

The Greatest Life Ever Lived

A Study in the Incarnate Life of Jesus Christ and An Exposition of the Four Gospels

LESSON XLII : THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT — PART I : EXHORTATION TO ENTER THE KINGDOM

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	related passages
7:13-8:1		6:43-49		

The Beginning of the Way: The Strait Gate and Narrow Path

Matt 7:13,14 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. : Jesus has been giving a description of those within the kingdom, their blessedness and relation to the world (Matt 5:1-16). This He followed by giving a description of the righteousness granted to and expected from those within the kingdom (Matt 5:17-7:12). It is natural now that He “draws the net” (to use a common phrase from today’s evangelistic terminology) by urging those listening to enter this kingdom. His tactics however are far from the psychological emotional invitations so prevalent today; rather He speaks to the will, laying forth the terms of redemption and the cost of rejecting those terms. The decision is left to the hearers as well as the loss if they refuse.

Entrance into the kingdom is both inviting and difficult, favorable and unfavorable. Favorable since those within the kingdom are truly blessed: they are possessors of the kingdom, are comforted, inherit the earth, shall be fully satisfied, and so on. Unfavorable in the sense they will be persecuted, insulted, slandered, burdened with heavy obligations beyond that of before such as loving their enemies and praying for their persecutors, they must not be hypocritical yet rightly judging others, etc. These are unfavorable because they are directly opposed to our human sinful nature, something which does not come natural for us. Contrary to some of today’s evangelists therefore, **Jesus pictures getting saved as not being the easiest thing in the world.** Last week my wife and I was discussing a close relative in which we made the statement that it would be difficult for this person to come to Christ (humanly speaking). Our son heard this and asked why since all a person had to do was trust Jesus with their heart. We said that was true but as people age they increasingly become prideful and hardened to the things of God. While there is nothing which prevents anyone from coming to Christ except our sin-hardened wills, it is also one of the most difficult things just to accept the scriptures that *“I am a sinner, helpless to save myself regardless of my ‘good accomplishments’ and must depend solely upon the merits of Jesus Christ, His blood shed on the cross and His resurrection for my eternal destiny.”* That goes against everything within a person and that is what makes it difficult. Indeed, so difficult that the scriptures speak of salvation as a miracle and impossible without the work of the Holy Spirit.

Two gates and two ways: the term “way” may be spoken of either as a “way” or a “road”; neither is wrong and much may be said as to favoring each. Wuest: *“Enter through the narrow gate, because broad is the gate and spacious is the road ... because narrow is the gate and compressed is the road, the one which leads away into life...”* A question among commentators arises as to which comes first:

- some ignore the question which is not altogether negative; sometimes we may pick that which *doesn’t* matter until we lose the point of the message entirely.
- some say this is a textual gloss and the reading should be limited to the reference to the “way” alone. “There is some textual evidence for omitting *gate* in each verse, but it would seem that these omissions were later attempts to simplify the somewhat difficult adjacent references to two gates and two ways.” [Tasker, *Matthew*]
- *gate* and *way* are taken to mean the same thing, namely, obedience to Christ. While there is definitely a close relationship between the two, several times in these verses the terms are used separately as *gate* and *way*, not *gate* or *way*.
- some say the *way* is first then the *gates* are taken eschatologically to refer to the gates of heaven or hell, using Luke 13:23f in support. For example, “The vital truth is that there are only two ways open for men and women to tread – described in Jer 21:8 as ‘the way of life’ and ‘the way of death’. And if by the grace of God a man keeps to the former, he must inevitably pass through the gate that leads to life; but it is equally certain that the man who continues to tread the latter way must eventually enter the gate that leads to destruction.” [Tasker, *Matthew*] While what he is saying is certainly not incorrect, I tend to lean against that interpretation of these verses directly. For one thing the wording and context of Luke 13 is different and does not support these verses rather than using a similar word picture. It also seems difficult to assume Jesus would repeatedly say *gate* and *way* if He meant *way* and *gate*.
- the most natural rendering is to keep the *gate* first which is followed by the *way*. **The gate is not a reference to death but of the choice that must be made now. Only by making a conscious choice does one arrive on the right way.** “The order ‘gate’ followed by ‘way’ is therefore very natural and makes good sense, especially in view of what is probably the intended meaning: **right initial choice (conversion) followed by sanctification; or else wrong initial choice followed by gradual hardening.**” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] “Gate, among the Jews, signifies, metaphorically, the

entrance, introduction, or means of acquiring any thing. So they talk of the gate of repentance, the gate of prayers, and the gate of tears. When God, say they, shut the gate of paradise against Adam, He opened to him the gate of repentance.”

[Clarke, *Commentary*]

The entrance to the road of life is “narrow”: so narrow some have compared it to a *turnstile* such as used at ball games to admit one at a time as the admittance is paid. Using such an analogy, it might be said that **salvation is individual**, one at a time in the sense that each of us must deal directly with the Lord rather than my children being saved simply because my wife and I are Christians. Being a narrow entrance it might be said to be **a gate of self-denial**: many earthly things must be stripped away if we are to enter in because they are too bulky to fit; things such as the lust for earthly goods, an unforgiving spirit, self-righteousness, hypocrisy and many other items already mentioned by the Lord in His sermon. “How strait is that gate! This mode of expression more forcibly points out the difficulty of the way to the kingdom. **How strange is it that men should be unwilling to give up their worldly interests to secure their everlasting salvation! And yet no interest need be abandoned, but that which is produced by injustice and unkindness.** Reason, as well as God, says, such people should be excluded from a place of blessedness.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

The path of life is “narrow”: as the entrance is narrow, so is the way of life. The road is said to be *tethlimmenā*, *straightened, constricted*. Wuest: “*Because narrow is the gate and compressed is the road, the one which leads away into the life, and few there are who are finding it.*” It comes from the word *thlibō* meaning *to press, to suffer affliction*. The same word is translated *afflicted* in 2 Cor 1:6; 1 Tim 5:10 and Heb 11:37. It is also translated *trouble, troubled* in 2 Cor 4:8; 7:5 and 2 Thes 1:6,7. In 1 Thes 3:4 it is translated *suffer tribulation*. It is here alone translated *narrow*, its only other usage being Mk 3:9 when the crowd is said to *throng* upon Christ; i.e. to crowd Him. The sense therefore is that of *pressing, to suffer affliction due to the pressure of circumstances or the antagonism of others*. The path is sometimes compared to a narrow path in a field (as in John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim Progress*) or more frequently as one walking up the side of a mountain on a path not very wide. The word implies more than that however; not just a path but one between two imposing cliffs with the believer hemmed in on both sides, pressing against him. I believe **Christ is here referring to the constricting nature of the believer’s life, not because of the life itself but rather the rebelling against holiness from within (our sinful nature, the flesh) and from without (the world and the devil).**

The wide entrance and broad way unto death: the narrowness of the Christian life is contrasted with the wide gate and broad way with many travelers. **The entrance itself is a gate of self-indulgence, self-centeredness and pride; so wide a multitude may enter at once with room to spare. No restrictions, no one of final authority to be obeyed, no rules except that which pleases one’s self.** The road however leads to destruction, *apōleian*, *to destroy utterly; not extinction but ruin, loss of well-being but not loss of being*. It is a common word, used 26x *destroy*, 30x *lose*, *lost*, 33x *perish*, and 1x each as *die* and *marred*. More than 75% of it’s usage is in the four gospels.

The two kinds of travelers: those on the broad way to destruction are called the *many* while those on the narrow way are called the *few*. This corresponds with other scriptures which state while *many are called, few are chosen* (Matt 22:14) as well as the passages in both the old and new testaments which refer to the elect as *the remnant* (e.g. Isa 1:9; Hag 1:14; Rom 9:27; 11:5; etc). We are not to take this however as some say, “heaven is just a small place in the corner of the universe”. Rather the scriptures teach those in heaven will be an innumerable multitude (Rev 7:9). As we accept the sovereignty of God we also realize **everyone will be in heaven which the Lord has written in the Lamb’s Book of Life and none will be absent**. “The erroneous conclusion must not be drawn that the tremendous crowds streaming through the wide gate and now traveling on Broadway are free and happy; while, on the other hand, those individuals who have found the narrow gate and are now proceeding on the constricted way are to be pitied. Actually **this ‘freedom’ and ‘happiness’ of the majority is of a very superficial nature. ‘Everyone who is living in sin is a slave of sin’** (Jn 8:34). He is as truly chained as is the prisoner with the iron band around his leg, the band that is fastened to a chain which is cemented into the wall of a dungeon. Every sin he commits draws tighter that chain, until at last it crushes him completely. Since the wicked have no inner peace (Isa 48:22) how can they be truly happy? On the other hand, ‘great peace have they that love Thy law’ (Ps 119:165; cp Isa 26:3; 43:2). Though entering the narrow gate and walking on the constricted way implies self-denial, difficulty and struggle, pain and hardship, this is especially true because the sinful nature has not yet been completely conquered. For ‘the new man’ (the regenerated nature) there is joy unspeakable and full of glory (1 Pet 1:8; cp Rom 7:22; Phil 2:17; 3:1; 4:4; etc). The ‘few’ who have entered through the narrow gate are ‘afflicted but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing’ (2 Cor 4:8f), ‘sorrowful yet always rejoicing, poor yet making many rich, having nothing yet possessing all things’ (2 Cor 6:10). And in addition to the treasures which they possess even now, they know that riches greater by far await them, for ‘our light and momentary affliction is producing for us an everlasting weight of glory, far beyond all measure and proportion’ (2 Cor 4:17; cp Rom 8:18).” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] “Men are so wedded to their own passions, and so determined to follow the imaginations of their own hearts, that still it may be said: There are few who find the way to heaven; fewer yet who abide any time in it; fewer still who walk in it; and fewest of all who persevere unto the end. Nothing renders this way either narrow or difficult to any person, but sin. Let all the world leave their sins, and all the world may walk abreast in this good way.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

The exhortation to enter the way into life: Christ gives a two-fold reason for deliberately making the choice for life; that is, (a) it is natural to prefer what is wide and broad, easy of access, to what is narrow and constricted; and (b) it is also natural to follow the crowd rather than the few. **Christ says “Beware!”** “Be up and on your journey. Enter in at the gate at the head of the way, and do not stand hesitating. If it be the right road, you will find the entrance somewhat difficult, and exceedingly *narrow*; for it demands self-denial, and calls for strictness of obedience, and watchfulness of spirit. Nevertheless, ‘*enter ye in at the strait gate*’.

Whatever its drawbacks of fewness of pilgrims, or straitness of entrance, yet choose it, and use it. True, there is another road, *broad* and much frequented; but *it leadeth to destruction*. Men go to ruin along the turnpike-road, but the way to heaven is a bridle-path. There may come other days, when the many will crowd the narrow way; but, at this time, to be popular one must be *broad* — *broad* in doctrine, in morals, and in spirituals. But those on the strait road shall go straight to glory, and those on the broad road are all abroad. All is well that ends well: we can afford to be straitened in the right way rather than enlarged in the wrong way; because the first endeth in endless life, and the second hastens down to everlasting death. Lord, deliver me from the temptation to be '*broad*', and keep me in the narrow way though few find it! [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]

Warnings with Respect to the Believer's Progress on the Way

Matt 7:15-20 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

Luke 6:43-45 For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.

“Does entrance through the narrow gate and proceeding upon the path to which it admits mean that any further caution can now be thrown to the winds? Not at all. To be sure, **God preserves His children, but He does this by means of their own God-given perseverance.**” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

False prophets = Gk pseudoprophētōn, *pseudo-prophets*, a word used 11x in the NT. Similar words include *pseudo-brethren*, *pseudo-apostles*, *pseudo-speakers* (liars), *pseudo-teachers*, *pseudo-witnesses* or *pseudo-witnessing* and even *pseudo-Christ*s. The word *pseudo* is used of anything false, a lie, a sham.

Beware means literally *to hold to* in the sense of *turning one's mind or attention to a thing by being on one's guard against it*. **“We know what a strong propensity men have to falsehood, so that they not only have a natural desire to be deceived, but each individual appears to be ingenious in deceiving himself.** Satan, who is a wonderful contriver of delusions, is constantly laying snares to entrap ignorant and heedless persons.” [Calvin, *Commentary*]

The hypocrisy of the false teachers: the objects of Christ's warning are those who are pretenders, hypocrites which appear as teachers of the Word while inwardly being savage rapacious wolves. **“Jesus warns His disciples that the most dangerous characteristic of all these false teachers is that their teaching often appears at first sight to bear resemblance to the truth.”** [Tasker, *Matthew*] “We have need of our judgments, and we must try the spirits of those who profess to be sent of God. There are men of great gifts who are '*false prophets*'. These affect the look, language, and spirit of God's people, while really they long to devour souls, even as wolves thirst for the blood of sheep. '*Sheep's clothing*' is all very fine, but we must look beneath it and spy out the *wolves*. A man is what he is *inwardly*. We had need *beware*. This precept is timely at this hour. We must be careful not only about our way, but about our leaders. They come to us; they come as prophets; they come with every outward commendation; but they are very Balaams, and will surely curse those they pretend to bless.” [Spurgeon, *Matthew*] Obviously the Pharisees and Scribes are included within that number but the description fits many others beside. “It applies, in fact, to all those whose influence tends to lead God's children astray, especially to those who *selfishly* and *maliciously* lead astray.... **The church of Jesus Christ, in every age, should be on its guard against those who distort the word of God for their own selfish purpose.**” Though their speech may be ever so smooth and oily, they constitute a real peril against which believers must arm themselves.” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] Scripture is full of examples of false prophets with Satan himself deceiving by appearing as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14). Examples of present-day false prophets are those who teach:

- “There is no heaven and hell.”
- “A God of love would never send anyone into everlasting punishment.”
- “Satan is a myth.”
- “Man is not sinful but only lacks opportunity.”
- “Man is not responsible for his behavior, it is due to his environment.”
- “The Bible is not God's Word but filled with errors.”
- “There is no final authority; everything is subjective and relative.”
- “God did not create us, we evolved.”

Jesus describes these wolves as rapacious, ravenous, meaning *extremely hungry, given to seizing prey to devour it, given to seizing for plunder or the satisfaction of greed*.

Recognizing the false teachers: Christ says these false teachers are recognizable by their fruits; i.e., a noble fruit as grapes or precious fruit as figs are not picked among thorns and thistles. In like manner a false prophet cannot bring forth that which is God-honoring. **Character reveals itself.** “Ye shall know: the compound verb indicates *full* knowledge. **Character is satisfactorily tested by its fruits.**” [Vincent, *Word Studies*] “In the present context the implication of this axiom is that because belief and practice, creed and conduct, are vitally connected, then false philosophies and erroneous doctrines, however attractive at first sight they may appear to be, will *in the long run* produce a perverted morality, even if their original exponents may themselves be moral.” [Tasker, *Matthew*] While one may be deceived for a short period of time and a hypocrite may hide temporarily behind the mask, time will reveal who is true and who is false. “Is it objected, that few persons are endued with such acuteness, as to distinguish good fruits from bad? I answer, as I have already said: **Believers are never deprived of the Spirit of wisdom, where His assistance is needful, provided they distrust themselves, renounce their own judgment, and give themselves up wholly to His direction.** Let us remember, however, that all doctrines must be brought to the Word of God as the standard, and that, in judging of false prophets, the rule of faith holds the chief place. We must also consider what God enjoins on His prophets and the ministers of His word: for in this way their faithfulness may be easily ascertained.... Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? By these proverbs, which were then in common use and universally received, Christ confirms His statement, that **no man can be deceived by false prophets, unless he is wilfully blind:** for the fruits as plainly discover upright servants of God, and unfaithful workmen, as the fruits point out the nature of the tree.” [Calvin, *Commentary*]

The fruit of the false teachers: is this fruit refer to what he is teaching or to the teacher himself, his conduct and character? Many passages in the NT speak of the fruit as being the teaching itself (e.g. Isa 8:20; Matt 15:9; Titus 1:9-12; Heb 13:9; 1 Jn 4:1-3; 2 Jn v9-11; etc). It is also used to indicate a person’s life or behavior (Lk 3:8-14; Jn 15:8-10; Gal 5:22-24; Eph 5:9-12; Phil 1:11; Col 1:10; James 3:17,18; etc). Therefore both may be said to be correct with the emphasis being upon the doctrines of the false prophets. “Fruits, in the Scripture and Jewish phraseology, are taken for works of any kind. ‘A man’s works,’ says one, ‘are the tongue of his heart, and tell honestly whether he is inwardly corrupt or pure.’ By these works you may distinguish these ravenous wolves from true pastors. The judgment formed of a man by his general conduct is a safe one: if the judgment be not favorable to the person, that is his fault, as you have your opinion of him from his works, i.e. the confession of his own heart.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

Our reaction to the false teachers should be the same here as we would treat weeds and thorns. “The doctrines ... should be discarded with the ruthlessness that men do not hesitate to display when they cut down a tree which fails to bear good fruit and throw it on the fire.” [Tasker, *Matthew*] “Who wants to build his nest upon a tree which is soon to be cut down? Who would choose a barren tree for the center of his orchard?” [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]

The eternal destruction of the false teachers: here as elsewhere Jesus describes those bringing forth bad fruit as being cast into fire (e.g. see lesson 18), an obvious reference to eternal damnation and torments. “What a terrible sentence is this against Christless pastors, and Christless hearers! Every tree that produceth not good fruit is to be now cut down; the act of excision is now taking place: the curse of the Lord is even now on the head and the heart of every false teacher, and impenitent hearer.” [Clarke, *Commentary*] “Here is the end to which evil things are tending. The ax and the fire await the ungodly, however fine they may look with the leafage of profession. Only let time enough be given, and every man on earth who bears no good fruit will meet his doom. It is not merely the wicked, the bearer of poison berries, that will be cut down; but the neutral, the man who bears no fruit of positive virtue must also be cast into the fire.” [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]

The End of the Way: Sayers vs. Doers

Matt 7:21-23 Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.

Luke 6:46 And why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

The conclusion of Christ’s message speaks of those who talk of doing the Lord’s will without putting it into practice, those who nominally profess salvation versus those who show their faith by their works (James 2:14-26). **If there was ever a message so needed for America today, it is this. What had such a grand beginning has grown to mere formalism in many circles, the doctrines still present (in some cases at least) while the life-changing power has long gone. How sad so many profess Jesus in our culture yet live entirely for themselves, thereby annulling their profession of faith.**

This connects with what Jesus had just been teaching concerning the false prophets. Not only are we to examine a teacher’s doctrines to ensure they align with the Word of God, but **we are also to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith** (2 Cor 13:5; 2 Pet 1:10). Those who are the condemned here are those whose life and lips are not in harmony. “But on this day of the last judgement they discover that, whatever may have been their previous success in deceiving others, and perhaps while on earth *even themselves*, they cannot fool the Judge.” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] Fearful verses.

“Not every one that saith is in fact a Semitic way of saying ‘It is not the people who say’. Jesus is here asserting with great emphasis that it is right conduct, the doing of the Father’s will, and not lip-service, which is the passport through the narrow gate that leads to life and results in a verdict of acquittal in that day (i.e. the day of judgement).” [Tasker, *Matthew*] “The sense of this

verse seems to be this: *No person, by merely acknowledging My authority, believing in the Divinity of My nature, professing faith in the perfection of My righteousness, and infinite merit of My atonement, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven — shall have any part with God in glory; but he who doeth the will of My Father — he who gets the bad tree rooted up, the good tree planted, and continues to bring forth fruit to the glory and praise of God.* There is a good saying among the rabbins on this subject: ‘A man should be as vigorous as a panther, as swift as an eagle, as fleet as a stag, and as strong as a lion, to do the will of his Creator.’” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

That day: a reference to the great day of final judgement.

“Lord, Lord”: “Trembling with fear they pronounce this title with awe and reverence, pouring into it far more meaning than they had ever done before the arrival of this crisis of deepest despair.” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] “No verbal homage will suffice: ‘*Not every one that saith.*’ We may believe in our Lord’s Deity, and we may take great pains to affirm it over and over again with our ‘*Lord, Lord*’; but unless we carry out the commands of the Father, we pay no true homage to the Son. **We may own our obligations to Jesus, and so call Him ‘Lord, Lord’; but if we never practically carry out those obligations, what is the value of our admissions? Our King receives not into His kingdom those whose religion lies in words and ceremonies; but only those whose lives display the obedience of true discipleship.**” [Spurgeon, *Matthew*] **“God judges of the heart, not by words, but by works.** A good servant never disputes, speaks little, and always follows His work. Such a servant a real Christian is: such is a faithful minister, always intent either on the work of his own salvation, or that of his neighbor; speaking more to God than to men; and to these as in the presence of God. **The tongue is fitly compared by one to a pump, which empties the heart, but neither fills nor cleanses it. The love of God is a hidden spring, which supplies the heart continually, and never permits it to be dry or unfruitful.**” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

“In Thy Name”: this is emphasized here, three times claiming to have done all “through Thy name”. In the Greek text the phrase is at the beginning of each clause, further emphasizing the point that it was being done for Him and through His power (or so they say). In reality, since Christ continues to state they were never His, all that they had done on earth was actually *degrade* the name by which they now hope.

The unsaved may appear to be saved which coincides with what Jesus had just taught concerning the false teachers who inwardly are wolves. Outwardly they appear as true sheep and believers are to use caution. “He may use the believer’s vocabulary, repeat the believer’s formulas, recite the believer’s creed, and take part in the believer’s activities without being a real believer himself.” [Tasker, *Matthew*] Here the ones standing before Jesus prophesied (which we would limit scripturally to preaching although there are many who do profess to receive revelations today), drove out demons and performed many mighty works. *And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light* (2 Cor 11:14). The most obvious scriptural example of this is Judas who walked with Christ and apparently did everything the other apostles did. His heart however was never converted and his true “wolf” nature showed itself just prior to his doom.

Where did the unsaved receive their power to do these things? Were these deeds genuine products of supernatural power or fraudulent?

- It is true there is much trickery, illusions, “sleight of hand”, etc among the false prophets. Scripturally there are those who tried to imitate Paul’s power and failed (Acts 19:13,14). The Egyptian magicians were likewise unable to “keep up” with the miracles of Moses (Ex 7:22; 8:7,18,19).
- It is also true however that Satan does have great power and while the miracles may be false in the sense that their source is not God, they are still great works of supernatural origin. For instance when the antichrist comes it will be with signs and wonders from Satan (2 Thes 2:9,10). **By God’s permission Satan does exert influence upon the physical realm as well as the spiritual.**

That God does use the wicked for His purposes is evident from scripture, and we must confess there is much in the world today which defies explanation. God may use a Demas or Judas in spite of themselves; note **the verses here does not condemn what they teach but rather that their lives did not match their words!** “Alas! alas! how many preachers are there who appear prophets in their pulpits; how many writers, and other evangelical workmen, the miracles of whose labor, learning, and doctrine, we admire, who are nothing, and worse than nothing, before God, because they perform not His will, but their own? What an awful consideration, that a man of eminent gifts, whose talents are a source of public utility, should be only as a way-mark or finger-post in the way to eternal bliss, pointing out the road to others, without walking in it himself!” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

These false teachers were never saved: Jesus does not state these men were those which diligently followed Christ, were saved and obedient then lost that salvation; rather these men were those who Christ *never* knew. “What is contained in Christ’s confession? That He never reckoned them among His own people, even at the time when they boasted that they were the pillars of the church.” [Calvin, *Commentary*] An illustration may be brought forth as well as to the meaning of the word “know, knew” in scripture: Jesus says these men were never known by Him. This cannot mean He had no knowledge of them **mentally** since God is omnipotent. Of course Jesus knew them in the sense that He is fully aware of their lives, their works, etc. Rather here Jesus speaks of a knowing that is **intimate**, a knowing which involves electing love, acknowledgment, friendship and fellowship. It is in that sense that God speaks of men “knowing” women in the most intimate sense (e.g. Gen 4:1). Wuest: “*And then I will declare in a public announcement to them, I never came to know you experientially.*”

While professing themselves to be faithful followers of Christ on earth, Jesus declares them to be workers of iniquity: literally “workers of lawlessness, law-despisers”. These who Christ declares to have never for a moment to be truly His will forever be expelled to eternal destruction (Matt 25:46; Lk 13:27; 2 Thes 1:9).

This declaration is a public declaration: the word is homologāsō, “to declare openly by way of speaking out freely, such confession being the effect of deep conviction of facts.” [Vine’s Expository Dictionary] “Profess: the word which is used elsewhere of open confession of Christ before men (Matt 10:32; Rom 10:9); of John’s public declaration that he was not the Christ (Jn 1:20); of Herod’s promise to Salome in the presence of his guests (Matt 14:7). Hence, therefore, of Christ’s open, public declaration as Judge of the world. ‘There is great authority in this saying,’ remarks Bengel.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*] Hendriksen: “and then I will say to them openly...”. Wuest: “And then I will declare in a public announcement to them...”.

Jesus here claims the honor of the Final Judge: as has been often said, *Jesus was either a liar, crazy or the eternal Son of God*. Here Jesus states the Person which will be the universal and final Judge of all the universe (Phil 2:6-11). “Depart from Me — what a terrible word! What a dreadful separation! Depart from ME! from the very Jesus whom you have proclaimed in union with whom alone eternal life is to be found. For, **united to Christ, all is heaven; separated from Him, all is hell.**” [Clarke, *Commentary*] “Already here in Matt 7:21,22 — hence, rather early in Christ’s ministry — we have a clear testimony to the effect that Jesus laid claim to nothing less than being the One to whom the entire world, believing and unbelieving, would be answerable.... Jesus claims to be in a unique sense ‘God’s Son’. He says ‘My Father’. Just what does He mean when He says this? In which sense does He call Himself, by inference, the Son of God? In the sense in which believers can all say, ‘Our Father’? Answer: **the very fact that He never includes any others when He says ‘My Father’ or ‘My Own Father’ shows that He viewed Himself as Son of God in a very special sense. He enjoys community of essence with the Father.**” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

The End of the Way: Doers vs. Hearers

Matt 7:24-27 Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

Luke 6:47-49 Whosoever cometh to Me, and heareth My sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: he is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.

Jesus speaks a parable although the word itself is not used here. A parable is defined as “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning”; “an extended simile”, or “an illustrative story in which a comparison is drawn and the word or phrase indicating this comparison (in this case will be like).”

Both men were builders which might be said of all living. “To live means to build. Every ambition a man cherishes, every thought he conceives, every word he speaks, and every deed he performs is, as it were, a building block. Gradually the structure of his life rises. Not all builders are the same however. Some are sensible, some foolish.” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] **There are only two kinds of builders in the eyes of the Lord.**

Both houses externally appeared the same, the difference laid in the foundation: both houses were common to those built in that day: walls of clay or mud which a thief could dig through, and the roof was of earth, grass or tile and could be opened up. One of the builders had foresight however to realize the pleasant dry season would not last and therefore dug through the top gravel to the rock bottom. The foolish man however built directly upon the loose gravel as if the sunny days would last forever. “The picture is not of two men deliberately selecting foundations, but it contrasts one who carefully chooses and prepares his foundation with one who builds at hap-hazard.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*] It requires comment that some translations emphasize the definite article (“the”) stating the wise man built on the rock (ARV, NAS, RSV). The obvious reference is to Christ as being “the Rock”. While that truth cannot be denied it is improbable and unnecessary. The parable is speaking generally and the definite article is commonly omitted when translating, as seen by “on rock” (NEB) or “on rocky foundation” (Williams) or “on a rock” (KJV). If one is to press the use of the definite article to refer to Christ, what then does “the” gravel refer?

The foundation built upon is the Words of Christ, probably a direct reference to the Sermon on the Mount but could properly be applied to the entirety of Christ’s teachings. This is the difference between the wise and foolish builder which Christ is emphasizing: **the wise are those who not only listen to the Lord but out of gratitude for salvation received puts His commands into practice.** “By the grace of God the sensible man does this; the foolish man, trusting in self and refusing to think about the future, does not. He is a hearer but not a doer. He follows the promptings of his own sinful will.” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] **This foundation is a life-long obedience** as well, not a temporary impulsive obedience. Wuest: “Therefore, everyone who is of such a character as to be **habitually** hearing these words of mine and **habitually** doing them shall be likened to an intelligent man...”.

Both builders' structures are outwardly the same, it is the trials which brought forth the differences between the buildings. Many make a profession of faith and perform the functions of Christianity *until the trials come*. It is the trials which separate the tares from the wheat, the sheep from the goats. **A true believer may stumble and fall but the Lord will *always* pick them back up; the false believer falls away never to return.** *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.* (1 Jn 2:19) “As it is often difficult to distinguish the true professors of the Gospel from the false, Christ shows, by a beautiful comparison, where the main difference lies. Here presents two houses, one of which was built without a foundation, while the other was well-founded. Both have the same external appearance: but, when the wind and storms blow, and the floods dash against them, the former will immediately fall, while the latter will be sustained by its strength against every assault. Christ therefore compares a vain and empty profession of the Gospel to a beautiful, but not solid, building, which, however elevated, is exposed every moment to downfall, because it wants a foundation.... The general meaning of the passage is, that **true piety is not fully distinguished from its counterfeit, till it comes to the trial.** For the temptations, by which we are tried, are like billows and storms, which easily overwhelm unsteady minds, whose lightness is not perceived during the season of prosperity.” [Calvin, *Commentary*]

The test to which the houses are put: the testing comes to both houses. Trials and crises come to all, both the wise and foolish builders. There is a difference in the wording used however. The house built upon the rock the winds *fell* upon the house, the sense being the winds *fell upon, struck against, beat upon with great force*. But for the house built upon the sand the winds *beat* upon the house, a form of the same word being used in Jn 11:9,10 to mean *stumble*. “The swirling waters that threatened it were not even able to shake it. It braved the tumultuous cloudbursts. It withstood the enormous force of the onrushing flood. It defied every furious blast.... On the other hand, it took hardly any effort for the angry floods to undermine the walls of the other house and to carry away the very sand or gravel on which it had been erected. Moreover, the rain and the wind easily finished whatever was left undone by the tide. All the wind had to do was give the tottering structure a little push.” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

The result of the test and the reason for the result: the house built upon the rocky cliff did not fall, the reason being directly ascribed to the fact of its foundation. “Trials come even to insincere professors. Are we not all born to trouble? The same kind of afflictions come to the foolish as come to the wise, and they operate in precisely the same way; but the result is very different. *‘It fell.’* These are solemn words. It was a fine building, and it promised to stand for ages; but *‘it fell.’* There were minor faults in the fabric, but its chief weakness was underground, in the secret place of the foundation: the man *‘built his house upon the sand.’* His fundamentals were wrong. The crash was terrible; the sound was heard afar: *‘great was the fall of it.’* The overflow was final and irretrievable. Many heard the fall, and many more saw the ruins as they remained a perpetual memorial of the result of that folly which is satisfied with hearing, and neglects doing.” [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]

Conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount

Matt 7:28-8:1 And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine: for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. When He was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. : the listeners had sat spell-bound in a state of utter amazement. They were *astounded* meaning literally *were struck out of their senses*. “Often to drive one out of his senses by a sudden shock, and therefore here of *amazement*. They were *astounded*. We have a similar expression, though not so strong: ‘I was *struck* with this or that remarkable thing.’ “ [Vincent, *Word Studies*] Wuest: “*the crowds were struck with astonishment to the point of the loss of self-control by His teaching.*” “*‘The people were astonished’*: was this all? It is to be feared it was. Two things surprised them; the substance of His teaching, and the manner of it. They had never heard such *doctrine* before; the precepts which He had given were quite new to their thoughts. But their main astonishment was at His manner: there was a certainly a power, a weight about it, such as they had never seen in the ordinary professional instructors. He did not raise questions, nor speak with hesitation; neither did He cite authorities, and hide His own responsibility behind great names. *‘He taught them as one having authority.’* He spoke royally: the truth itself was its own argument and demonstration. He taught prophetically, as one inspired from above: men felt that he spake after the manner of one sent of God. It was no fault on their part to be *astonished*, but it was a grave crime to be astonished and nothing more. My Savior, this was a poor reward for thy right royal discourse — *‘The people were astonished.’* Grant to me that I may not care to astonish people, but may I be enabled to win them for Thee: and if, with my utmost endeavors. I do astonish them, and nothing more, may I never complain; for how should the disciple be above his Lord?” [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]

“The sermon is over; what has come of it? Never was there so great a Preacher, and never did He deliver a greater discourse: how many were the penitents? How many the converts? We do not hear of any. **Divine truth, even when preached to perfection, will not of itself affect the heart to conversion. The most overpowering authority produces no obedience unless the Holy Ghost subdue the hearer’s heart.**” [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]