

It's always fun for me on Sunday mornings to go by the rooms where our infants and toddlers are cared for during our morning services. One of the things I'm reminded of when I look into the rooms is that babies demand a lot!

They demand a lot when it comes to our sleep. You sign up to be a parent and you'd better be prepared to get a lot less sleep than you used to.

They demand a lot when it comes to our schedule. You can't just plan a trip or a night out without factoring in what to do with that baby.

They demand a lot when it comes to our budget. Have you seen all the equipment parents lug around these days? Strollers, car seats, port-a-cribs—it all costs money, not to mention the well-baby check-ups, the toys and the clothes.

Babies demand a lot even when it comes to our sense of purpose. You have a baby and things you used to deem important will now pale in significance to your hopes and dreams for that child.

Babies demand a lot. I wonder if you've ever thought about that as it relates to Christmas. It's at Christmas we celebrate the birth of a baby named Jesus. And that baby demanded a lot. He demanded a lot of his parents. Mary had dreams of having a normal family the normal way. Instead, she's finds herself pregnant by the Holy Spirit before she even marries. And Joseph has to swallow his pride and take her as his wife. After the baby was born they had to travel from Bethlehem to Egypt, and then from Egypt back to Nazareth, all because of this baby.

This baby we call Jesus demanded a lot. And he continues to demand a lot today. In fact, the grown-up Jesus demanded even more than the baby Jesus. No where is that more evident than in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has taught on a variety of things in this sermon.

He started by defining a life that's blessed. It's not what we thought. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn.

He reaffirmed his commitment to the OT, demanding a righteousness greater and deeper than the scribes and Pharisees.

He summarized his teaching with what we call the Golden Rule—do to others what you'd want them to do to you—words that look nice cross-stitched and hung on a wall, but are much harder to write on our hearts.

Jesus demands a lot. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus essentially tells us to enter the kingdom of heaven you must be a disciple of his, and being a disciple isn't seen in what you profess, but in what you do. "The teaching of the Sermon on the Mount is not meant to be admired but obeyed" (R.T. France). It's very interesting, when Jesus finished with this sermon it says, "the crowds were amazed at his teaching." In other words, many of them were impressed, but only a few of them became disciples. Admirers are impressed; disciples are devoted. Admirers applaud; disciples surrender their life.

Jesus brings this out in 7:13-27 by offering four contrasts between genuine and false discipleship. In each he calls us to make a choice. As we'll see there's really no middle ground in Jesus' mind. You're either a devoted follower of his or not. You're either with him or against him. You're either headed for eternal life or eternal destruction.

True Disciples Enter Through the Narrow Gate

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

The first contrast comes in verses 13-14. It is between two different gates and the roads they put you on. One gate is wide (it's easy to find) and the road it puts you on is broad and roomy. There are many people passing through that gate; many on that path. It's a broad thoroughfare. There's plenty of room for a diversity of opinions about what's right and wrong; what's true and false. People are laughing, having fun, patting each other on the back. Travelers on this road can pretty much drift along and do what they feel like doing. There's not a lot of effort required; it's the default direction of humanity.

But the other gate is quite different. This gate is hard to find; it's easy to miss. It's so small it requires a lot of effort to find it. And once you do discover it, it's so narrow you won't manage to get any luggage through that gate; you'll pretty much have to leave everything behind. It has to be entered one by one, like one of those turnstiles at the ballpark. And the road it leads to is similar—it's narrow, restricted and confining. There aren't a whole lot of people on that road. You kind of wonder where everyone went.

Jesus is clear that each of those paths lead to very different destinations. The wide path leads to destruction while the narrow one leads to eternal life. That's why Jesus is emphatic about which way you should go. "Enter the narrow gate" is a firm command. There's a sense of urgency in this, like a fireman offering one escape route to those in a burning house.

What's interesting about this first contrast isn't what Jesus says but what he **doesn't** say. He doesn't say anything about **how** to enter that narrow gate or even how to know if you're on the right path. One thing we know though is over in the Gospel of John Jesus said, "***I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved,***" and a little later he said, "***I am the way, the truth, and the life...***" (John 10:9; 14:6) Of course, because of this many have accused Jesus of being narrow-minded, and when it came to the issue of entering the kingdom of heaven he most certainly was. But why not? We're all narrow-minded about certain things. All my math teachers growing up were narrow-minded when they insisted there's only one right answer and billions of wrong ones. And nobody thinks a doctor is narrow-minded when saying there's only one vaccine to cure polio.

True Disciples Bear Good Fruit

Let's go on to the second contrast to find out more about what Jesus is talking about. The contrast here is between two kinds of fruit.

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them." (verses 15-20)

Why does Jesus all of a sudden warn against false prophets? Probably because there are many on that wide, broad road because of false prophets—men and women who claim to speak in the name of God, but in fact they send people down a road to hell. They offer an easier alternative to the narrow gate and hard way we just talked about. And you better be discerning because these false prophets appear as sheep. They look and sound right on; they quote the Bible and talk about Jesus and seem to have it all together, but notice what Jesus says: inwardly they're ferocious wolves. The word "ferocious" is often used for thieves. It means "rapacious." It points to someone who uses others to get what they want.

So these folks are posers. They pose as sheep but really are wolves. How do we know if they're the real thing? Jesus says do a fruit check. The test of so-called prophets is seen in their fruit; the product of their life—is it good or bad? It's not just what they

teach, although that matters, but it's more about the kind of life they live. Paul put it quite clearly in Galatians 5. He said, "***The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.***" He then turned around and in the next breath said, "***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control***" (Gal 5:19-21, 22-23). It's not that hard to discern between good fruit and bad fruit.

When we think of false prophets we tend to think of cults, but Jesus is likely thinking about people in the church. Paul once stood before the elders at Ephesus and said, "***Even from your own number***" savage wolves will be found (Acts 20:29-30). There are all kinds of reasons people get involved in church, but wolves are basically predators. Predators come to church because they've discovered that church-people can be really generous, and they can use that for their own financial gain. Predators come because they've heard there are single women here who are vulnerable. Predators even come to church because it buys them credibility in their business.

One thing about fruit is it takes time for it to grow and for its quality to be seen. Fruit grows slowly; at first you don't know if it's good or bad. Sometimes it's obvious, but often you have to wait. Paul once wrote to Timothy, "***The sins of some are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them. In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not obvious cannot remain hidden forever***" (1 Timothy 5:24-25).

So what a person says must be tested by how they live and who they truly are will be seen in time. Once again, the stakes are high. Trees that bear bad fruit are cut down and thrown into the fire.

True Disciples Do the Will of God

But it's not just false prophets on trial here; it's all of us. Let's start spending all of our time looking outside of ourselves, Jesus' next words are spoken about us. He contrasts those who merely profess Christ with those who practice what he teaches.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (verses 21-23)

These are some of the most haunting words Jesus ever spoke. He makes it clear who will enter the kingdom of heaven. It's not about a profession of faith; it's not about saying, "I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior." These people are even fervent about it. They don't just say, "Lord," but "Lord, Lord!" Earlier we learned

about false prophets, but here we learn about false profession. Don't get this wrong—it's important to profess our faith, but that's not enough.

Jesus says it's not even enough to see God perform miracles as a result of your work. All that's well and good, but that won't get you in. There are examples in the NT of people driving out demons and performing miracles in the name of Jesus who really didn't know Jesus (Mark 9:38; Acts 19:13ff). Jesus himself warned us that, "*great signs and wonders*" will be performed by imposters (Matt. 24:24).

What's wrong with these folks? What's missing? Doesn't the Bible say, "*If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*" (Romans 10:9)? Yes, it does say that. But the point here is when you truly know him as your Lord and your belief in him is genuine, that will change what you do; how you live. Again, it's the fruit Jesus was just talking about in the previous paragraph. That's what Jesus means when he says it's only the one "who does the will of my Father" who'll enter the kingdom of heaven. We're not saved by our works, but faith without works is dead; it's no faith at all. If you really believe Jesus died and rose for you, sits enthroned in heaven, and will soon return to rule over all things, that will change how you live. It will transform how you approach your job, your friendships, your marriage, your parenting, your sexuality, your finances, everything.

Imagine a man meets a woman. They start dating and eventually he tells her he loves her. In fact, he tells her every day he loves her. He even marries her. It might seem like he really does love her. But what if I told you he never lifts a finger to help her around the house? When she gets sick, he doesn't take care of her. He never takes her out, and he even goes out with others. Does he love her? No! It may look from the outside like he does. He may even believe he does. But he doesn't, and his actions prove it. The actions aren't the love, but they **are** the evidence of the love. The same is true in our relationship with Jesus.

That's why Jesus says to them on the day of judgment, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" The word for "evildoers" is *anomia* which means, "anti-law" or "law-breakers." They don't do the will of the Father. They don't keep his law. They talk the talk, but they don't walk the walk. The truth is they don't know Jesus and he doesn't know them. And you can tell because the way they live is the antithesis of God's revealed will for his people.

It seems to me based on this there may be a few surprises in heaven. Some we expect to be in the kingdom won't be there. It will be like they're dining at an expensive restaurant, trying to pay with their Discover card, and the waiter saying, "I'm sorry, sir, but we don't take Discover." They thought they had what they needed but they don't, and there's no other means to pay. Many people pay lip service to God. Perhaps they grew up in a church,

got baptized, joined a small group, went on a mission trip, wrote a few checks to Christian ministries—all good things—but they didn't know Jesus, and Jesus didn't know them. Equally surprising are the folks we don't think will enter heaven, but do. How about the young man who commits suicide? Or the felon who meets Jesus in prison? It's like this poem from Jill Briscoe:

I dreamt death came the other night
And heaven's gates swung wide
An angel with a halo bright
Ushered me inside
And, there to my astonishment
Stood folks I judged and labeled
As quite unfit ... of little worth
And spiritually disabled
Indignant words rose to my lips
But never were set free
For every face showed stunned surprise
No one expected me

We may be surprised at our neighbors in the kingdom of heaven, but God won't be. The litmus test will be the same for all of us: Did you know Jesus Christ? Did he know you? Did that knowing change you into a person who cared about and sought to do the will of the Father?

True Disciples Put Jesus' Teaching into Practice

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."
(verses 24–27)

The last contrast is between two kinds of builders. Here are two people building a house. A casual observer doesn't notice much of a difference between them. You see, the difference between them is in the foundation, and foundations are usually not seen. Only when the storm comes and batters both houses with equal ferocity is the fundamental and fatal difference seen. The house on the rock weathers the storm, while the house built on sand collapses in irreparable ruin.

In the same way, those who profess to be followers of Christ often look the same on the outside. Both appear to be building their lives—family, career, fun, etc. Both hear God's word, and both may even be respectable members of the Christian community. Again the reason you can't tell the difference is the deep

foundation of their lives is hidden from view. The real question isn't whether or not they hear and even believe Christ's teaching but whether they **do** what they hear.

He's talking about his teaching right here in the Sermon on the Mount. We've all heard it, but are we doing it?

- He's told us our righteousness must be deeper because it reaches even our hearts, and our love broader because it extends even to our enemies.
- He's told us our giving, praying, fasting must be real, and not just a show.
- He's told us not to worry about material provision. Our treasure is to be in heaven and not here on earth.
- He's told us our greatest concern is to be the advancement of his kingdom. We've all heard it, but are we doing it?

How do we know? Only a storm will reveal the truth! And notice both kinds of builders must endure the storm; no one is exempt. It might be the storm of a crisis or calamity in your life that reveals what kind of foundation you've built upon. But if it's not that, there's another storm ahead for all of us; it's the storm of the day of judgment. And if you hear the words of Jesus but then you build your life on your career, or your success, or your child's success, or your intelligence, or your family, or your bank account, or your own righteousness, or your political party, or anything else save Jesus and his word, when the storm comes your life will collapse because it was built on sand!

It reminds me of when we built this very building we are in right now. Foster City doesn't have a lot of dirt, but it has a lot of sand. I recall talking to our contractor and he confirmed my worst fears: We built this building on three feet of sand! But thank God

they knew what they were doing, because beneath the sand is about 180 feet of bay mud. On top of it all they also laid about 650 feet of concrete, so we're in good shape.

So inspect your foundation. Look intently and honestly at your life. You may have built your life on Jesus and his word a decade ago, yet slowly but surely over the last few years you've been building on something else. We're all a work in progress. We all take two steps forward and one step back. But we need to make progress.

Babies demand a lot. The baby Jesus demanded a lot. But the grown-up Jesus demands even more. He demands we be not just admirers who stand amazed at his teaching but disciples who put it into practice. And that means making some hard choices.

- Choose between the narrow gate and the wide gate. There's no third gate.
- Choose between the constricted road and the broad road. There's no third road.
- Choose between a good tree that bears good fruit and a bad tree that bears bad fruit. There's no third tree.
- Choose between profession and practice. There's no third category.
- Choose your foundation. Will it be rock or sand? There's no third house.

Will you just hear or will you hear and do? Will you be an admirer or a disciple?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.