

## The Questions Jesus asks us. Matthew 7:13-29

Some of you, as you listened to the reading, may have been shocked by Jesus' unfashionable and presumptuous clarity.

As Jesus comes to finish His teaching of the disciples on what it means to follow Him, what responding to the gospel He preaches means he uses unfashionable and exclusive binary language

Only two ways – the narrow and broad

Only two builders – the wise and the foolish

Only two outcomes – life and destruction

Jesus is clear because He wants His listeners, you and I today, to know where we stand, in which camp we are, what eternity awaits us

And if you are shocked by Jesus' clarity into grappling with the question of whether Jesus has the authority to make those claims – that's good. Like the jolt from the defibrillator, it's a shock that might save your life

But others of us – we've heard it before

We are in danger of being so familiar and comfortable with what Jesus says that we might miss the opportunity Jesus gives us to check whether we are on the right way, building what will withstand the storm

And that would be bad, a shame, for Jesus is not talking to outsiders, but insiders

People who say 'Lord, Lord'

People who, like us this morning, are listening to His word

### **2 Ways, 2 Destinations 7:13-14**

*Matthew 7: <sup>13</sup> "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. <sup>14</sup> For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*

Jesus characterises the way people can respond to his teaching with a picture – a picture of people travelling through life on two very different ways – one a paved highway, the other a goat track to a mountain village

These Two ways are distinguished by from each other by their character, company and destination

One, has a narrow entrance; you have to be intentional to get onto it. It is hard, a word that can have the sense of narrowed, compressed – but can also have a sense of being oppressed and afflicted. So this is a difficult and at times painful way to go.

The other is easy to get onto – it has a wide gate, and the way is spacious and accommodating – no pressure here

And there are few on the narrow way – it's a lonely path, while you will always have company on the broad road

But the most striking difference between the two is their destination

The narrow hard way leads to Life – and Jesus means eternal life, life in God’s eternal kingdom, at peace with God

And the broad to Destruction, the eternal fire [Matthew 18:8-9, 25:46].

What is at stake in the way you travel is eternal life or eternal death

The narrow way, the hard way, is Short term difficulty and hazard for eternal gain

The broad way is short term ease and popularity for eternal loss

As He comes to the end of His teaching Jesus is asking His hearers, asking us

Which road are you on? What will your destination be?

What becomes clear in these concluding verses is that what determines what way you are on is how you are responding to Jesus. The narrow way is the way of commitment to follow Jesus by doing what HE says. The hard way can be entered only one way – through repentance and faith in Jesus – saying Jesus is boss. And we walk along it by each day denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Him.

The broad way is the path of ignoring Jesus to live to please yourself, pursuing what you want, taking your direction from any but Jesus.

It is easy to get on to the broad way, and there will be lots of company – but its end is destruction. And that should make you think

Which way am I on? Where am I headed?

If you believe what Jesus says, you will want to get off the broad way, for no matter what experiences you have along the way destruction is a dreadful end, and life is so good

And as you are thinking about it note Jesus’ warning.

Wanting to be popular, in with the crowd – can destroy you

To be a follower – must take what is at times the lonely road

Know how hard it is at school to be the kid left out, made fun of

And Not just at school

But only one way leads to life, and the approval of the crowd is not just fleeting and fickle, it will never keep you from destruction

But it is not just wanting to be popular that can derail us on our journey, prevent us getting to our destination

### **The Danger of being deceived 7:15-20**

*Matthew 7:*<sup>15</sup> *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. <sup>16</sup> You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A*

*healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.*

Jesus says there will be false prophets seeking a place amongst His followers

Not just false teachers – but false prophets

A prophet is someone who claims to speak God's word, who speaks with the authority of God

So it is a fearful thing to go against a prophet, and it is an authority that can be easily abused for selfish gain

Jesus says that they will appear like one of the flock, like one of Jesus' followers on the outside will be intentionally deceptive,

But their inner reality is that they are there to satisfy themselves, satisfy their appetites – at the cost of the lives of the sheep

This warning against false prophets is made repeatedly in Scripture – Matthew 24:5, 11, 24; 1 John 4:1

And it's Not an empty warning

They are present in the Old Testament, in the early church, Throughout history and today

Think Joseph Smith who founded the Mormons, or Mary Baker Eddy who founded the Christian Scientists, or Charles Russell who founded the Jehovah's witnesses, Del Agnew of the Tinker Tailor sect in Sydney last century, right down to those who predicted President Trumps victory

But if these false prophets look the same on the outside, if they are deliberately taking on a disguise – using the right words and phrases, being in the right places,

How can we spot a false prophet?

By their fruit – because fruit is true to type

<sup>16</sup> *You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?*

<sup>17</sup> *So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.*

Fruit unerringly reveals the kind of tree from which it comes.

The ESV is not helpful here in describing the trees as healthy or diseased

The word translated healthy also can be translated and mean – good, good morally, sound and wholesome. A good tree bears good fruit.

The word translated diseased can also be translated and mean – bad, unwholesome. A bad tree bears bad fruit.

And that is the point. Jesus is talking about the type, not the condition, of the tree.

Fruit is always true to type, reveals the kind of tree from which it comes.

Jesus is saying Fruit –someone's observable words and actions and their outcome developing over time – reveals the kind of person they are

True for all of us [Matt. 12:33-37]

Good hearts, hearts given to trusting and obeying the Lord Jesus, bear good fruit

Bad hearts, hearts given to pleasing self and obeying its own desires, bear bad fruit

Jesus says we must apply this truth particularly to those claiming to be prophets. The greatness of their claim to speak from God means they should be subject to greater, more searching, scrutiny.

Don't just listen to their words. Look at their behaviour, look at the outcome of their ministry in their lives and the lives of those who listen to them.

Remember - Fruit takes time to develop. You may not be able to tell at a first hearing

So To be safe firstly you have to be in a position to examine the fruit of those who claim to be prophets

Listening to internet preachers, you may well not be

Especially if they are in their own ministries, and they are trying to solicit your dollars

They will control the flow of information to you

Following preachers and prophets on the internet you are setting yourself up to be deceived

If they are ministering in a normal church setting – there are the normal safeguards and greater scrutiny.

And secondly, to be safe, you have to believe Jesus – bad fruit, a bad tree, destined for destruction

But People make excuses for those they think spiritual

These people are So far above them, they say, so close to God, their experience so much more intense, they can't be judged by ordinary standards. And that kind of exceptionalism is encouraged by these false prophets

Don't get conned - Trust Jesus

This Simple test – by their fruit you will know them

Would have protected people from Joseph Smith who was sexually immoral with multiple women

Would protect you from the likes of Benny Hin and Kenneth Copeland – whose worldliness, love of money, and deceit, is obvious

So if there is a good, sure test of whether someone is a false prophet, why are people taken in? Why might you be?

It is because false prophets tell people what they want to hear. The roots of our being deceived lies in our own hearts.

In Jeremiah's day the false prophets were saying

*Jeremiah 6: <sup>13</sup> "For from the least to the greatest of them,  
everyone is greedy for unjust gain;  
and from prophet to priest,*

*everyone deals falsely.*

<sup>14</sup>*They have healed the wound of my people lightly,  
saying, 'Peace, peace,'  
when there is no peace.*

But people wanted to believe there would be peace, peace without repentance from their idolatry.

In the first century church of Thyatira the false prophet was teaching

The prophet of Rev. 2

*Revelation 2:*<sup>20</sup> *But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing **my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.***

That is, teaching them that they didn't need to be different, or not too different, from their pagan neighbours.

They could share in their idolatry, share in their sexual immorality. They didn't have to separate themselves from those things – and that made their lives so much easier

And today?

Telling people what they want to hear

You can pursue what your neighbours pursue

Whether that is health, or wealth, or sexual fulfillment, or political power

You don't need to be too different – you can make the narrow way like the broad way.

But Jesus says false prophets will destroy you

So Who are you listening to?

Listening to those who are telling you what you want to hear

That will support your worldliness or your desires

OR are you listening to Jesus and making your judgements on whether someone is sent by God on the basis of His word

On the Conformity of their life and teaching to His teaching

The Fruit that should be seen in the ministry of a prophet is turning people from sin to the Saviour

Promoting the obedience of disciples in denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Him

As Jeremiah said of the prophets of his day

*Jeremiah 23:*<sup>22</sup> *But if they had stood in my council,  
then they would have proclaimed my words to my people,  
and they would have turned them from their evil way,  
and from the evil of their deeds. [cf. 23:14-17]*

As you journey on the narrow way, listening to false prophets, taking direction from them, can destroy you.

But it is not just believing the lies others tell you that can mean you never come to your destination. We can be seriously self-deceived.

### **The Danger of being self-deceived 7:21-23**

*Matthew 7: <sup>21</sup> "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. <sup>22</sup> 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?' <sup>23</sup> And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'*

Jesus is talking about People in the 'in crowd'. They call Jesus Lord.

People with great spiritual experiences to testify to v. 22 – mighty works done in Jesus' name, that is on His behalf, on His mission

But – they were using those experiences as a substitute for genuine obedience, doing the will of my Father in heaven. With all that charismatic activity they were, says Jesus, still 'workers of lawlessness'

Note the authority Jesus claims

He accepts being called Lord

And He says He is the one who utters the final judgement on our lives

He gives the verdict 'Workers of lawlessness' and

He pronounces the sentence – 'Depart from me'

Now are you Surprised that people who prophesy, cast out demons, do mighty works – could be excluded at the last day?

– if you are not, they were

What was their problem? Listen again

Did not we, we, we

On that day, the day of judgment, they are Looking to self, relying on what they had done

But the Father's will – starts with repentance and faith in Jesus, with responding to the gospel

It starts with turning away from relying on self and what we have done to acknowledge our need. That we are poor in Spirit, and our only hope is in mercy.

That life of repentance and faith in Jesus then issues in a commitment to take direction from Jesus, to live the life that practices a righteousness greater than the scribes and the pharisees, that fulfills the law and the prophets

Those crying 'Lord, Lord' are no doubt impressed by Jesus and His power

But there was no poverty of Spirit

They were pointing to what they had done for Jesus as a reason they should be let in

Not relying on what Jesus had done for them

And their life then also showed that reliance on self. They continued, not doing the Father's will, not governed by Jesus' teaching that fulfilled the law, but taking direction from themselves, living lawless lives. They were followers of Jesus on their terms, not His – and so not followers at all.

As believers we Can have all kinds of experience, but only ever one basis of confidence on the last day

That we are Known by Jesus

Called by Him

Found in Him –

In Paul's words in Philippians, being willing to suffer the loss of all things, including those things that conferred spiritual privilege,

*Philippians 3: <sup>7</sup>But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup>Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order **that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—***

ON that day our hope is not relying on our own actions or righteousness, but on Jesus' work for us and His righteousness

And In Him – then living the life that does the Father's will, that becomes like Him in His death, saying to the Father every day 'Not my will, but yours be done.' [Phil 3:10-11].

Who are you trusting?

Looking to your experiences for assurance of welcome on the last day, placing your confidence in what you have done?

Or looking to the Lord and what HE has done, and living each day the life of depending on Him, the life of daily repentance and faith

Relying on religious or charismatic experiences and not giving yourself to the will of the Father, the life of the righteousness that exceeds the scribes and the pharisees, can lead you to being shut out forever.

And so Jesus comes to His final encouragement to embrace life by following Him

## Two Builders 7:24-27

*Matthew 7:<sup>24</sup> "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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, He is addressing those in the 'in group', those gathered to hear Jesus' words

The disciples and the crowds then

Us now, as we sit here week by week.

Jesus tells a story to illustrate the difference between two kinds of hearers and the consequence of that difference

There are Those who hear and do – and it is hearing and doing – All their life they don't stop listening, and they don't stop putting what they hear into practice

They pay attention, make the effort, bear the cost of treading the narrow way

They start where they must

Responding to the gospel call by repenting, turning back to God and saying God's king Jesus is now in charge of their lives

And they Go on by living by Jesus' word – to be people whose yes is yes, no no; who don't lust after others; who turn away from anger, who love enemies, who forgive, who relate to God their Father in secret, not to impress others, who serve God, not money

They are building on a sure foundation, the foundation of Jesus' trustworthiness – so what they build lasts

It Withstands the rising floodwater, the power of the storm

And we have Seen recently in the NSW storms how powerful and sudden that flooding storm can be

Then there are Those who hear – and don't do

Forget

Not really paying attention – thinking about lunch, or where they would rather be – the footy

Or they reckon it is too much work to think through their life and make the changes needed

Just prefer to get on with what they want, without the fuss of thinking about what Jesus says

Or maybe they think they know better

Admire Jesus – reckon he is good to listen to but sometimes a bit out of touch with reality

They are still in charge and have decided their own judgements and desires are a better guide for living

They Build on an untrustworthy foundation – the sand of their own judgment and rule, or the teachings of others that suit them.

When the storm comes, what they have built is easily washed away – all goes

Now we are not told exactly what constitutes the rain and flood, how the foundation we build upon is tested

It may be it includes the trials of life – the sicknesses or loss of work or relationship failures that show how easily what we have put our trust in, relied upon, can be taken away in a moment

But Jesus definitely has in mind the testing of the last day, the trial of judgment and death that tests us all

On that day even though the wise and foolish were both engaged in the same activity – both building their lives – their labour will have a completely different outcome

The work of the wise will endure, and the foolish will lose it all.

Hearing that, which builder are you? Wise, or foolish?

Are you trusting in yourself

Or Trusting in Jesus to guide and direct you through life by His word so that what you put your effort into has enduring fruit, you build what lasts

It's not hard to tell

Look at your life, then look at Jesus' teaching

Who is directing the character you are developing, the choices you make, the things you pursue – your own desires, or Jesus' words?

Are you living with God as your Father, depending on Him, seeking to please Him by listening to His Son? Or are you living ignoring God, keeping Him out of your life?

Wise, or foolish?

With that story Jesus finishes His teaching – and it has an impact on the crowds listening

### **By what right? The authority of Jesus. 7:28-29**

*Matthew 7: <sup>28</sup> And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, <sup>29</sup> for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.*

Jesus has taught differently to the official teachers, the scribes – who were always supporting their teaching and judgments by reference to other scribes

Jesus taught with authority. He expected people to believe and do what He said

And the crowds got it right.

Jesus teaches with self conscious authority.

Think of what we have just heard

He commands people to respond to His gospel preaching – ‘Repent’

He Pronounces a blessing on those persecuted for following Him – they are now in the same class as the prophets, God’s prophets 5:11-12

He puts His word alongside the command of God 5:21-22, 27-28. “You have heard it was said to those of old ‘You shall not murder. ...’ But I say to you ....”

He Pronounces the last judgment, determines who gets to enter the Kingdom of God 7:21, 23

Responding to him, HE says, makes the difference between a life that will count for eternity and one that is gone forever, wasted

That is a big claim to authority, claim to the authority of God

And it is an authority that Jesus will go on to demonstrate in His ministry

He will cast out demons with a word

Restore wholeness with a word or touch

When he is challenged about forgiving the sins of the paralytic He says

*Matthew 9: <sup>4</sup>But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? <sup>5</sup>For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk?’ <sup>6</sup>But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic—“Rise, pick up your bed and go home.” <sup>7</sup>And he rose and went home.*

In the gospel we see His claim to authority challenged by His enemies, and in the end provokes His crucifixion

For the religious authorities, their determination to put Him to death, is a rejection of that claim and His crucifixion the demonstration of its emptiness – a demonstration of a complete lack of authority, of His powerlessness

But then God raises Jesus from the dead. It is a vindication of His authority, and a revelation of its extent

*Matthew 28: <sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*

Jesus is revealed as having all authority – authority over you and I, authority to judge and forgive

And that means Jesus’ shocking words – that there are only two ways, and only two kinds of builder

Have authority

You and I are Hearing this morning the words of the one who will judge us at the last day

On that day your response, your answers to the questions HE is asking you

Will be revealed

And your eternity will be determined by those answers

That day will reveal which road you were on – the narrow and hard, or broad

Who you were listening to – Jesus or liars

Who you were trusting – Jesus or yourself

Whether you were wise because you listened and did, or foolish because you sat here – and then ignored Jesus, dismissed what He taught

Feel the weight of that – the words Jesus has spoken, that you have heard this morning, determine your eternity

### **Responding to Jesus**

And as you feel that seriousness

Don't lose the wonder of what you have heard–

In a world where all must die and face judgment Jesus says there is a way to life, eternal life

In a world where all achievements are vanity, a mist, lost in death, Jesus says there is an opportunity to build what will last

And there is time to change – can always change the road you are on

At every point of the broad road the narrow gate is always there and You can enter through it by repentance and faith in Jesus, saying Jesus speaks the truth, and I am going to stop being in charge of my own life and turn to follow Him

Stop trusting self – and start trusting Jesus

Start building on the solid foundation

You can do it today

Now maybe some of you are sensing the importance of what Jesus has been saying, of what you have been hearing

Not sure – don't know enough about Him, don't know about His resurrection, need time to think

Decide to find out more, to think more about what you have heard by getting to know more about Jesus. You can do that by reading a life of Jesus – and the Christianity explored course helps you do that – it is reading through a life of Jesus and asking questions about what you read

If you know it is serious, but you are not sure – make sure. Enrol in Christianity explored. Eternity is worth investing some time in.

But maybe some of you have heard what Jesus has said today and you want to start on that new way, the way to life

Recognise that up to now you have not been wise, you have been living foolishly, just going along with the crowd

Maybe even sitting there listening week by week – but not doing

Instead Ignoring and forgetting

But you are convicted that life is found in listening to Jesus and doing what He says

You want that life, not the destruction you know you deserve

Or perhaps you recognise that even though you have been around churches a while you have been trusting in your experiences and not been living Jesus way.

Over time you have allowed lust, or dishonesty, or pride – to take up residence in your heart

Or perhaps you know you have been listening to people whose fruit show they have been false prophets, let yourself been drawn away to desire other things – wealth, or power, or health, drawn away from the life of a follower of Jesus

If any of those describe you – act now

Repent – now

Confess your sin, ask for forgiveness, ask for the Lord to give you strength and grace to live His way

You can talk with God here

Leave space at end – for that

Terrible shame to hear, and be convicted, and not act

But perhaps these are familiar words that you have taken to heart over many years, and your feet continue on the narrow way

Hear your Saviour

Don't be unsettled by not being part of the majority – walking with the crowd was never the way to life

Be alert for liars

Keep your trust in Jesus and what He has done for you

Not in your Christian experience or on what in God's mercy you have been able to do in His service

Be like Paul, relying on Jesus' righteousness forget what is behind and press on for the goal [Phil. 3], the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, the day when He will transform our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body [Phil. 3:14, 21]

And Keep listening and doing – the great testing still to come – for us all

That is the wise life, the life in touch with reality, for Jesus has authority, all authority

Those who have built their life on His word – will not have laboured in vain