

Beware

Introduction. Throughout His mountain message Jesus has set forth the standards of God. In concise terms He not only shows us what the kingdom is like, but also describes the nature and character of those who would be its citizens.

With the start of Matthew 7:13 Jesus brings us to a critical decision. The “two ways” was a common teaching method in Judaism and Greco-Roman philosophy. The truths in this sermon are not just to be admired and praised, but applied and practiced. He has not suggested a few minor adjustments or advised us to be more “religious.” His call is for a radical transformation. Jesus presses kingdom citizens to choose a practical response that reveals itself in visible conduct. As Jesus comes to His “invitation,” no one should be unsure of what He has said or unaware of what is required. The only question left to answer is, “Will I do it?” And to aid us Jesus provides three important warnings.

I. Beware Of Alternate Paths (vv. 13-14)

- A. Can you think of two verses easier to understand? Yet their significance is profound. Today we typically have a variety of choices, but Jesus warns that kingdom living does not provide the same luxury. Instead, there are just two gates, two roads, two crowds, and two destinations. And Jesus commands us to choose (cp. Joshua 24:13-15; 1 Kings 18:21). The blessing of eternal life is not experienced without a determined decision and a diligent pursuit. “Strive” is a conscious, purposeful, and intense effort (Philippians 1:27; 3:14; Colossians 1:29; cp. 1 Corinthians 9:25; 1 Timothy 6:12). No one has ever stumbled into the kingdom or wandered through the narrow gate by accident.
- B. It seems best to regard the gate as something entered in this life as one begins the path of discipleship. The “narrow” gate is clearly restrictive and does not permit entrance to what Jesus prohibits. The “wide” or spacious gate seems far more inviting; it connotes a lack of striving, of work. The “broad” road is spacious and accommodates the crowd and their baggage, but it leads to destruction (Romans 7:11, 13; 1 Timothy 6:9). This is not extinction or annihilation, but the complete loss of well-being. The other road is “narrow” and restricting, because it is the way of persecution and opposition (John 15:19-20; 16:2, 22, 33).
- C. No passage attacks the easy-believism of our time with greater fervor. True discipleship is a minority religion (Luke 12:32, “little [micro] flock”; Matthew 22:14). There are not a variety of roads, all leading to Heaven; no salvation by casual acceptance; no promises of fun and entertainment; no discussions of convenient or comfortable living. His sharp words are not intended to threaten or intimidate, but to compel us to make the right choice. But even when the correct choice is made, there are still obstacles to be overcome.

II. Beware Of Disguised Deceivers (vv. 15-20)

- A. As long as God has had true prophets, Satan has had false ones (Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 18:20, 22; Mark 13:22; 2 Peter 2:1; 2 John 7). There will be those who appear in sheep’s clothing, yet who are ravenous wolves. They use correct terminology, possess great knowledge, appear biblical, and carry an air of sincerity. These are not ignorant Christians who have misunderstood, but

- deceivers who are deliberate in disguise and destructive in intent. Because of their “costume” they do not attract immediate attention or arouse initial suspicion.
- B. There has always been a large market for false prophets, because most people do not want to hear the truth. They prefer to hear what is pleasant and flattering, even if it is false and dangerous, over what is unpleasant and unflattering, even if it is true and helpful (Jeremiah 5:30-31).
 - C. How can these deceivers be discovered? By close inspection and clear thinking. Jesus changes metaphors from sheep and wolves — to trees and fruit. Twice He reminds us, “You will know them by their fruits” (v. 15, 20). Because the fruit is genuine, naive persons might conclude that the tree itself also has to be genuine. Though the foliage may appear the same, the fruit produced is radically different. Jesus urges us to use sound appraisals and objective evaluations of their teaching and examine the conduct of their life (Hebrews 5:14).

III. Beware Of False Claims (vv. 21-23)

- A. Having discussed the importance of fruit, Jesus now gets even more personal. After warning us about false prophets, the Lord now warns men about themselves. These verses have to be some of the most sobering words ever spoken. Jesus destroys any legitimacy of nominal faithfulness (Romans 2:13, 26; 6:17; 2 Corinthians 8:11; 1 John 2:17). Not all who call Him “Lord” really believe it. Not everyone who is fervent is right with God. Profession of Christ and practice of lawlessness are totally incompatible. These are people whose lips move, but whose life does not follow. While no man enters the kingdom solely because of obedience, Jesus declares it is likewise true that no man enters who refuses it.
- B. Jesus cautions us about self-deception. This man addresses the Judge with respect and sincerity. His spiritual resume is impressive. He assumes he is eternally secure. Yet the verdict he expects and the one he receives is very different (Titus 1:16). His “reverence” is declared to be worthless. He may have had God’s name in his mouth, but rebellion was in his heart. He never considered God would find fault or that he would receive anything other than a divine “welcome” (cp. Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30, 41; Revelation 20:11-15). Jesus asserts those recognized by the Judge are the ones who fix their heart on doing His will (John 8:31; Hebrews 3:14; 10:38-39; 1 John 2:19). God’s will may not be the perfection of the true Christian’s life, but it is the direction of it.

Conclusion. As Jesus extends the “invitation,” He warns His hearers that kingdom living is not about choosing any path, heeding any teacher, or uttering any claim. Instead it demands we consistently walk on the narrow way, reject the false, and objectively evaluate our own life. Like His first century hearers, we must answer this simple question: “Will I do it?”

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