

BUILD YOUR HOUSE ON THAT!

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Matthew 7.13-20
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I. Connecting With One Another

Have you ever been in a situation where you had no choice in a particular matter? How was that?

How important is it for you to have multiple choices about things like school, work, vacations, clothing, foods, restaurant options, etc?

Before continuing, please pray:

- a. For the Children's and Student Ministries of Good Shepherd: that God would continue to use Karen and Werner, and the adult teachers and advisors serving children and students.
- b. For the opportunities to grow in faith this Fall: that through them the Holy Spirit would draw us, as a community, into a deeper reliance upon Jesus and into a closer fellowship with one another.
- c. For Students from our community going off to college this Fall: that God would fill them with his knowledge and surround them with others who are seeking to follow Jesus.
- d. For us, as a community of faith: to be people of truth and grace, of discerning without condemning, and always willing to humbly point others to Jesus, the Savior.

II. Introduction to this Study

In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus invites his disciples and the multitudes of people listening to him to enter into a new, counter-cultural way of life in what he calls the "Kingdom of Heaven." This "Kingdom" can be understood as living under the sovereign rule or leadership of God, and is the way to experience a truly blessed life. As we continue through chapter 7 we see a series of warnings, the first being the warning against judging or condemning others. In this study we find two additional warnings. The first is to choose carefully between two gates and two roads or ways. The second is to watch out for false prophets but to discern truthful teachers by their character.

III. Study the Text - Read Matthew 7.13-20

- a. Beginning with verses 13 and 14, describe the contrasting 1) gates and 2) roads (or ways) found in these two verses. To what do they open the way? To where do they lead? Which is easier? Which is more difficult? Why? How do you respond to Jesus giving such a warning? Why is such a warning critical?
- b. Why, if God's love and mercy are so wide, does Jesus insist that one must enter a "narrow gate" and follow a "narrow road (or way)"? What does this suggest about the choice Jesus' listener (or you the reader) must make?
- c. The narrow gate brings to mind Jesus' interaction with the wealthy ruler found in Luke 18.18-30. Take a look at that passage. Here the narrow gate is compared to the eye of a needle - a very small opening. Why is it hard for a person of wealth to squeeze through this small opening and to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (that is, to submit to God's sovereign rule)?

- d. In the context of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is making the claim that he is the (narrow) gate. This is repeated in John 10.7-10. Turn to that passage to better understand Jesus' claim. What is implied by Jesus' claim to be the "gate" into the Kingdom of Heaven? Is he the only "gate" for entering into it?
- e. In John 14.1-6 the claim is even more explicit. Read through these verses. How would you paraphrase verse 6? What explicit claim is Jesus making here?

Good Time for a Note: Just as Jesus calls people to a counter-cultural way of life he makes a counter-cultural claim that he alone is the gate and the road (or way). Our culture does not like limitations and exclusive truth statements like this one. The current climate is one in which "all religions are the same, there are many ways to God." Yet Jesus extends a call to turn to him, trust in him, and follow him as the only entry point and the leader along the way that leads to blessedness, to the Kingdom of Heaven, to an abundant and everlasting life.

Here's my take on Jesus' claim to be the "narrow gate, the way, truth, and life":

First, it is exclusive in its affirmation of the truth of God's revelation in Jesus - he is God's unique provision for the reconciliation and salvation of humankind. However, this does not have to deny the possibility of the salvation of non-Christians (Matthew 25.31-46 applies here).

Second, his claim is inclusive in that it does not limit the saving grace of God only to members of the Christian Church (for example Muslims having dreams in which Jesus appears and calls them to follow him), but still it does not hold that non-Christian religions are a trustworthy means of salvation (all religions are not the same).

Third, it is pluralistic in that it acknowledges God's gracious work in the lives of all human beings while still affirming the uniqueness and decisiveness of what God has done in Jesus.

Jesus is the unique way, truth and life. God can and does work to draw people to Jesus (and his work of atonement) both through our mission of evangelism and through ways that remain mysteries to us. (For more, see the resources listed below)*

- f. Back to Matthew 7.15-20. Against what is Jesus warning his disciples? Note that the context for this is the community of faith, so these are false prophets who are "proclaiming God's words" to the body of Christ-followers.
- g. How do these false teachers operate? How can one identify that these are false teachers? Can you think of modern-day "false prophets" within the sphere of Christianity?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. Have you made a conscious decision to follow and trust in Jesus? Are you continuing on the narrow road of discipleship daily and submission to Jesus?
- b. In what ways can you help others of other religious convictions to take a look at Jesus as the one revealed to be the way to know God, the truth about God, and the source of life with God? How can you help others stay on the narrow road of following Jesus?
- c. Our popular media stands out in my mind as a vehicle of false teaching in a secular society. As you watch TV shows and/or movies, are you aware of the ungodly and false teachings being propounded in them (often in very amusing and attractive ways)? How can you help your children, grandchildren discern what is being taught in the media?

* James Edwards, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (2005, Eerdmans Publishers)
 Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (1989, Eerdmans Publishers)