

HOW TO BUILD A LIFE - Matthew 7:13-29

The rest of Jesus' sermon contains no new command or instruction. The emphasis is now on ***application and persistence in the truth***. ***Knowing*** the sermon will help no one. Knowledge of the truth only increases responsibility and judgment. ***Doing*** what Jesus said will build a life of eternal strength and power.

Here again, Jesus, the master teacher, narrows the focus of our thoughts. As we've seen throughout this sermon, Jesus boils truth down into ***choices***. And, as usual, only two are put on the table. Jesus will contrast ***two options for His hearers***: there are ***two gates, narrow and wide (13-14)***, ***two fruits, good and bad (15-23)***, and ***two ways of building, wise and foolish (24-28)***.

- 1) **THE NARROW AND WIDE GATES TO THE KINGDOM** - 7:13-14 - "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. [14] For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

The serious disciple will have to discipline himself to practice the teaching of Jesus in this fallen world. Wide and narrow don't merely refer to distance or space. The word translated "narrow" in the Greek carries the meaning, ***"to experience trouble or difficulty"***, while the word for "wide" can have overtones of ***"prosperity"*** or ***"ease."***

Clearly, Jesus predicts ongoing conflict with this world's value system for His followers. This does not mean we are to be fearful or timid. But there is a clear call to carefulness in terms of not being ***deceived***, steadfastness in terms of never ***giving up***, and realistic expectations, in terms of expecting ***persecution***. The Christian must be prepared to stand on his own - to conform to the standard of Christ rather than the pack. Clearly, Jesus' teaching about the wide and narrow gates has its primary emphasis on helping us understand we will have to part with much other company if we choose to walk with Him.

- 2) **GOOD FRUIT AND BAD** - 7:15-23 - "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. [16] You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? [17] So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. [18] A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. [19] Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. [20] Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. [21] 'Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. [22] On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' [23] And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

What was ***implied*** in the wide and narrow gate illustration is now stated clearly. ***More people will profess Christ than follow Him***. One particular cause of spiritual damage will be ***false teachers***. People will be taken in by a message that will not put them right with Jesus nor give them entrance to His kingdom. The specific danger Jesus highlights is the crowd's inclination to follow leaders on the basis of the ***visible effects of their ministry (works)*** rather than the ***character of their personal lives (fruit)***.

The danger in this is spelled out clearly by Jesus. People can demonstrate mighty works in the Name of Jesus without belonging to Him in any way - **7:22-23** - "On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' [23] And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

Fruit, on the other hand, is defined as ***"doing the will of my Father who is in heaven"*** (21). And what is the will of the Father in heaven? Taken in proper context, the words refer to the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount as Jesus gives it. Jesus is saying to ***look for leaders who follow those instructions in their personal lives***. Of course, they still must proclaim Christ. The life and the words must go together.

God's people have repeatedly gone astray when they listened to people who ***told them what they wanted to hear*** - **Jeremiah 23:16-17** - "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. [17] They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, 'It shall be well with you'; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No disaster shall come upon you.'"

Another less known reference, but very powerful along the same lines, is **Micah 2:11** - "If someone showed up with a good smile and glib tongue and told lies from morning to night--'I'll preach sermons that will tell you how you can get anything you want from God: More money, the best wines . . . you name it'--you'd hire him on the spot as your preacher!"(The Message).

True teachers and leaders should *exalt the Person of Jesus Christ* - **1 John 4:1-3** - "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. [2] By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, [3] and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already."

And, in addition to this message, they should *bear the fruit of character set out in the Sermon on the Mount*. Both are essential.

- 3) **HOW TO BUILD A LIFE - 7:24-28** - "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. [25] And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. [26] And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. [27] And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." [28] And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching,"

Here's a quick wrap up on the practical truths Jesus sets out in the conclusion of His teaching:

- a) **Everyone is building a life** - We usually think of life as a *stretch of time we are using up*. Jesus says it's more. It's an *eternal structure* that we are locking into place with each passing day. **You and I are not just doing something each day, but becoming something each day**. All of the little choices and attitudes add up. You can choose whatever you want. But there the freedom ends. The **result** of those choices isn't under your control. And you have to live in the house you build.
- b) **We either build wisely or foolishly** - Let's look at the difference. Consider the man who builds *foolishly*. He *hears* what Jesus says but does not *practice* it. He makes the fatal mistake of many religious people in thinking that *because he knows about the content of the truth, he is among the initiated*. He makes a relationship with Jesus something academic rather than something practical and life transforming.

The foolish builder also builds *for the needs of the moment*, rather than *the day of accountability and eternal judgement*. The "*storm*" Jesus talks about in **verses 25 and 27** should be examined in the light of the kind of judgment He's already described in **verses 19 and 21-23**. Other storms will come throughout all of our lives to be sure, but this day of *judgment* is the one that will determine the destiny of our lives finally.

Notice that this is the constant theme of both the O.T. and the N.T. **David pondered carefully the total collapse of lives at the day of God's judgement**. **Psalms 1:4-5** specifically says that the "**wicked will not stand at the judgement**." This is the *fall* Jesus predicted as well.

The wise builder is one who perseveres through all opposition and hardship - who measures people by who they are in Christ rather than the things they say - who daily applies the teaching of Jesus to his own heart, living it out in all circumstances - and who measures each construction day of his life by how it will stand in the day of judgement.

- c) **The words of Jesus must be foundational in my life** - Again, Jesus teaches on priorities. His Lordship must be absolute. His new life won't blend or mix with my old way of doing things. The greatest house in the world will fall without a solid foundation. And whatever else I may do with my life - however successful I may be - it will all come to nothing without the Lordship of Jesus established *before* and *underneath* it all.