

# Sermon on the Mount

Message 12

## *Entering Jesus' Kingdom*

Matthew 7:13-29

### *The End*

Now we come to the end of Jesus' great sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. All along Jesus has been creating a vision, painting a picture of life in His Kingdom. He has described the qualities of His citizens – meek, merciful, peacemaking, hungry and thirsty for righteousness. His subjects obey God's law from the heart, not only on the surface. They ask, "What more can I do to please God," not "How little can I do and stay in the Kingdom?" The citizens of Jesus' Kingdom are genuinely pious. They pray, fast, and serve the poor with a pure heart, not for public acclaim. They are not focused on personal gain in this life, but on spiritual wealth. In this world their first priority is God's Kingdom, and they trust God to meet their daily needs. And last week saw that Jesus' citizens are wise, discerning people. They know how to help their friends out of sin. They know there are spiritual predators in this world. They know how to identify them, and they know to avoid them. All along there have been some, but few specific commands. Now we come to the heart of the matter for us. The key question all through our studies has been, "Does this sermon describe you? Do you look like you belong in this Kingdom?" Little has been said about how to get into this Kingdom. But now Jesus tells us how to enter His Kingdom.

### *The Two Gates*

When I was a child we often had to move our farm animals from one place to another. We would move the cows to a better pasture, the pigs to a bigger pen, the chickens to a laying house, or any of the above to the slaughterhouse. Sometimes we would drive the animals along a path, and other times we would load them onto a trailer or truck. In either case, the entrance to the path or the truck was narrow. Now it is difficult enough to coax an excited animal to go where you want, but it is much more difficult if the opening is narrow. No pig or cow is going to walk up onto the truck for the trip to animal heaven just because you want him to. The job is far easier if the opening is wide. So we would always construct temporary fences on either side of the narrow entrance which would diverge into a very broad opening. Then it was fairly easy to chase the animal into this funnel-like pen and up to the truck or into the narrow path.

We are like that, too, aren't we? When I am looking for a parking space, especially when I am in the van, I go for the nice, wide space. And why not? There is nothing wrong about reducing my risk of scraping your car as I wedge the big van into place. But Jesus says that if we take this approach to spiritual life, we are headed for destruction. In this passage He said, "Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." Why is this the case? Why should Jesus make it hard to get into His Kingdom?

The key is the gate. Jesus uses this metaphor for the means of getting into His Kingdom. But what does it mean? What is it that gets you in? If we move over to verse 21, Jesus says that you must do the will of His Father to enter the Kingdom. And in verse 24 He says we must hear and do His own sayings. So we see that the *sayings of Jesus* are the will of His Father, and these sayings are the gate. In other words, you can only get into Jesus Kingdom by hearing and acting upon Jesus' teaching. This is another way of saying you must believe the gospel.

The broad gate, then, is all the other messages of salvation, the false gospels you hear. There is only one true Savior, and only one true gospel. The path to real salvation is narrow. But there are a thousand false messiahs and false gospels. Some are easy to recognize. In Jesus' day there were the pagan deities and the mystery religions. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century Mohammed came as a messiah and introduced the false religion of

Islam. All the other religions of the world – Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, animism – all these pretend to offer salvation, but will fail. In the end they will destroy you. Less obvious are other false gospels such as communism, atheistic evolution, hedonism, feminism, and most other isms. Many isms have a profound truth in them – such as communism, which recognizes that society cannot function well with huge disparities of wealth. The problem is that these ideologies become idols. This happens also with capitalism. Although a free market is a biblical concept, any economic system can replace God as the object of worship. These ideologies pretend to offer what only God can deliver – a Kingdom of peace and virtue. Jesus says not only will they fail, they will destroy you in the process.

If this is the case, if these false gospels will kill you, why do so many people fall for them? Because it is so easy to go that way. These gospels are all around us. Popular culture batters you with a constant message of salvation. Buy this car to get a sexy girl, use that make-up to get a hunky guy, go to Lehigh to get a prosperous career, buy a Dell computer to get better grades, get your clothes at Old Navy to be in the cool crowd, smoke a cigar like James Bond to be super cool, work out at the gym to get eye-popping fit like Charlize Theron – hour by hour you are told over and over how to be saved from your miserable life, the failure that you are presently. Life is further complicated by the fact that many of these actions are good in themselves. Perhaps it *is* best to get a Dell computer, Old Navy clothes, and to work out at the gym. At least we can say there is nothing inherently wrong with these things. The problem is not in these things themselves, but their link to salvation. You are not merely being sold some products – you are being sold a religion, a specific view of life and a clear path to salvation. You are urged to pursue this life because these things, and *only* these things, will make you the wonderful, glowing success you desire to be – you deserve to be, you *ought* to be.

You probably resist this gospel, don't you? You worship Jesus, not wealth, or your body, or someone else's body, or popularity. So how long does this go on? For one hour? Or two? Maybe a whole day? But in the end you give in. We all do. We are immersed in these false gospels so thoroughly, and they appeal to our own sin nature so completely – we eventually fall for them. It is only by God's grace we return to the true gospel. Have you cultivated a habit of repentance when you fall for these idols? Are you developing a sensitivity to your weaknesses for them? Are you learning to see them coming and resist? Or do you just fall time after time?

Popular culture offers a broad path to destruction, but a secular university does as well. This is not as obvious in calculus class, but many of the humanities courses offer their own gospel. The most prevalent today is the false gospel of tolerance. You are told that the path to peace and prosperity is by pretending that there is no real right and wrong, and by treating all opinions as correct. This is so persuasively argued it is difficult for many people, even Christians, to see the error of this teaching. You are being asked to think that fornication and sexual perversions are OK, but tolerance is not allowed for theft and murder. Well, I am glad we do not tolerate theft and murder, but it is inconsistent to begin by demanding universal tolerance, then sneak in one's own prejudices. The secular doctrine of tolerance is a lie and destructive. It destroys real thought, society at large, and the individual who entrusts his life to it. What society needs is the Christian gospel of real love for your fellow man, and what *you* need is Jesus Christ Himself.

The broad gate is the overwhelming number of false paths to life which end up killing you. The narrow gate is the one path which really delivers. Those who follow it do not merely get a *better* life – they get life itself. This path is the gospel Jesus preached, and it is the message of salvation. It is the only message of salvation. All others are false. That is why this gate is narrow. Only one way leads to God. But if this path leads to God, why should it be difficult? Is God a sadist, to torment us as we seek to be saved?

There are several reasons why the narrow gate is difficult. The first and most obvious is that it is narrow. Just as it was very difficult to get those animals through a narrow opening, so it is difficult to stay

on the narrow path when there are so many wider paths before us. We keep drifting into the wrong road. But the narrow path is difficult for other reasons as well. It is difficult to put God's Kingdom first when our natural impulse is to put ourselves first. We see other people getting great jobs, acquiring wealth, and getting ahead in the world – and we feel left out. God's Kingdom and righteousness just do not have the glamor and excitement of the world's charms. So we are constantly tempted to put ourselves first. Finally, Jesus cautioned us early in His sermon that those in His Kingdom will be persecuted. He said, "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake." It is not easy to be reviled and persecuted, even if Jesus *does* say it is blessed.

If you would join Jesus' Kingdom you have to make a choice. There are two paths before you. You can take the wide, easy road – or the narrow, difficult one. Only one leads into Jesus' Kingdom. You can say you are following Jesus by following the broad road, but you are lying. The wide road is pleasant and pleasurable, but it will never lead you into Jesus' Kingdom. It *will* lead to destruction. Only the narrow road will lead you into Jesus' Kingdom. It is difficult, but it is the only way to life. So that is your choice – life or death. You decide which to pursue.

### ***The Imposters***

Some people refuse to make a definite choice. They cannot bear the narrow road, but they cannot accept the consequences of the broad road. These are the people who cry, "Lord, Lord," but do not obey the Lord. They are imposters, frauds. What would become of them in the army? What happens to a man who claims to be a soldier, but refuses to obey orders? Such a person is not tolerated for a minute. He is thrown out! Even in business this is the case. An employee who refuses to do his job soon will have no job. Jesus warns us not to mess with Him. Do not claim to follow Him and then refuse to do what He says. He will throw you out of His Kingdom! Such people are believers who do not believe, followers who do not follow, disciples who will not learn. They are despicable, and their destruction is just.

Several years ago Ruth put the boys in the car and drove over to Allentown and watched one of the biggest and newest office buildings blow up. No, it was not terrorists! The owners of the building hired a demolitions team to blow up the Corporate Plaza. A few nights before, everyone had gone home as usual, but by morning Corporate Plaza was a useless hunk. A huge sinkhole opened up underneath one side, and the whole building fractured. The tenants were able to get in long enough to retrieve their files and some small equipment, but building was too dangerous to be allowed to stand. The builders had been hasty and had failed to lay a solid foundation, so all their work was lost. A few years later Allentown planned to build a big hockey rink where the old Hess's department store had stood, but this time they learned their lesson. After the foundation was excavated but before the footer was poured, extensive tests were conducted – and guess what? The subsoil was too unstable to support a structure as massive as a hockey rink. It would have taken thousands of tons of concrete to stabilize the soil, so the hockey rink was abandoned. So right here is our own backyard we have a vivid reminder of Jesus' principle. You can go to Allentown to this day and see the empty lot where the proud Corporate Plaza used to be. Likewise you can examine the lives of Enron executives, the WorldCom executives, and many others who built successful lives without a strong foundation. For several years or decades they looked great, but eventually they came crashing down.

Many people look at this story and see a parable with a moral – you must build your life on sound principles if you wish to succeed. This is true as far as it goes, but it really misses the point. Jesus told this story to drive home that *He* must be the foundation of your life. You must not only *hear* His words – you must *do* them. If you do, you will have a solid life. If you do not, your life will be a disaster. You can go for a long time telling everyone you are in Jesus' Kingdom while really following the broad path. You can live as a hypocrite, enjoying the rich rewards of this world. But one day you will melt down, and like the house built on sand, like the Enron debacle, it will be a spectacular, public display. When the dust clears and for years after, mothers will tell their daughters, "Look at her. She started life so well. She was a member of the

RUF group in college. She even taught Sunday School. But look at the wreck of her life. Don't you be like her." Fathers will say to their sons, "Look at him. He had everything going for him. He led a mission trip. He witnessed to his neighbors. But all along he was a fraud. Don't you follow his example." You will be famous! Is this the sort of fame you want?

### ***The Gospel of Works***

The Sermon on the Mount is a picture of the Kingdom Jesus came to establish. All along the question to each of us has been, "Do you fit into this picture? Does this sermon describe your life?" Who are you, the wise man or the foolish man? Do you hear Jesus' words and obey? Or do you hear Jesus' words and live the way you want? Tonight you have heard Jesus' words, and you are responsible to obey what you have heard. Will you? Will you put His Kingdom before all else? Will you keep His law? Will you worship Him alone? Will you everyday? Will you over Christmas break? Life, and a place with Jesus in His Kingdom are before you. But Jesus warns you that destruction will follow refusal to obey.

Does this sound like the gospel? Isn't the gospel the message of salvation for sinners – that Jesus came to do for us what we could not do for ourselves, that God accepts us and forgives us when we believe in Jesus? How, then, does Jesus say we must do good works to get into His Kingdom?

At one point the Jews came to Jesus and asked Him what work they must do to please God. Jesus replied that the work of God is to believe Him whom God had sent (John 6:29). You see, the reason so many people do not do the things Jesus says is that they do not believe in Him. They hear His words and they are impressed. They appreciate the peaceful vision of the Sermon on the Mount. They admire His high moral character. But essentially they do not believe Him. When Jesus says, "Obey me or you will be destroyed," they say, "Nah – I don't buy it. I can live a good life without tying myself down with all those restrictions." You see, they *say* they admire Jesus, but their actions show they think *He* is a fraud. When we get to the center of their lives, they do not believe in Jesus.

Implicit in this whole sermon is the call to believe in Jesus. Believe His words. Trust his message. The proof that you *do* believe Him will be your actions. Your deeds are not the admission fee of the Kingdom, but the proof that you have paid the admission fee. Your actions are the fruit of faith. When you believe in Jesus your life will totally change. And you know what your life will look like then? More and more, it will look like the Sermon on the Mount. But this will not come by your own effort. The fruit of faith, your obedience that follows believing – this also is the result of Jesus' work in you. Jesus promises to be right there with you, helping you to obey Him. In some mysterious way, even as you choose to obey Him, He enables you to choose obedience. This does not rob you of the significance of your choice – it comforts you and assures you of the success of your choice. If you long for Jesus' Kingdom, if you enter the narrow gate, if you desire to obey His words – Jesus makes this promise. No matter how narrow the path, no matter how tough the obedience, no matter how fierce the persecution, He will sustain you. He will keep you on the path, He will keep you in His Kingdom, He will preserve you through persecution.

### ***Conclusion***

The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' vivid picture of the wonderful Kingdom He came to establish. He did what He came to do. Jesus began His Kingdom with the few disciples who heard His voice and obeyed His words. When He rose from the dead, He ascended to His throne in heaven and rules His Kingdom from there. For 2,000 years His Kingdom has been growing, and one day it will be the only Kingdom on this earth. It is a wonderful vision. Then there will be peace and prosperity everywhere. Evil will be banished for good, sin will be eliminated, injustice will be forgotten, pain and suffering will be gone forever. All that will remain will be Jesus and His followers. Mankind will live in perfect harmony. All this is yours for the asking. Do not settle for some shabby earthly substitute. Do not throw your life away for trivial trinkets. Go for the gold. Get on that narrow path. Cry out to Christ to point you there and keep you

there. Become a citizen of the Kingdom that counts for eternity. Amen.

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