

Bible Studies for Life Series for November 18: Make up your minds

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Bible Studies for Life Series for November 25

Make up your minds

- Matthew 7:13-29

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In this final section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes explicitly clear that his teaching is to be applied to this life. The Sermon on the Mount is not an exposition of what life will be like when the kingdom of God is fully realized; it is the way that Jesus' disciples are to live now. It is a picture of the ethic by which we live as citizens of God's kingdom on this earth.

If there were any question about that, surely this section would put them to rest. Each scenario Jesus describes illustrates the obedience expected of his disciples.

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Robert Frost beautifully wrote of the choice a traveler had to make: “Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, and sorry I could not travel both and be one traveler. Long I stood and looked as far as I could to where it bent in the undergrowth; ... Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, and I, I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.”

It is the same choice Jesus says we must make—to choose the narrow way or the broad path that leads to destruction.

While this is a multiple choice exam, there is no option that reads, “All of the above.” Jesus says that there are only two ways, hard and easy; two gates, broad and narrow; two crowds, large and small; that end in two destinations, destruction and life. This was no more popular in Jesus’ day than it is now. No one likes to be confronted with the necessity of a choice, but Jesus will not allow us to escape it.

Eternal life will not be found by following the crowd but by a deliberate decision. Jesus experienced this in his own life and ministry, and John tells us there was a time when many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

R.T. France says of this passage: “True discipleship is a minority religion.”

False prophets were not a new category to Jesus. We see them several times in the Old Testament, and Jesus seems to have regarded the Pharisees and the Sadducees in the same light. Jesus called them “Blind leaders of the blind.”

Paul encountered them throughout his ministry, most notably confronting them in Galatians and Second Corinthians. The Galatians have turned from the gospel originally presented to them to a “different gospel.” So serious is the false teaching of these pseudoprophets that Paul says, “... if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!”

Jesus does not leave us in the dark in trying to determine the validity of these false prophets and their teaching. He says, “You will know them by their fruits.” The fruits are not specified, but the idea is clear that their lives must mirror their teaching. There are a couple of questions we must ask: Is this teaching consistent with the revelation of God in Jesus? Is this consistent with the teaching of the New Testament?

Evidently the ethical nature of Jesus’ warning here carries with it the idea that false teachers are trying to build their own following rather than exhorting people to follow Christ.

Obedience is implicit in the first two scenarios of this section. In the last two, obedience is made explicit. Matthew 7:21: “Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

Salvation always shows evidence of its work in a person’s life. When we are marked with the presence of the Holy Spirit, our lives begin to change, and there is evidence of God at work in us.

When I was finishing seminary, a revival came to town. It was the talk of the campus and many of the churches in the area. But there was something that just didn’t feel right about it to me. The best piece of advice I got when I asked if it was valid was, “Well, let’s just see what change comes from it.” We cannot come into the presence of God and walk away unchanged.

Since we have been studying the Sermon on the Mount, we need to take

into account what Jesus already has taught in applying this passage. We need to start with ourselves. Before we start to look for obedience in someone else, we need to examine our own obedience and see just how short we fall. Jesus tells us here that he desires obedience in relationship. It all begins with that relationship with Jesus. We are not obedient out of fear, nor because we are trying to attain God's approval by our good works. We are obedient because we love the Lord and desire to please him. Obedience is first and foremost built on relationship.

Jesus concludes the sermon with the story of the two builders. It is again the story of obedience, "... everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them" Jesus insists neither a verbal profession nor an intellectual knowledge of him, though both are necessary, can be a substitute for obedience. This is not to suggest that we enter the kingdom by good works. The whole New Testament teaches salvation is purely by the grace of God through faith. It is to say that those who truly respond to the gospel will be obedient and express their faith through good works.

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