

DISCIPLESHIP: MATTHEW 7:13-29

Jesus has come to the end of his sermon after covering a lot of ground. He finishes it with a few things to watch out for and he does that by making use of a series of four contrasts, all of which have to do with obedience.

Video

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENi1SvEFqsQ&feature=PlayList&p=98084915B959C4C0&index=0>
'Just do it!' could sum up what Jesus has to say in this last part of the Sermon. Putting it into practice shows that we've really heard what Jesus had to say.

Before we look at the series of contrasts, let's go to the end of the chapter. The people recognised that there was something different about Jesus because he taught with authority. That stood in contrast to their regular teachers of the law, the scribes and the Pharisees. All they did was add burden upon burden because in the end they made it more about the righteousness of external actions as opposed to righteousness that comes from within. Jesus didn't add further things that people had to do but showed what would flow from the heart of someone living within his kingdom and touched by his grace. I reckon that as the people heard Jesus they would have known without doubt that what he said was truth. It would have come to them as something they couldn't ignore. He goes on to make the point that, having heard what he had to say, the important thing now is obedience. That same message is there for us to hear today.

Let's have a look at Jesus' contrasts and warnings.

The Narrow Gate and the Wide Gate (13-14)

I like driving on dirt roads. It must have somehow managed to get into my blood when I was a kid living in Peterborough and practically every road was dirt. Our Camry has seen a lot of dirt roads and it has the rattles and squeaks to prove it. Three or four years ago we were in Victoria and I decided to head for a dirt road going over a hill. We were two thirds of the way up the hill when I came to the realisation that this was not a track for a front wheel drive sedan but was far more appropriate to a four-wheel-drive. It was quite bumpy and had the occasional ditch that bottomed out on the car. The only problem was it was too late to go back. I can still see the surprise on the face of the driver of a four-wheel drive coming the other way as we crested the top of the hill!

That's a picture of the narrow road that Jesus is talking about in this section of today's passage. The picture his words generate for me is of a life roadway that has bumps and dips, rocks and gravel, bull dust, blind corners, hills and valleys and mud. It's a roadway that often seems to throw up difficult things and requires perseverance and focus. But it's also a roadway on which you can come around the corner and suddenly see something like a lizard perched on a fence post. Or it might be a lyre bird in front of you or a wedge tailed eagle or a beautiful vista looking over the hills and valleys. While the road is hard, the unexpected and delightful could happen at any moment. I compare that to driving the freeways in America: broad, smooth and fast --- and mostly all you see to either side are shops.

What Jesus said indicates that there is a right way to enter the kingdom of God and that we will miss it if we're on the wrong way. On the one hand is the road that leads to life is a narrow one with the narrow gate and is the path of obedience. It's not grudging obedience that only comes from duty or obligation (although even that is better than not obeying) but it is the obedience of a willing heart because we have seen and experienced his grace. Only a few find it because it is not always an easy or smooth road.

On the other hand, the road that leads to destruction is a broad road with a wide gate. It's the road of being independent, doing our own thing, having to be in control, living apart from a relationship of faith with God as our Father through Jesus. Lots of people walk this path because we would much rather do our own thing than follow the path of obedience. The only problem is ultimately it leads to destruction because God gives us what is in our hearts --- and that's pretty scary.

Good Tree Bad Tree (15-20)

The second contrast is between the good tree and the bad tree. In this contrast Jesus is warning against those who deliberately set out to mislead others i.e. false prophets. On first look, it is

generally true that false prophets will never appear as that. On the outside they look good and they will say and do the right things. They will appear no different to anyone else. In fact, there will be much about them that is very attractive and appealing. But inwardly, where it really counts, they are ferocious wolves. The way you tell the difference is by the fruit that becomes evident because eventually that rotten core will be seen for what it is. Jude says of these:

Jude 1:12-16 (NIV)

¹²These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. ¹³They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

¹⁴Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: “See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones ¹⁵to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” ¹⁶These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

The one thing of which we can be sure is that eventually the fruit of what's inside us will become evident. The good fruit is that which comes out of faithful obedience.

Those Who Do God's Will and Those Who Don't (21-23)

The third contrast is between people who faithfully do God's will and those who replace it with doing great deeds in Jesus' name. People are generally captivated by the bold, spectacular and impressive. If great deeds result from doing the will of the Father then that's wonderful. But great deeds are no substitute for simply doing his will. Even great actions apparently done in the name of Jesus aren't necessarily an indicator of what's in the heart of a person. A person could be doing everything that appears to be right and yet not know God. The ones who enter the kingdom of heaven are those who do the will of the Father.

Wise and Foolish Builders (24-27)

The last contrast Jesus talks about is between a wise man who built his house on the rock and the foolish man who built his house on the sand. Those who hear Jesus and do what he says are the ones who build a house on the rock. Those who hear him and do not do what he says are the ones who build their house on sand; it has no foundation and will fall at the first opportunity. Once again it comes back to obedience. To hear what Jesus says but not do it is completely lacking in wisdom. In doing what Jesus says we build a life that is indestructible.

That brings us to the end of our series on discipleship. A trust that it's been of help to us as a church that there are things out of it that we will take into our own lives. A disciple is an apprentice Jesus: we learn from him by doing what he does and becoming like him. In the end, as Jesus emphasised at the end of his sermon, it all comes down to doing what he says, being obedient, living out the life of the kingdom which is described for us in the sermon.