

The Sermon on the Mount

Lesson 13: Two Roads, Two Trees, Two Builders -- Matthew 7:13-29

Every great sermon must finally come to a decision, and so does this one. For three chapters Jesus has been describing a different kind of life, the life of the blessed, the salt and light, the heart-deep righteousness that loves enemies and trusts the Father and treats others as it would be treated. Now, as he reaches the end, he stops describing and starts pleading. He sets before his hearers a series of stark, unavoidable choices and asks the only question that finally matters: having heard all this, what will you do?

He offers three images, and each one comes down to two options with no third. There are two gates and two roads: a wide, easy gate opening onto a broad road that leads to destruction, and a narrow, hard gate opening onto a difficult road that leads to life. There are two kinds of trees, known by their fruit, the good tree bearing good fruit and the diseased tree bearing bad, with no neutral ground between them. And there are two builders who hear the very same words, one who builds his house on rock and one who builds on sand, indistinguishable until the storm comes and reveals what each was standing on all along.

Running through all three images is a truth that should sober us: it is possible to be very close to the kingdom and still be outside it. The wide road is crowded; the narrow one is found by few. There are trees that look alive but bear bad fruit, and false prophets who come in sheep's clothing. Most piercing of all, there are people who call Jesus "Lord, Lord," who prophesy and do mighty works in his name, to whom he will say, "I never knew you; depart from me." The dividing line is not religious words or impressive deeds but actually doing the will of the Father, building one's life on the rock of obedience to Christ.

And when Jesus finishes, the crowds are astonished, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as their scribes. That is the final note of the whole Sermon, and it is the note on which we must end too. These are not the suggestions of a religious teacher to be weighed and filed away. They are the words of the King, and our eternal destiny hangs on what we do with them. Before you read another line, understand that this lesson is not asking you to admire Jesus' teaching. It is asking you to build your house on it. Two roads lie before you. Two foundations. The choice, and the storm, are coming for us all.

Group Discussion: Jesus ends his great sermon with three pictures, two gates, two trees, two builders, each forcing a choice with no middle ground. Why do you think Jesus ends not with comfort but with such a stark call to decision, and what does it mean that someone can be very near the kingdom and still be outside it?

Personal Reflection: Jesus says the difference between the wise and foolish builder is not hearing his words but doing them. Where in your life have you been hearing Jesus' teaching

without actually building on it, and what would it mean to move from admiring his words to obeying them?

Read Matthew 7:13–29

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?

6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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.
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Reflect on these passages: Luke 6:46–49, Luke’s account of the two builders and the question, “Why do you call me Lord and not do what I tell you?”; James 1:22–25, being doers of the word and not hearers only; Galatians 5:22–24, the fruit of the Spirit as the mark of a life belonging to Christ; Romans 6:3–4, being baptized into Christ and raised to walk in newness of life; Matthew 25:31–46, the King separating people by the fruit of their lives.