

The Sermon on the Mount, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 13: Two Roads, Two Trees, Two Builders

Matthew 7:13-29

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this climactic passage drives the entire Sermon to a decision and teaches that genuine discipleship is marked by actually doing the will of the Father, not merely professing faith or performing religious works. Through three images, the two gates, the two trees, and the two builders, Jesus presents discipleship as a stark, exclusive choice with eternal consequences and no neutral ground. The recurring and sobering theme is that one can be very near the kingdom, full of religious words and even mighty works, and still be outside it. The dividing line is a living, obedient faith that hears Christ's words and builds on them.

Several truths central to our heritage surface here and should be taught clearly. The narrow way warns against the assumption that the majority is safe and that an easy, undemanding religion saves. The test of fruit teaches discernment of true and false teaching and true and false profession. The solemn I never knew you exposes the emptiness of a faith that says Lord, Lord without obedience, refuting any notion that mere profession, or impressive spiritual activity, secures salvation apart from doing the Father's will. And the two builders make obedient response to Christ's words the foundation that determines whether a life stands or falls in the final storm of judgment.

Because this is the last lesson, it is the natural place to gather up the whole Sermon and press for response. The formational aim is to move students from admiring Jesus' teaching to building their lives on it, and to make plain how a person actually comes to Christ and begins to build: by hearing the gospel, believing in Jesus as Lord and Christ, repenting, confessing him, and being baptized into him for the forgiveness of sins, then walking in lifelong, faithful obedience. Ground the call in the authority of Christ the King, on which the Sermon ends, and in the grace that makes obedient discipleship possible. Keep the tone urgent but hopeful; this is a summons to decision, offered by a Savior who longs for all to choose the narrow road that leads to life.

Question 1

Student Question:

Jesus contrasts the wide gate and easy road that lead to destruction with the narrow gate and hard road that lead to life, noting that "those who find it are few" (v. 13-14). What does this teach us about the nature of true discipleship, and why is the way to life described as narrow and difficult rather than broad and easy?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the two gates and two roads, and resist the temptation to soften the starkness. Jesus presents a binary: a wide gate and easy road leading to destruction, and a narrow gate and hard road leading to life. There is no third way, no broad-yet-safe middle path. Every person is on one road or the other, headed toward one destination or the other.

Teach why the way to life is narrow and hard. It is narrow because it is defined; entering it means coming to God on his terms, through Christ, in the obedient faith the whole Sermon describes, not on our own preferred terms. It is hard because the life Jesus has been describing, poverty of spirit, purity, enemy-love, kingdom-first living, cuts against the grain of our fallen nature and the surrounding culture. Discipleship is costly; Jesus never pretended otherwise (Luke 14:25–33).

Address the sobering note that those who find the narrow way are few. Jesus dismantles the comforting assumption that the crowd is safe, that whatever most people are doing must be acceptable. The popularity of a road tells us nothing about its destination; indeed, here the crowded road is the deadly one. This is a needed warning in any age that equates majority approval with rightness.

Balance the difficulty with the destination, lest students hear only burden. The narrow road is hard, but it leads to life; the easy road is comfortable, but it leads to destruction. The cost of discipleship is real, but it is the cost of the road that actually arrives somewhere worth arriving. Jesus is not hiding the difficulty; he is being honest about it, precisely because he is inviting us to the way that leads to life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Discipleship as a stark choice between two roads with no neutral ground
- The narrow way as defined (Christ's terms) and difficult (against our nature and culture)
- The cost of discipleship taught honestly (Luke 14:25–33)
- The warning against assuming the crowd is safe
- The hard road leading to life, the easy road to destruction

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the way to life described as narrow and hard rather than broad and easy?
- Why does Jesus warn that the crowded, popular road is the dangerous one?
- How does the destination of each road put its difficulty in perspective?

Question 2

Student Question:

Be honest about where you tend to prefer the wide, easy road, choosing what is popular, comfortable, or undemanding over the narrow way of following Christ. Where is Jesus calling you to choose the harder, narrower path?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question asks students to locate where they prefer the wide, easy road, choosing the popular, comfortable, or undemanding over the narrow way. The preference is universal and usually operates by default; we drift toward ease unless we deliberately choose otherwise. The question invites attention to that drift.

Help students identify specific arenas of the easy-road temptation: going along with the crowd rather than standing for Christ, choosing comfort over costly obedience, avoiding the harder path of forgiveness, generosity, purity, or witness that the Sermon has pressed. The narrow road is chosen in concrete decisions, not in the abstract.

Move toward one deliberate choice of the harder, narrower path this week. The aim is not generalized resolve but a specific point where they will choose obedience over ease, the way of Christ over the way of the crowd. Each such choice is a step further onto the narrow road that leads to life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Locating the default drift toward the easy road
- Specific arenas of the easy-road temptation
- The narrow road chosen in concrete decisions
- One deliberate choice of the harder path

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you tend to prefer the wide, easy road?
- In what specific decision is Jesus calling you to the narrower path?
- What would choosing that harder path look like this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus warns of false prophets in “sheep’s clothing” and says, “You will recognize them by their fruits” (v. 15–20). How does Jesus teach us to discern true from false, and why is the fruit of a life a more reliable test than impressive words or appearances?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Move to the test of fruit, which Jesus gives as the way to discern false prophets who come disguised as sheep. The principle is that a tree is known by its fruit; what a life and a teaching actually produce, over time, reveals their true nature. Appearances can be managed, but fruit eventually tells the truth.

Teach the two applications of this test. First, discerning false teachers: we evaluate those who claim to speak for God not by their charisma, popularity, or impressive claims, but by the fruit of their teaching and their lives, measured against the standard of Scripture (compare Acts 17:11; 1 John 4:1). This is vital protection for the church in every age, including ours, against the false prophets Jesus says will come.

Second, examining the genuineness of any profession, including our own. A living faith bears the fruit of a changed character and obedient life; the fruit of the Spirit grows where the Spirit dwells (Galatians 5:22–23). This is not salvation by works but the recognition that genuine faith inevitably produces fruit, just as a living tree inevitably bears according to its kind. A profession that produces no fruit over time is suspect.

Guard the balance. Fruit takes time to appear and discern; this is not a license for hasty, censorious judgment of others (which the previous lesson warned against), nor for anxious self-condemnation over every imperfection. It is a call for patient, honest evaluation, of teaching, of teachers, and of our own lives, by the steady evidence of fruit rather than by impressive but possibly hollow appearances.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A tree known by its fruit: what a life and teaching actually produce over time
- Discerning false teachers by their fruit, measured against Scripture (Acts 17:11; 1 John 4:1)
- Genuine faith inevitably bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23)
- Fruit as evidence of, not the means of earning, genuine faith
- Patient, honest evaluation rather than hasty judgment or anxious self-condemnation

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the fruit of a life a more reliable test than impressive words?
- How do we use the fruit test to discern true from false teaching?
- How is fruit the evidence of genuine faith without being the means of earning salvation?

Question 4

Student Question:

Consider the “fruit” your own life is producing. If others judged the reality of your faith not by your words but by the fruit of your character and conduct, what would they conclude, and what does that tell you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the fruit test inward, asking what others would conclude about the reality of the student’s faith if they judged by fruit rather than words. It is a searching but clarifying

question, because our fruit is more visible to others than our private professions and often more honest than our self-assessment.

Help students examine the actual fruit of their character and conduct: the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control), the pattern of their relationships, the direction of their lives. The question is not whether they are perfect but whether genuine fruit is growing.

Move the examination toward hope and growth, not despair. Where fruit is thin, the answer is not to manufacture it by willpower but to abide more deeply in Christ, the vine, from whom all real fruit comes (John 15:4–5). Encourage students to bring their honest self-assessment to God and to seek deeper communion with Christ as the source of the fruit they long to bear.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Turning the fruit test honestly inward
- Examining the fruit of the Spirit in our character and conduct
- Fruit as more honest than self-assessment
- Abiding in Christ as the source of real fruit (John 15:4–5)

Discussion Prompts

- If others judged your faith by its fruit rather than your words, what would they conclude?
- What fruit is genuinely growing in your life, and what is thin?
- How does abiding in Christ produce the fruit you long to bear?

Question 5

Student Question:

Jesus says, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father” (v. 21). What does this teach about the difference between merely professing Christ and genuinely belonging to him, and why is doing the Father’s will the true mark of a disciple?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Center on Jesus’ piercing statement: not everyone who says Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom, but the one who does the will of my Father. This is one of the clearest refutations in all of Scripture of the idea that a verbal profession alone secures salvation. Saying the right words, even sincerely calling Jesus Lord, is not the same as belonging to him. The mark of a true disciple is doing the Father’s will.

Teach the relationship between profession and obedience without falling into either error. We are not saved by accumulating good works as a wage; salvation is God’s gift received through faith. But the faith that receives it is a living, obedient faith, never a mere verbal claim. To call

Jesus Lord while refusing to do what he says is a contradiction in terms; as Jesus asks elsewhere, why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do what I tell you (Luke 6:46)? Genuine faith submits to Christ's lordship in actual obedience.

Connect this to the whole thrust of the Sermon and of the New Testament. From the beginning Jesus has insisted on a righteousness that reaches the heart and shows itself in life. James will later say that faith without works is dead (James 2:17). This is not works-righteousness; it is the recognition that real faith and real obedience cannot be separated. The doer of the Father's will is not earning entrance but demonstrating the genuineness of saving faith.

Apply this against the cultural form of cheap religion, which assumes that a one-time profession, a prayer, or a label settles one's eternal standing regardless of how one then lives. Jesus dismantles that assumption here. The question is not merely whether we once said the right words but whether we are, in ongoing reality, doing the will of the Father as those who belong to Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Verbal profession alone as insufficient for salvation (v. 21)
- Saving faith as a living, obedient faith that submits to Christ's lordship (Luke 6:46)
- Doing the Father's will as the demonstration, not the wage, of genuine faith (James 2:17)
- The inseparability of real faith and real obedience
- The refutation of cheap religion that rests on a one-time profession or label

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between professing Christ and genuinely belonging to him?
- Why is doing the Father's will the true mark of a disciple?
- How does this refute the idea that a one-time profession settles everything?

Question 6

Student Question:

Where might there be a gap in your own life between what you profess with your lips and what you actually do, calling Jesus "Lord" while withholding obedience in some specific area? What would closing that gap require?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question asks students to find the gap between what they profess and what they actually do, the specific area where they call Jesus Lord while withholding obedience. Almost everyone has such a gap; the value of the question is in locating the particular one rather than confessing inconsistency in general.

Help students search honestly across the territory the Sermon has covered: anger and reconciliation, purity, honesty, enemy-love, money, anxiety, judging others. Often the gap is precisely where one of these lessons pressed and we quietly declined to obey. The Sermon itself has been mapping the places where our profession and practice may diverge.

Move toward closing one gap concretely. Ask what obedience would actually require in that specific area, and encourage one definite step of submission this week. The aim is to move from calling Jesus Lord to letting him be Lord in the very place we have been holding back.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Locating the specific gap between profession and practice
- Searching the territory the Sermon has covered for the gap
- Identifying what obedience would actually require
- One definite step of submission in the area held back

Discussion Prompts

- Where is there a gap between what you profess and what you do?
- In what specific area are you calling Jesus Lord while withholding obedience?
- What would closing that gap require this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

To some who prophesied and did mighty works in his name, Jesus will say, “I never knew you; depart from me” (v. 22–23). How can people be so active in religious work and still not be known by Christ, and what does this reveal about what truly matters to him, a real relationship of obedient faith rather than impressive activity?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Handle the most sobering words in the Sermon with care: many will say on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, cast out demons, do many mighty works? And Jesus will declare, I never knew you; depart from me. These are people of intense religious activity, even apparently supernatural activity, who are nonetheless shut out. The passage demands that we ask what they lacked.

Teach what the decisive phrase reveals: I never knew you. The issue is relationship, a real, mutual knowing between Christ and the disciple, expressed in a life of obedience to the Father's will (which Jesus has just named in verse 21). These people had activity in Jesus' name but not a true relationship with him marked by obedient faith. They were workers of lawlessness, religious in deed but not submitted in heart and life.

Press the searching application: it is possible to be busy in religious work and still not be known by Christ. Activity is not the same as relationship; using Jesus' name is not the same as belonging to him. This should humble any of us tempted to rest our assurance on our service, our roles, our accomplishments in the church, rather than on a living relationship of obedient faith with Christ himself.

Bring the comfort that accompanies the warning, rightly understood. The point is not to make faithful believers doubt whether Christ knows them, but to expose the emptiness of activity divorced from real discipleship. Those who truly know Christ, who have come to him in obedient faith and walk in his will, are known by him; he is the good shepherd who knows his sheep (John 10:14, 27). The warning drives us not to despair but to ensure that our religion is relationship, our profession is obedience, and our foundation is Christ himself.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Intense religious activity coexisting with being unknown by Christ (v. 22-23)
- "I never knew you" locating the issue in real relationship, not activity
- Doing the Father's will as the mark of those truly known by Christ
- The danger of resting assurance on service and accomplishment
- The comfort that Christ truly knows his obedient sheep (John 10:14, 27)

Discussion Prompts

- How can people be so active in religious work and still not be known by Christ?
- What does 'I never knew you' reveal about what truly matters to Jesus?
- Where might you be tempted to rest your assurance on activity rather than relationship?

Question 8

Student Question:

Examine whether your confidence before God rests on religious activity and accomplishments or on genuinely knowing and being known by Christ. What is the difference, and where does your assurance actually lie?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question asks students to examine the actual basis of their confidence before God, whether it rests on religious activity and accomplishments or on genuinely knowing and being known by Christ. It is a clarifying question, because many sincere believers have quietly built their assurance on the wrong foundation.

Help students distinguish the two foundations honestly. Assurance built on activity (attendance, service, roles, accomplishments) is fragile and ultimately misplaced, as the previous verses show; such things can exist without a true relationship. Assurance built on knowing and being

known by Christ, on a living, obedient relationship with him grounded in his grace, is secure because it rests on him.

Move toward grounding assurance rightly. Encourage students whose confidence has rested on activity to shift it to Christ himself, to the relationship of obedient faith into which the gospel brings us. True assurance comes not from totaling our religious works but from belonging to Christ, walking with him, and resting in what he has done, evidenced by a life that does the Father's will.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Examining the true basis of our confidence before God
- The fragility of assurance built on activity and accomplishment
- Assurance grounded in knowing and being known by Christ
- Resting confidence on Christ and his grace, evidenced by obedience

Discussion Prompts

- Does your confidence before God rest on activity or on knowing Christ?
- What is the difference between the two foundations?
- Where does your assurance actually lie, and where should it lie?

Question 9

Student Question:

Jesus closes with the two builders, where the difference is not whether they heard his words but whether they did them, and the storm reveals the foundation of each (v. 24–27). Having now walked through the whole Sermon on the Mount, what does it mean to build your life on the rock of obedience to Christ, and how does a person actually come to him and begin building, hearing his word, believing, repenting, confessing him, and being baptized into him, then walking in faithful obedience? Connect this response to the whole call of the Sermon.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal and pastoral climax not only of the lesson but of the whole study, and you should give it your fullest care, for it gathers up everything. Begin with the decisive point of the two builders: both men heard the same words of Jesus. The difference between them was not hearing but doing. The wise man built on rock by hearing and doing Christ's words; the foolish man built on sand by hearing and not doing. The whole Sermon comes down to this: will you do what you have heard?

Teach the meaning of the storm. Both houses faced the same flood and wind; the storm did not discriminate. But it revealed what each foundation truly was. The storm represents the testing of life and, ultimately, the judgment of God, before which every life will finally stand. A life built

on obedient faith in Christ stands; a life built on anything else, including admiration of Jesus' teaching without obedience to it, falls, and great is the fall of it. The foundation is invisible until the storm, but the storm is certain.

Now make plain how a person actually comes to Christ and begins to build on the rock, for this is the natural and necessary application of the whole study. To build on the rock is to respond to Christ with the obedience of faith. The New Testament lays out how that response begins: hearing the gospel of the crucified and risen Lord (Romans 10:17), believing in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (John 8:24), repenting of sin (Acts 17:30; Acts 2:38), confessing him before others (Romans 10:9–10), and being baptized into him for the forgiveness of sins, buried with him and raised to walk in newness of life (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:27). This is not earning salvation; it is the God-appointed way of coming to Christ, the obedient faith by which we begin to build our house on the rock.

Then teach that building on the rock is a lifelong work, not only a beginning. The wise builder does not lay a foundation and wander off; he builds his whole house on it. So the obedient faith that brings us to Christ continues as a life of faithful discipleship, doing the Father's will day by day, remaining faithful to the end (Matthew 7:21; Hebrews 3:14). The whole Sermon describes the shape of that ongoing building, the character and conduct of those who are building their lives on Christ the rock.

Close by holding together the seriousness and the grace, for both are here. The seriousness: this is a matter of two destinies, a house that stands and a house that falls, and the call to decision is urgent and unavoidable. The grace: the King who calls us to build on his words is the same Savior who died and rose to make us his own, who supplies by his Spirit the very obedience he requires, and who longs for all to come to him and build on the rock. Send your students out not merely having admired the Sermon but resolved to do it, having come or recommitting to come to Christ in obedient faith, and building, brick by faithful brick, a life that will stand when the storm comes.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between the builders as doing, not merely hearing, Christ's words (v. 24–27)
- The storm as the testing of life and the judgment of God that reveals every foundation
- Coming to Christ through obedient faith: hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, being baptized into him (Romans 10:17; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:27)
- Building on the rock as lifelong faithful discipleship, not only a beginning (Matthew 7:21; Hebrews 3:14)
- Holding together the urgency of decision and the grace of the King who supplies what he requires

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the difference between the two builders doing rather than hearing?

- According to the New Testament, how does a person come to Christ and begin building on the rock?
- How is building on the rock both a beginning and a lifelong work?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over the entire Sermon on the Mount, not just this lesson. The crowds were astonished because Jesus taught with authority (v. 28–29). Where has this study most pressed on your heart over these thirteen lessons, and what is the one most important way you sense the King calling you to build your life on his words from here forward?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This final capstone looks back over the entire study, not only this lesson, and asks where the Sermon has most pressed on the student's heart across all thirteen lessons, and the one most important way the King is calling them to build their life on his words from here forward. It is the climactic application of the whole journey.

Help students survey the territory they have traveled: the blessed life, salt and light, the heart-deep righteousness, anger and reconciliation, purity, marriage, honest speech, enemy-love, secret devotion, money, anxiety, judging, and now decision. Encourage them to discern the one place the Spirit has pressed most insistently, the recurring conviction, the area they have most resisted, the change they most need.

Then press for one most important step of building, and note the authority on which it rests. Jesus ends the Sermon with the crowds astonished at his authority, and that authority is the final ground of the call. These are the words of the King; our response is not optional admiration but obedient building. Send your students out with one clear, weighty resolve, and with the assurance that the King who taught with authority is the Savior who supplies the grace to obey, and who will keep the house that is built on him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Surveying the whole Sermon for the place of deepest conviction
- Discerning the one most important step of obedient building
- The authority of Christ the King as the ground of the call (v. 28–29)
- Going out resolved to do the Sermon, not merely to admire it, in the King's strength

Discussion Prompts

- Across all thirteen lessons, where has this study pressed on your heart most?
- What is the one most important way the King is calling you to build on his words?
- How does the authority of Christ change the way you respond to all you have heard?