

**Entrance into the Kingdom of God
And the Validity of Contemporary Judaism:
Jesus' View**

We conclude our study today of one of Jesus' best-known messages. Jesus' forerunner, John, announced the advent of the Kingdom of God in the person of the "Lamb of God." His notoriety had spread throughout the land through His itinerate ministry, an unheard-of array of stunning miracles, as well as synagogue readings and declarations ("...today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing," he said having read Isaiah 61:1-2a in Nazareth). He announced, "The time is fulfilled the kingdom of God is at hand... (Mark 1:15)."

The dominate question of the people of our Lord was this: "How do I enter this kingdom you are declaring?" They knew it required righteousness but where was it to be found.

"Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully (Ps. 24:3-4)."

- I. The Setting, Matthew 5:1-2
- II. The Introduction, 5:3-16
- III. The Clarification and the Thesis, 5:17-20
- IV. Argument Sustaining the Thesis, 5:21-7:6
 - A. The Scribes and Pharisees wrongly interpret the Scriptures, 5:21-48
 1. The Law, Jesus, and murder, 5:21-26
 2. The Law, Jesus, and adultery, 5:27-30
 3. The Law, Jesus, and divorce, 5:31-32
 4. The Law, Jesus, and deceptive speech, 5:33-37
 5. The Law Jesus, and vengeance, 5:38-42
 6. The Law, Jesus, and discrimination, 5:42-47
 7. Conclusion, 5:48
 - B. The Scribes and Pharisees distort religious practices, 6:1-18
 1. In the way they give, vv. 1-4

- 2. In the way to pray, vv. 5-15
- 3. In the way they fast, vv. 16-18
- C. The Scribes and Pharisees' inconsistent personal practices, 6:19-7:6
 - 1. Relative to materialism or selfish hoarding, vv. 19-24
 - 2. Relative to selfish worry, vv. 25-34
 - 3. Relative to critical judgmentalism, 7:1-6
- V. An invitation, 7:7-12
 - 1. Stated, v. 7
 - 2. The reason, v. 8
 - 3. The surety of acceptance, vv. 9-11
 - 4. Conclusion (7:12)
- VI. A choice: two gates, Matthew 7:13-23

The way of life is described as two roads; the validity of the road is determined by the destination to which it brings the traveller. The road is to be chosen by the journeyed; again, the stress is on response. Jesus urged his hearers to enter the gate of discipleship on the road of persecution (5:10-12) that ends in heaven. The broad gate is attractive, the way of cultural and religious affirmation by the nation's leadership, but its end is tragic. Jesus is clearly asserting that there is only one way into His kingdom and that there is a literal hell, contrary to the thinking of even some postmodern religious leaders and the Sadducees of Jesus' day.

 - 1. The fact, vv. 13-14

The point of the metaphor of the two gates is that there are only two choices people can make in life, one leading to heaven and the other to hell. One is more temporally attractive than the other (it requires licence, not discipleship), but the less attractive is ultimately preferable. The narrow road, the road entered through Jesus, is not the most obvious or attractive way to go.
 - 2. The difficulty of false teachers, vv. 15-23.

The reason that the broad gate is so alluring is that false teachers and deceivers abound. Specifically, the referent is to the teachings of the Pharisees and scribes in Jesus' day, but we have our own plethora of false messages and messengers.

 - a. The fact of false teachers, v. 15a

This reminds me of the story of the false prophet Zedekiah son of Chenaanah and the four hundred prophets of Baal, who in opposing the judgmental message of Micaiah son of Imlah and prophesized peace, but only destruction came (I Kgs. 22:1-28).

b. The deception of false teachers, v. 15b

The false teachers are deceptive; they come disguised.

c. The detection of false teachers, vv. 16-20

It seems that he is speaking of the religious leadership. See 23:2-7. What they said was true, but they do not bear the fruit of their teaching.

In verse 16a, he states the principle illustratively: trees and bushes produce what is consistent with their character. False teachers produce false fruit; they lead followers down the wrong path. The metaphor of grapes/figs and thorns/bushes (v. 16b) remind us that bushes produce after their kind. From a grape bush comes grapes or fruit; a thorn bush does not produce grapes but thorns. The metaphor of the trees (vv. 17-20) is lengthier. The emphasis here is on the quality of the fruit rather than the kind. The good fruit of teaching, when embraced, puts one on the narrow path and the destiny, as evidenced by fruit, is the kingdom. As the root, so the fruit, suggesting that the teachings of the nation's leadership was corrupt and, consequently, the road they would have us travel (though attractive) only leads to destruction.

d. The fate of false teachers, vv. 21-23

These verses are as shocking as they are graphic and arresting. To make claims of affiliation without entering through the 'narrow gate' is without validity. To suggest allegiance to Jesus based on being acquainted with miraculous powers, without entering the 'narrow gate', will only lead to terrifying consequences ('I never knew you' [v. 23]).

3. A final exhortation, vv. 24-27.

Here you have a wonderful declaration of who Jesus is; He is Lord. As Lord, he alone will make all final judgments and all of them will be just! Second, 'know' does not mean a factual awareness; it means an affectionate heart relationship. The leadership, and many in the crowds, knew about Him, but few knew Him. Third, 'enter the kingdom' means to become a follower, a disciple of Jesus. Fourth, 'on that day' refers to the final judgment.

The function of the illustration of wisdom expressed in building an edifice on a secure foundation and the foolishness of building the structure of life on weakness is a wonderful invitation by Jesus to

heed His words. Works do not redeem us; however, they do reveal whether we are redeemed! Works are an effect or consequence, not a cause of belief in Jesus. The 'foolish man' is one who constructed his building on the errors of the scribes and Pharisees. In the great judgment they will suffer a "collapse" as well as those who follow their errors.

VII. The authority of Jesus recognized, Matthew 7:28-29

This brief comment about the impression that the message had upon the hearers, that of amazement, closes the narration of Jesus' discourse. It parallels the opening verses (5:1-2) of the sermon. This indicates that chapters 5–7 are a single literary unit of our Lord's teaching. The crowds perceived that Jesus did not teach as the scribes, validating their words by citing secondary sources; He spoke on his own authority though he had no formal training. He cited Scripture but assumed the role of its interpreter; he did not quote any secondary sources. Clearly, he has authority to do what the scribes do not!

Thoughts

1. The reason there is so much confusion over religious issues is that there are many hucksters peddling error in the guise of truth. When you listen to religious broadcasts can you spot wolves dressed in attractive attire? Do you hear error from the pulpits of our land? Truth does not come from wolves in sheep's clothing. The antidote to gullibility is knowledge of the true shepherd. Are you regularly reading the Word of God? What shepherd are you listening to these days?
2. The difficulty of spotting false teachers is that their words are often pleasant, and their appeal is attractive. You can only know the quality of a teacher by the fruit that comes from his/her work. 'As the root, so the fruit,' is the litmus test of truthfulness. The actions of a person often tell us more than his/her words. Is their message in conformity to that of Jesus? If not, they are false teachers.
3. Knowledge of the Lord does not make a person a Christian. Clearly in our passage false teachers profess to be followers of the Lord and are capable of miracle working. The fact of spiritual words or benevolent deeds does not make one a saint. You can have God in your mouth, while empty of him in the heart. The most important question in life is not, 'Have you met Jesus?' It is, 'Has he met you?' Though a person may know about him, redemption does not occur essentially in the mental faculties. It occurs in the heart, in the affections. False teachers

speaking of him, but they have no love for him. Their love is greed of place and cultural values.

4. Sand is a good foundational material, if there are no storms. When battering storms come to the shore of your life, sand is not stable enough to keep a building erect. What you need is to stand on something that is impervious to storms, a rock. Jesus is that rock. All other foundations will prove inadequate, not in the good days and years of our lives, but when the storms come. The greatest of these storms will be the final judgment. Do you want to stand before God on a porous foundation of religious error or on the truth, the rock, Christ Jesus? What foundation are you building your life upon these days?
5. Do not miss Jesus' invitation. Now is the day to ask, seek, and knock. Are you willing to do that? Jesus will not ask you about significant accomplishments, pedigree, or your benevolences; he will ask you if you were willing to come to Him, to enter the narrow gate. Are you willing to become a follower of Jesus? The choice is yours, but there will come a time when that choice will no longer be yours to make. Are you willing to embrace the love of God revealed in the person and work of Jesus for you?