

Matthew 7:13-29

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Date: 03 June 2018

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[0 : 0 0] Matthew 7, verse 13 to 29. I'm speaking in the summer at a conference, and I'm on the last night of the conference.

! It's a Welsh conference, there were loads of people at the wedding yesterday from Wales,! And they kept saying to me, you need to send them home singing, whatever that means, at the end of a week. I think what they mean is the sermon at the end needs to uplift them and encourage people and send them home singing. It's a good way to end a sermon like that.

Isn't it? In an upbeat kind of way. To give something positive. Kind of pizzazz to it. Something that lifts you up, harries you up, and keeps you going through the week. That is what Jesus does though, is it? I'm at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. What does Jesus do? Jesus gives you this solemn and extended, serious appeal. And in fact, it's somewhat frightening at the end of the Sermon. You see, Jesus is at this point in our text, kind of concluding the so-called Sermon on the Mount. His instructions from 5.17 to 7.12. And now, what Jesus does is he presses it on your conscience and on mine. And he applies it. And he gets so solemn and so serious. And so serious is the issue. You notice that he brings up the issue of judgment. And he brings up the issue of destiny a number of times. So look at verse 13. He speaks about destruction versus life. In verse 19, he speaks about a tree that is cut down and is cast into the fire. In verse 23. He says to people, I never knew you'd get away from me. And then in verse 27, you have this house collapsing. And it's so serious about the ultimate end. And it's so possible that we can deceive ourselves about whether we're truly in the kingdom of God or not.

so easy. And so urgent that Jesus teaches us this morning to test whether we are a genuine disciple of the Lord Jesus. And he presses it upon you. And you want to say, Jesus, if you want to end a sermon, this isn't the way to end it. This isn't the way to send people home singing. But since Jesus did end it in this way, we've got to take the time to listen to what he should not have said, haven't we? So what does he do? Four things. First of all, he confronts you with the way that you must follow. He confronts you with the way that you must follow. Look at verse 13. He says, enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction. And those who go down that way of destruction, they are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life. And those who find it are few. The way that you must follow Jesus is so candid. The Lord Jesus never holds anything back. He tells you what you need to know. He never deceives you. He comes straight out of it. And he says, if you want to enter the kingdom of God, if you want to be

Christian, it will be tough. He does not appeal to you and say the Christian faith, the Christian life is a wonderful and exciting thing. And I have a wonderful plan for your life. And I want you to join me in this adventure. That's never the way the gospel is presented. There may be some truth in that, but that's not what he says. He says, the gate is narrow. The way is confined. Don't admire it. Don't consider it. Enter it. But you see how he presses this on us and the point he makes. He presents the way that we must follow. And it's not just an entrance. It's not just a gate. Can you see that? It's a way. It's a pilgrimage. It is a road that is narrow and confined. And he says it will be difficult. In fact, the word that he talks about in verse 14, how confined is the way, is the root word in the Bible from which we get the word affliction. It means to press in. It means to be restricted. It means to bring something into bounds. It means to put pressure on it. And so this word that is sometimes translated as affliction, it may be that Jesus means to imply what Paul and Barnabas said to those Christians in Acts 14. He says, through many afflictions, you may enter the kingdom of God. He may be telling us that this way that you enter is a narrow way and it's a way of suffering and affliction and distress and difficulty. And he doesn't hide that from you.

[5 : 04] Perhaps part of the difficulty is unpopularity. But there's another way, isn't there? There's another gate. A broad gate. A wise gate and a broad way.

And there are going to be many that go on that path. And he is saying, I don't want you, as one writer says, I don't want you to be part of a great herd. I want you to be part of a little flock. And so I want you to go in by the narrow gate. But if you go into the narrow gate of the kingdom of heaven, it won't be a popular thing to do. You will be going against the grain. And we have a culture, don't we? And a whole society that says you just go along with things. You go along with the flow. You just don't stand out. And that is the culture, particularly, in which we live. You can be an individual. You can be who you are and whoever you want to be. As long as you agree with everybody else. You've got to go along with the flow. And Jesus is saying, no, no, no, you've got to go against the wind.

[6 : 22] And it's a difficult way. And it's not a popular way. And he wants you to know the way that you must follow. And that's true, isn't it?

That you will meet that, if you are a Christian, you will know that to stand out and to stand apart and to go against the flow is difficult and it is hard. And every single one of us who's seeking to live for the Lord Jesus will find that, whether you're in school or college or work or at home.

You might say, well, what do you know? You're a minister. And I want to say, actually, I know it every week. Because the thing that I get tired most in doing week by week is having to make decisions that I know will displease you.

Of having to tell someone what I wish that I didn't have to tell them. And so the Christian life is a life of sometimes having to take the unpopular way.

And as you seek to follow Christ, you will find it again and again and again that that is the way. That is the walk. And our job as Christians is to encourage one another in this and not to excuse one another out of it.

[7 : 31] The way that you must frequently follow. Secondly, Jesus impresses us and confronts us with the vigilance that you must exercise. The vigilance that you must exercise. That's from verses 15 to 20.

Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. And he is warning his disciples about people who teach a version of Christianity, but it is false.

You will always have teachers and false teachers as well. And the problem is, Jesus is saying, he is saying they are so subtle that you can't tell them from their manner.

But these teachers, they seem really sound and spiritual. And as fervent as they may be, they seem to have the voice of authority and certainty in the way that they speak and so on.

And it's hard to tell them apart. But they seem to be part of the flock. They seem to be genuine. It's very difficult to detect. In 1943, the British were jamming some of the radar and interfering with some of the radar of the Germans.

[8 : 48] And so with some of their communications to their fighter pilots, the Germans had to make use of a radio telephone mechanism. And they would use that to give their fighter pilots instruction.

And it somehow happened that the British discovered what that frequency was of that radio telephone. And they managed to hook into it. And they set up a powerful station in which British men could actually speak into the radar of the German planes.

British men who spoke fluent idiomatic German. They could listen to the German controllers who were talking to the fighter pilots. And they learnt their accents.

And they could begin to imitate them and their verbal text. And they listened to them. And they got to the point where they could even imitate the inflections of the German controllers. It was a night when British raids were on a German city.

And the German controller was talking to his fighter pilots. And he was trying to give them instructions. And he said to them, he knew that there were ghost voices, he called them.

[9 : 55] That is the British who were giving German instructions to the German pilots. And throwing them off and confusing them. And so the German controller shouted, beware of ghost voices.

Beware of being led astray by the enemy. And at one point, one of the German controllers let out with a burst of profanity. He started swearing and so on. The British ghost voice in perfect German said, the Englishman is swearing.

The German controller got so angry and said, it is not the Englishman swearing. It is me swearing. And he got so confused that the German pilots began shouting at one another. And casting abuse at one another. Because who do you follow? Who's the real German? When it all sounds the same. Who are you going to follow? Who are you going to listen to? How are you going to know? And that is the situation Jesus says in the church. You're going to have false prophets and false teachers. And how are you going to know? You won't be able to tell from their mere manner.

[10:59] How will you be able to discern them? And Jesus in light of this gives us criteria. You've got that criteria in verse 16 to 20. He says, by your fruits you will know them. The principle is this.

He says, in time, your character will become known. Their character will become known. What you are will be shown by the fruit that you bear.

Fruit will inevitably disclose character in time. Jesus puts it in this way, doesn't he? Verse 17. He says, 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. It's really obvious, isn't it? Really simple illustration. Bad tree, bad fruit. Good tree, good fruit.

You can tell what a tree is like by the fruit it produces. You can tell whether it's healthy and sound and good. On the other hand, if a tree doesn't produce good fruit, you can tell that the tree is defective.

[12:06] You can tell from the evidence what the inner condition is. Thomas Boston, the Puritan pastor, put it this way. He says, he puts a little bit of a different twist on it, but the same basic idea.

He says, you look at the trees. You look at the trees in wintertime. Trees in wintertime, they've got no leaves, have they? They're bare. They're barren. But once the spring starts to come, you begin to see, don't you, buds and leaves.

And you can tell what's a living tree from a dead tree. You do it by evidence. And that's what Jesus is saying here. And so here is the vigilance you must use.

You must judge them by their fruits. And what are the fruits of various false teachers? What is their teaching? What is the fruit?

Well, one fruit is this. What are they teaching about Jesus Christ? You ask a very simple question, isn't it? Who is Jesus of Nazareth? And what do you say about him?

[13:08] And if they hedge a little bit, you press them and you say to them, do you believe, as John taught us, that Jesus is God in human flesh? You can tell a lot whether they're a true teacher or not from that.

Or what's your view on God? You get behind the kind of come on lines. Another way that you test false teachers is, you see, does their teaching produce strife and confusion?

You've got to be careful. We know that the truth is going to make people upset and unhappy and it will arouse opposition. It will frequently do that. But you have to realise that teaching that is false and false teaching will disturb churches.

And it will cause strife. And it will cause confusion amongst false people. Another thing is this whole idea of servitude, if I can put it like that.

And that's far more likely in a church like ours. That you have some teacher which you really appreciate. And there comes a certain point in maybe that movement where they demand a certain loyalty from you.

[14:16] It can happen with ministers who've been there a long, long time. And suddenly there are those who are loyal and those who are not. And if you're not loyal to their teacher, your discipleship is somewhat suspect.

And if you don't pledge your loyalty to them, or your devotion to them as a person, you need to really watch that. Anyone who tries to steal your devotion and pull you away and places themselves almost above the Lord Jesus is a false teacher.

And you've got to recognise that. It's a matter of sexual immorality. It's in 2 Peter 2. One of the marks of false teachers, not always, but frequently, is their lives are marked by sexual immorality.

And not just their lives. That doesn't necessarily say that somebody's a false prophet in itself. Because many people, people like you and I can fall like that. But frequently in their teaching, they will weave into it various kinds of false teaching.

They will call good evil and evil good. And it will be a kind of justification for a sexually immoral life. They'll make it part of the bag, if you like.

[15 : 33] It's a mark of false teachers. And then there's a matter of grief, isn't there? Of covetousness and money. I'm not saying that every appeal for funds necessarily means you're a false teacher.

I want you to give generously to Getham in two weeks. But a false teacher is primarily concerned, isn't he, with money. With your gifts. What you'll give.

And your finances. And that is some of the marks of a false teacher. You've got to be vigilant. And the people who are most susceptible to false teachers.

Are people who are nominal Christians. People who sit in churches like this. Whether it's a Presbyterian church, or an Anglican church, or a Baptist church. And they've never really taken the time to get themselves into the Bible.

And so as a result, they're not well grounded. And they are the ones who are sucked in by false teaching. And they can't detect when it's off beam. Because they've never been aware of the truth.

[16 : 34] And so you must be vigilant, Jesus says. Because the stakes are so high. Look at verses 13 and 14. The stakes are so high because it is death or life. It is destruction or life.

And that's why it's so important. Thirdly, Jesus confronts us with the shock that you must face. The shock that you must face. Verses 21 to 23 are the most terrifying verses in the New Testament. He says to us, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord. That is the tagline, isn't it? Of someone who's an evangelical. Lord, Lord. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven.

And you might say as you read those verses. Yeah, Jesus is making a distinction, isn't he, between those who speak with their mouths. Those who kind of have merely words of commitment.

And those who really do in his father's will. He's making a distinction between those who speak with their mouths and their actions. But that isn't the distinction. That's not right. David verse 22 explains it there.

[17 : 43] He says, on that day many will say to me, Lord, Lord. Did we not prophesy? Did we not speak in your name? And did we not cast out demons in your name? And didn't we do many mighty works in your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you.

Get away from me. You workers of lawlessness. Can you just notice a couple of things with me? Verse 22, look at how it starts. Jesus says, on that day. I love the way Jesus assumes to himself that he is the judge of men and women on the last day.

Can you see that claim? You don't always have to have an overt claim of authority. You don't need Jesus to say, I am the judge. Look at what he says in verse 22. On that day. Sometimes he just assumes it.

This is the man who will judge the living and the dead. Back in 1731. And Jesus says, many will say to me, on that day, Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name? And didn't we cast out demons in your name?

Didn't we do many mighty works in that name? And he'll say, get away from me. I don't know who you are. You workers of evil. But I want you to see in verse 22. They had done something, hadn't they?

[18 : 59] It wasn't merely words. It wasn't just talk. They prophesied. They cast out demons. They done mighty works. If I can call it a successful ministry. They had a successful ministry.

They were gifted speakers. And yet they had no part in Jesus Christ. There's something phony, isn't there? It's like when you go to a rugby game and they've kind of put the crowd noise through the PA.

You can't understand it. And you're there. And the noise is great, but the atmosphere is rubbish. And it's because it's kind of a fake atmosphere. It's like Milli Vanilli. Do you remember Milli Vanilli? Do you remember? And they'd sing, didn't they? But they were lip syncing. It wasn't right. Or Boney M, wasn't it? The black guy in Boney M wasn't really singing. Some Scandinavian guy. You didn't know that.

And so, there was just something phony about it. Something not real. Well, I never spotted that about Milli Vanilli or Boney M, did we? Just enjoyed their quality music.

[20 : 09] And you don't spot it. And Jesus says to see in verse 22, there's going to be many, many deceived on that day. Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, didn't we preach sermons in your name?

Didn't we lead Bible studies in your name? Didn't we run the youth group? Didn't I teach Sunday school in your name? Was there an elder in your name? I saved a month's diaconate. I brought meals to people.

And he will confess, I don't know who you are. It's where we put our confidence, isn't it? Do we put our confidence in our kind of Christian record of achievement?

And Jesus says it won't wash. What does Jesus say is considered? It's not those who say, Lord, Lord. Not those who've got the evangelical language. But the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

What's the will of his Father in heaven? What is the will of his Father in heaven? It's really simple. It's a Sermon on the Mount. It's what we've looked at for the last couple of months.

[21 : 14] It's next from chapter 5, verse 17. The will of my Father in heaven. It's the one who believes in the miracle of kind of casting out anger in his relationships with others.

It's the one who knows that miracle in his life of sexual purity and marital fidelity. It's like the miracle of straightforward truth-telling and not misusing God's name, of being straight.

In your words, it's like the miracle of daring to reflect the likeness of your Father to the world, towards unbelievers and your enemies. And to show a degree of mercy. The one who does the will of my Father is the one who doesn't try to establish a Christian reputation, even amongst other Christians.

But the only thing that matters to them is the love of their Father in heaven. Whether it's in their giving or their praying or their fasting or their repenting. The only thing that matters to them is speaking to the Father and pleasing the Father.

And the only thing that matters to this person is that he can tell others. It's not that he can tell others that he's having a certain struggle with a certain sin and that he's been weeping and repenting. But no, he does it behind closed doors.

[22 : 24] And the only thing that matters is that his Father knows. And his Father forgives. That's the person who does the will of the Father. And if my Father really does feed the birds and clothe the flowers, then I can trust him with this week.

And he's going to do the same for my needs. And the will of my Father is not some outstanding Christian service that I've chalked up or that I've preached loads and loads of sermons.

Now you see, we must be really, really careful not to deceive ourselves. Ask yourself, as you look at this text, many will say to me, Lord, Lord.

There are people out there, there are some people that think familiarity with Jesus, or knowledge about Jesus, or association with Jesus is somehow eternal life.

But mere familiarity is not. Just notice, there are people in this passage out there that have done many mighty works in your name, Jesus.

[23 : 38] The fact that somebody does a miracle, a mighty miracle, does not mean that they're a genuine disciple of Jesus. Let's say we had someone here who was blind this morning.

And we got them up the front. And they were healed, him or her, of the blindness. That in itself would not authenticate that person as a genuine disciple of Jesus.

You can read 2 Thessalonians 2 or Revelation 13. Even the final Antichrist will do great miracles. And he's not in the kingdom of heaven. Miracles are no indication that you're in the kingdom of heaven.

Success is not an indication that you're in the kingdom of heaven. Giftedness is not an indication.

Do you see how careful we must be? I love this, because what it means for you and I, it means this. That doing the will of my Father in heaven requires of you and me the mundane obedience to his Father's will.

[24 : 50] I think that's brilliant. God does not require of you some outstanding service record that you can boast about. He's not asking you to do something remarkable.

He's not asking you to do something kind of crazy for the Lord. He's asking you to live for him in your day-to-day life. And so let each person examine him on herself.

Lastly, Jesus confronts us with the obedience you must render. The obedience you must render.

See in verse 24 to 27, because we're so likely to be received, he underscores, doesn't he, that we are to hear his words and do them.

That is the genuine test of a Christian disciple. You hear his words, verse 24, and you do it. And the person who does that is like a person who builds their house upon a rock, and the wind comes and

the floods rise, and the wind comes down and the house still stands.

And the person who hears Jesus' word and doesn't do anything builds his life on sand. And the whole thing gets washed away in the storm.

[26 : 04] And what Jesus is saying is the person who builds their life on hearing and doing is like a person who builds upon a rock. And your life will be secure in a storm, whether it's the storm of the Last Judgment, which I think it is, and I also think it's the other storms of life.

And there is a certain stability and security to that person's life who's built their life on Jesus' teaching. And you might say, but I wonder why Jesus places such importance on hearing and doing his word.

Why are Jesus' words and his teachings so important and so vital to him? And I think it's because what we do with someone's words, your obedience to someone's words shows what you think of that person.

And your obedience to Jesus' words reveals your attitude of Jesus' person. So children, your mum or your dad, they tell you to do something, and you say to your friends, you say to your mum or dad, but my friends, my friends don't do that.

They don't have to do that in their home. And what do your mum and dad say? Your mum and dad say, but I'm telling you. But I'm telling you to do it. I'm telling you as your mum.

[27 : 21] I'm telling you as your dad. And by not obeying your mum or dad's instruction, it shows what you think of your mum or dad. Parents might say, you did not do what I told you to do.

So by not obeying my instructions, you are reflecting your attitude to that person. And your obedience to Jesus reflects your attitude towards Jesus.

And it shows whether you are one of his disciples or followers. That's why it's so important. Just notice with me, Jesus doesn't say there'll be no more floods.

He doesn't say you'll be spared the rain. He doesn't say you'll be spared the wind. He doesn't say you'll be spared the flood. He doesn't say you'll be spared the darkness. He doesn't say you'll be spared the storm.

He doesn't say if you do that, and so on. He doesn't say that your house will become a mansion. He doesn't promise you a six-bedroom house in Richmond, or anything like that.

[28 : 25] He says just that when you come through that, that when you come through the floods, and the darkness, and the wind, and the storm, you'll still be standing. And I think, again, that's a real encouragement to us as Christian disciples.

You, you might say, well, that's not very much, is it? It's not just much to survive. But I think the longer you go, and the longer you live as a Christian, the more significant it is that when the storms come, and the wind blows, it makes all the difference in the world that when it's all over, you're just still standing on your feet.

You're just still standing. That's a great thing, isn't it? And that is the obedience you must render. That is the stability you can have. And Jesus is concluded his sermon, and there's the reaction. Can you see the reaction, 28, 29? The crowd says in verse 28, they are astonished at his teaching. They've had that note of authority they weren't used to from their scribes and from their teachers. And we can't go into that now. We don't need to. But this you need to watch out for. You need to watch out for your reaction to Jesus' teaching. There's a certain danger if you are with the crowd and you just stand there and you are astonished at his teaching.

[29 : 52] There's nothing wrong with that in itself, but there's a great danger in it. Horatio Nelson, he was an admiral in the British Navy years ago.

And it was said that he had a great reputation, that he showed great courtesy to his conquered enemies. And on one occasion, there was a defeated captive who came onto Nelson's boat, onto Nelson's course deck, in order to surrender and so on.

And this defeated captain, he knew of this tradition of Nelson, that he was well known and renowned for his courtesy to conquered enemies, to people. And when he came onto the ship, he walked over to Nelson's with his hand outstretched, as if he was going to get a reception.

And Horatio Nelson said, one sentence to him, your sword first, and then your hand. You may be astonished at Jesus' teaching, you may admire it, but really it doesn't actually matter to you.

And Jesus says to you, your sword first. The first issue with the Lord Jesus Christ is will you submit to his authority? Will you bow before him?

[31 : 08] And will you call him Lord? And you must ask yourself that, have you done that? It's not just, do I admire Jesus?

I quite like his teaching, I'm interested in it. But have I bowed to him as Lord and God? Because it makes all the difference in the world.

In this life. And in the next life. Let's pray.