

The Sermon on the Mount (Part 2)

The New People of God

Study 16 – The Two Ways

Introduction

One of the good yet challenging things about life is that it is full of choices. Most of the time these choices are mundane and insignificant – What will I have for breakfast? Will I accept that invitation or just settle for a quiet night in? Should I buy those jeans or keep shopping around? What mobile phone deal is the best one? And so the list goes on. At other times the choices we face are far more important, choices that really affect us in a significant way. What should I study at University? Should I make that career move? Should I pursue this relationship? Are we ready to start a family? What will we do if we can't have children?

What all of these questions and choices, the mundane and the important ones, have in common is that they are questions and choices related to everyday life in this world, secular questions and choices if you like. It's not that they don't matter at all or that we are not exercised about some of them. But it is true that they are not ultimate choices, choices that count for eternity. And that is where the choice that Jesus puts before us in Matthew 7:13-23 is so different, for the choice that we find in these verses is a life and death choice, a choice which will determine our eternal destiny.

The language and imagery that Jesus uses to define this ultimate choice is drawn from the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, in particular the 'Two Ways' imagery of the book of Proverbs. In effect all people must choose between two ways to live, the way of wisdom or the way of folly, the way of life or the way of death. Put like this, the choice seems obvious of course, but Jesus point in this passage is that the way of wisdom and life is in fact neither the easy nor the popular way and that there are plenty of incentives for making the opposite choice. According to Jesus, the sad fact is that only the minority choose the narrow way that leads to life whereas the many choose the broad way that leads to destruction.



Read Matthew 7:13-23

1. According to Jesus how many gates are there by which people could enter and how many ways are there that people could follow?
2. What characterises each gate and each way?
3. What will the final outcome be for each choice?
4. Which gate does Jesus urge his hearers to enter by?
5. Why was it necessary for Jesus to have to urge people to choose this gate?
6. What light does what we have learnt thus far in the Sermon on the Mount cast on Jesus' description of the way of life as a narrow way?

7. In verses 15-20 Jesus warns against the influence of false prophets. How does he describe them? What makes them so dangerous?

8. How does Jesus' warning against false prophets fit in with His teaching about the two gates and the two ways?

9. What criterion has Jesus given by which these prophets are to be evaluated?

10. Read verses 21-23. What warning does Jesus give to those who are quick to apply His name to what they say and do?

11. According to this passage, what is the key characteristic of a true prophet?

12. What can be said of all true believers?



1. Which way would you say you are following? Why do you say this?
2. How has this passage encouraged you or challenged you?
3. How would you use this passage in a conversation with someone who is not yet a Christian?