lord would overlook the abusive behavior because of all the good they were doing.

[23 : 45] confident that God would accept such a bargain. And in our own smaller ways, we tend to make the same mistake ourselves.

But even if we're doing big things, Jesus calls it lawlessness. If it is done from a heart that is not attentive to him, a heart that is unconcerned with what the Lord says is good and right and true.

So beware of such lawless bargains. The way that leads to life is one in which we actually are deeply concerned with this question. What is the will of my Father in heaven?

What actually pleases and honors him? A person who is on the way to life, that is where their heart's at. They're wondering, how can I honor my Father in heaven?

What would be pleasing to him? Even if it means maybe not doing big things. Maybe if it means living an ordinary life and serving him in small and sacrificial ways.

[24 : 50] I'm okay with that if my Father in heaven is pleased. So Jesus warns against lawless bargains on the way that leads to life and the third and final warning is very simple he gives.

It's beware of foolish foundations. Beware of foolish foundations. In verses 24 through 27 Jesus says, Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the 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.

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 and the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat against that house and it fell and great was the fall of it.

Again, Jesus is pointing us not to what we say we believe but what we actually do with his words because what we do reveals where our heart is.

The wisdom of our hearts is revealed in the choices we make and the fruit that we produce. What kind of foundation do we build on? The difference between the wise and foolish builder it isn't that one hears Jesus' words and the other doesn't because both of them hear his words.

[26 : 20] They both could be sitting here this morning hearing the scripture read and explained but hey, you who are mothers have you ever had the experience of telling your child something and they don't hear you?

Does that ever happen? Maybe seven times in a row it happens. On about the eighth time finally your kid starts to pick up on what you are saying.

There's a difference between hearing something and taking it to heart. Jesus says that one day is coming a day of judgment. That's what he's talking about here.

He's not, when he's talking about these winds and storms and floods he's talking about that coming day of judgment when all that we have built is going to be tested by rain and flood and wind is the same judgment that Paul was speaking of that we learned about last time in Romans chapter 2 when he says he will render to each one according to his works.

To those who by patience and well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness there will be wrath and fury there will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil the Jew first and also the Greek but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good the Jew first and also the Greek for God shows no partiality.

[27 : 49] The difference between those two ways that we live will be evident on that day and it is foolish to build a house on hardened sand a material that it looks really solid it seems sturdy but then when the waters rise it gives way.

Wise is the one who builds a house on rock that can never be shaken eternally. That rock is the wisdom of Jesus Christ. So beware of foolish foundations that is the third and final warning that Jesus gives to keep us on the way that leads to life.

and what does it look like to walk on that pathway? Well it looks like this. You heed the words of Jesus Christ.

I like that word heed because it captures that you're not just hearing it and you're not just listening but you're taking it to heart and you're intentionally thinking of how do I put this into practice?

Notice what's emphasized in the final two verses of this chapter verses 28 and 29. When Jesus finished these sayings the crowds were astonished at his teaching for he was teaching them as one who had authority and not as their scribes.

[29 : 03] The crowds noticed there's a certain authority to Jesus. Jesus isn't just passing on social customs. Jesus is not manipulating them with self-serving rhetoric and a passionate speech.

Jesus is speaking from a place of authority with the authority of the Son of God the one who can interpret God's law rightly. They're astonished at the very content of what Jesus is saying and they're astonished at how Jesus demonstrates the fruitfulness and the wisdom of a man who truly knows God as his Father.

As fully God and as fully man Jesus perfectly embodies the character and nature of God and perfectly embodies the exact kind of human being that we are meant to be. It is good to heed the words of Jesus Christ.

Some of you have heard me say that one of the greatest gifts that my mom gave me growing up was an insistence that we read and memorize the Bible and thanks to her help not only was I memorizing the Bible from a young age but had read all the way through it by the time I reached high school I don't take much credit for that myself that's mostly my mom doing that work and knowing the word of God that made all the difference in my life it laid a foundation which the Lord then built on over the course of the rest of my life and I want to encourage you it's never too late to start laying that foundation that can be laid now.

I grew up with the Old Testament words that Jesus grew up with I have the words of Christ and his apostles and the more that you read the more that you take in scripture the more that you meditate on it the more you start to get a feel the more you start to know what Jesus Christ sounds like you start to get an ear for his voice you start to get a sense for what he is wanting what would honor and please him if you listen with a humble heart and attentive spirit it's very instructive that when Jesus was tempted by Satan not three chapters earlier that his responses are always responding with scripture the scripture that he grew up with that he was immersed in if you cut Jesus he would bleed Bible he knew it through and through he knew how his father spoke and Satan couldn't get his hooks into him you're surrounded at all times by many voices all throughout the week voices of your family of your friends of your spouse children teachers social media advertisements and that ever present voice inside your own head saying all sorts of terrible things accusing things discouraging things tempting things they're all shouting and clamoring for your attention and I find they're all more or less confident and very insistent about what you ought to be doing you ever feel pulled a million different ways by a million different voices in your life it's overwhelming it's hard to keep our feet on the narrow way that leads to life the beauty of becoming familiar with

[32 : 29] Jesus Christ the way he speaks the way the scriptures speak is that his voice speaks louder than every other voice there's a beautiful thing about God's word is knowing it well when I'm talking and asking people for advice and somebody gives me a word of advice and I'm like boom that makes sense that clicks that lines up with everything that I've heard from God that's what's needed in this situation when we know his voice we can hear it above a noisy crowd only then can we obey the commandment that God has given us when he says in Matthew 17 verse 5 this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased listen to him and so that those words that Jesus gives to us leads to an incredible promise here's what he promises us in Romans chapter 10 his spirit tells us the word is near you in your mouth and in your heart that is the word of faith that we proclaim because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved for with the heart one believes and is justified and with the mouth one confesses and is saved for the scripture says everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame for there is no distinction between

Jew and Greek for the same Lord is Lord of all bestowing his riches on all who call on him for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved you will not be saved through God's judgment because of all the amazing things you have built for yourself in this life you aren't going to be saved because of all the great things you've done for God and you're not going to be saved by professing a faith that isn't yours but belongs to your parents or to somebody else you're saved because your faith is in the best possible person to put your faith in the one trustworthy the one utterly trustworthy person in all the world Jesus Christ you trust that he is righteous righteous on your behalf he is the man that you could never be he has done great things in your place and you entrust yourself fully to him and because

Jesus he is speaking these words on his way to the cross he is crucified in your place which means that Jesus took the place of judgment on your behalf he received the sentence of death for your sake and that means that united with him him receiving the death that we ought to have died we get to experience the life the resurrection life that Jesus enjoyed on the third day and forever more it belongs to you forever so be deeply attentive to your master's voice hear that call to believe and you find that when you are born again when you've truly given your heart to the Lord what pleases him begins to start pleasing you his mentality becomes yours and you experience the joy of being his faithful servant that is the way that leads to life let me pray our God and Father we thank you that you have left us these words of wisdom there's much more that we can say at the heart of all this

Lord is you don't just want external conformity you don't want big it is not your aim to have external conformity to decent behavior it is not your aim to have big spectacular ministries it is not your aim for us to impress you you want contrite hearts a broken and contrite heart you will not despise a person who comes to you humbly entrusting themselves to you who knows the voice of the Lord who reads your word who takes it to heart who mulls over it consults with wise and trusted people about it Lord as we continue to learn your word together in this church and community may we become a people who are shaped by it who know how to walk faithfully and to do your will who know how to love one another who love you most of all and are eager to spread the good news of Jesus

Christ that there is salvation there is hope in a future an eternal life that can never be taken away Lord let us live enjoying that now and longing for more and more of it in the future to come amen you you you you you you