

May 31, 2026
Pursuing the Kingdom: The Way is Narrow
Matthew 7:13-23
Vernon Advent Christian Church

As we come to Gospel of Matthew 7:13–23, we are coming to the end of what is referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. For three chapters, Jesus has been describing what life looks like under the rule and reign of the kingdom of God which both He and his forerunner, John the Baptizer, had both preached was at hand. He has spoken about the character of kingdom citizens in the Beatitudes. He has confronted anger, lust, revenge, hypocrisy, greed, anxiety, judgmentalism, prayer and even love for our enemies. And over and over again, Jesus has called His followers away from a phony, outward religion and into a deep, authentic relationship with our heavenly Father.

And now, as He begins to bring the sermon to a close, the tone becomes more urgent and deeply personal, as we mentioned last week. Jesus moves from explanation to invitation, really, even into confrontation. Because after hearing everything He has taught, the question to the hearer is no longer, “Do you understand what I’m saying?” The question becomes, “What will you do with it?” In other words, Jesus is saying that nothing I've said is optional. This is the standard. This is what the Kingdom life looks like. “Are you in? Or are you out?”

And, honestly, this is where this passage can become uncomfortable for us. Because Jesus refuses to allow His hearers, including you and I, to remain neutral. Throughout the passage we're going to look at today, Jesus presents to us a series of contrasts that all boil down to the same point and the message is clear and unmistakable. There are only two kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world, and every one of us is in one or the other. There is no middle road. You can not straddle the fence, so to speak. You are either in or you are out.

And that cuts directly against the spirit of our present day culture. We live in a time that celebrates endless spiritual options and resists exclusive claims to absolute truth. People often say things like, “All paths lead to God,” or “It’s okay, just live out your truth.” But Jesus says something radically different. There are not “many roads” and they certainly do not “all lead to God.” No, Jesus teaches that there are only two roads, and they lead to two very different destinations.

That is why this passage matters so much when considering what it means to pursue the kingdom of God. Because Jesus is forcing us to wrestle with a sobering question, “Are we truly following the King?” Or are we “only associating ourselves with religion?” And our passage today teaches us that pursuing the kingdom of God requires choosing the narrow path which, although may be less traveled, it is the only path that leads to eternal life. If you are able, please stand with me as I read God's word from the Gospel of Matthew 7:13-23. [Read Passage]

Now, right off the bat, this passage picks up right where we left off last week, and the first truth Jesus gives us is this, the Kingdom of God requires us to choose the narrow way. Jesus begins with a brief, yet direct, command in vs. 13, “Enter by the narrow gate.” Notice

immediately that Jesus presents the kingdom as something that requires a decision. He does not say, “Stand back and look at the gate,” or “Admire the gate,” or even to simply “Talk about the gate.” He says to “Enter it.” For the kingdom of God is not something we are to appreciate from a distance. It is something we must personally enter into and embrace.

And Jesus did not speak of this gate as our final destiny, He does that elsewhere, but here, it is described as the entrance to a path. There is a right way and a wrong way and Jesus understood and taught that not all ways and not all destinations are equally good.

For, He then contrasts the two gates and two roads or “ways.” First, is the wide gate and the easy way in vs. 13, “For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.” The point here is that the wide gate and way is easier because it does not require surrender, repentance or submission to God's authority. It is the road of self-rule. It allows people to carry their pride, their sin and their own definitions of truth. And it is comfortable because it asks very little of those who choose this path.

It would be like going for a hike and coming to a fork in the trail. One path is wide, smooth and crowded. Everyone seems to be taking it. The other path is narrow, steep and far less popular. Most people would instinctively assume the wider path must be the better one because, it seems, everyone is taking that one. But experienced hikers know that popularity does not mean that it's the best path. One trail may lead to a breathtaking summit while the other ends at a dead end. And Jesus is reminding us that just because everyone is doing it, that doesn't mean it is right. The question is not, “What is everyone else doing?” but, “Where does this road lead?”

The same is true spiritually. Our culture often tells us what we naturally want to hear. “Live however you want.” “Follow your heart.” “Define truth for yourself.” “You don't need repentance.” “You don't need surrender.” But Jesus says that, yeah, that all may sound good, but that road leads to destruction. And that word, “destruction” should be a sobering one to us. For what Jesus is speaking about here is eternal separation from God, what the Bible calls “Hell.” Jesus will use the same word in Matt. 10:28 when He says, “Don't be afraid of people, who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. The only one you should fear is the one who can destroy both the soul and the body in hell.”

And notice the indication here is that people are not merely wandering there accidentally. They are choosing a path. The truth is, Jesus doesn't send anyone to Hell. People willfully make that choice on their own by choosing the path that leads there. So the question Jesus places before us is not whether we admire the gate, or understand the gate, or can even describe the gate. The question is simple, have we entered it?

And He describes this gate for us in vs. 14, “For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” Now, why is the gate narrow? Well, a narrow gate means you cannot drift into it by accident. You must intentionally choose to pass through it. You see, the kingdom of God requires surrender. You must drop your heavy baggage at the gate because you cannot bring the “baggage” of self-righteousness, unrepentant sin or worldly pride through the narrow entrance. Entrance into this narrow gate requires humility and a stripping away of our self-reliance.

And more specifically, the gate is narrow because salvation is found in Christ alone. Later in His ministry Jesus would make this exclusive claim in John 14:6, “I am the way, and

the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” And that exclusivity offends our modern way of thinking. But Jesus does not soften it. He lovingly, yet unapologetically, proclaims the truth that salvation is found nowhere else but in and through Him.

Now notice something else. Jesus says the road is “hard.” Not because following Christ is joyless, but because kingdom living runs against the grain, or against the current, of the world in which we live and against the instincts of our sinful nature.

Following Jesus is hard, brothers and sisters. It means dying to ourselves. It means repentance. It means obedience. It means trusting God and laying down our personal preferences for the sake of His kingdom. It means loving our enemies, forgiving others, rejecting hypocrisy, seeking holiness and pursuing the kingdom above our earthly comforts. The broad road says, “Live for yourself.” But the narrow road says, “Follow the King.”

And so, yes, the road is hard and it is tough, but its destination is “life” in its fullest, eternal sense. Pursuing the Kingdom means living in this temporal world in light of the reality of our hope in Christ. The hardships of the narrow road are temporary, but the reward of the destination is eternal. For it is far better to be on a difficult road that leads to a safe harbor than a smooth highway that leads to a cliff.

Now, Jesus knows that once we commit ourselves to the narrow way, another challenge immediately arises. How do we recognize those who are truly walking that path and those who only appear to be? The narrow gate requires a deliberate choice, but not everyone who claims to be on that road is genuinely leading people toward life. That is why Jesus moves naturally from the image of two roads to the image of two trees. So having called us to enter the narrow gate, Jesus now calls us to exercise discernment by examining the fruit that flows from those who claim to speak for God in vs. 15–20.

Jesus says, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” This is a surprising warning because, at first glance, false prophets do not appear overtly dangerous. Now, wolves in wolf costumes wouldn’t deceive anyone. The danger is that they look like sheep. In other words, outward appearances can be misleading.

Throughout His sermon, Jesus has repeatedly exposed the difference between outward religion and authentic relationship. Now He warns that some spiritual leaders may look convincing on the outside while being spiritually destructive to their hearers. And honestly, this warning is incredibly relevant today.

We live in a time of endless “spiritual” voices. There are countless podcasts, influencers, preachers, authors and online content creators out there and everyone claims authority, truth and insight. Some are faithful while others distort the gospel by wrapping their teachings in Christian language to make them palpable, or to make them seem to be speaking for God. Some preach a gospel centered entirely on self-fulfillment. Others preach a gospel of prosperity, comfort and personal success. And others minimize repentance and holiness altogether. Still others elevate flashiness and appeal over character. And Jesus says, “Beware the wolves in sheep’s clothing.”

And then He gives the test. “You will recognize them by their fruits.” Not merely by their gifts. Not their popularity. Not their charisma. But their fruit. Fruit, here, refers to the

visible evidence of Holy Spirit's work in a person's life. Eventually, what is inside a person becomes visible through their character, priorities and influence.

And Jesus uses a simple illustration to make His point. "Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles?" The answer is obvious. The nature of the tree determines the nature of the fruit. A healthy tree produces healthy fruit. A diseased tree produces bad fruit. And this applies not only to teachers, but to all disciples. Citizens of the Kingdom of God will produce visible fruit, real heart transformation, over time. And Paul describes what that fruit is supposed to look like in the life of the believer in Galatians 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

Now perfection is not the issue here. Christians still struggle and fail. But genuine faith produces genuine change. A transformed heart gradually produces transformed desires, transformed priorities, transformed speech, transformed relationships and transformed obedience. In other words, kingdom transformation. That's exactly Jesus' point. If you have been walking with Christ, no matter the length of time, hopefully you can say that you are no longer the person you once were. If you have trouble saying that, than maybe you need to do some self-evaluation and see if there is something off in your relationship with God.

And Jesus' warning in vs. 19 is serious. "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." This is not a casual admonition. Jesus is, again, speaking here about judgment and destruction. And this warning is not to be taken lightly.

Which leads directly into perhaps the most sobering section in this entire sermon of Jesus, and perhaps the most sobering words in all of scripture. Jesus says in vs. 21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven." Now, that statement should stop us in our tracks. You see, the kingdom of God requires more than religious activity. It requires more than "doing religious things."

Notice these people are not atheists. They are not openly hostile to Jesus. They even call Him "Lord." In fact, they appear deeply religious. Most likely, Jesus is referring back to the false prophets He was just referring to, but the point here is that a verbal profession of faith alone is not enough for salvation.

[Example of faith and sitting in a chair] It's not enough to say you believe the chair will hold you up, but you have to put your faith into action and actually sit down and allow the chair to do its work. The same is true with Christ. You can say all you want to that you believe in Jesus. But all it is just lip service unless you put that belief into practice and totally surrender your life to his finished work on the cross and come under the authority His kingdom and its values.

Jesus continues by making the point that, actually, the one who will enter into the kingdom is the "... the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." Now we must be careful here. Jesus is not teaching salvation by works. The New Testament consistently teaches salvation by grace alone through faith alone. But genuine faith produces obedience. True discipleship is not just going to church and saying we believe, it is total surrender to Christ and His kingdom.

Then Jesus brings this point together as He paints another sobering picture of judgment day in vs. 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?”

Now, this is astonishing because these people have impressive resumes don't they? They preached. They performed miracles. They did powerful works. And yet Jesus says, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.”

Notice He does not say, “I knew you once.” He says, “I never knew you.” These people did lots of “religious stuff” without genuine surrender. They were actually doing ministry but without transformation. And honestly, this may be the worst place to be in, the possibility of being a Christian in name only without have a true inward conversion. The fact is, you can know how to act and talk like a Christian without actually knowing Christ. You can attend church without actually belonging to the kingdom. You can even do all the right things and even look like a Christian without being, truly, born again.

Jesus's point here isn't to cause any confusion for anyone to doubt there salvation. Jesus is exposing false assurance. The kingdom of God is not about outward performance alone, about saying and doing all the right things, it is about knowing and following the King.

So how do we apply this passage? First, we need to think about which road we are truly on and which kingdom we belong to. Jesus does not allow for any middle ground or neutrality. Nobody ever accidentally ends up on a mountain peak. They climb there intentionally. In the same way, nobody drifts into deep spiritual maturity or eternal life.

The broad road is easy because it requires zero effort and you just go with the flow of this world. But Christ calls us to the narrow road. It is tight, it is pressing and it will cost you everything. But look where it leads. The hard and narrow road with Jesus leads to true, everlasting life, that begins the moment you say “yes” to Jesus and lasts for all eternity. While the broad and easy road without Him leads to destruction and eternal separation from God.

Second, brothers and sisters, we need to practice spiritual discernment. And by that, I mean, we need to be able to know God and His word well enough to be able to spot the wolves in sheep's clothing. Not every spiritual voice is trustworthy. May we be a people who studies the word of God to the point that we can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, discern that which is of God and that which isn't.

Third, examine your own lives honestly. Is there evidence of genuine spiritual fruit in your life? Not perfection, but real transformation and growth. Is your life increasingly marked by repentance, obedience, humility, love and dependence on Christ? In the same way that we go to the doctor for a check-up or mechanic to make sure our car is running correctly, we need to re-evaluate our own lives to make sure that we are aligned with God and His will.

And finally, we are not to confuse religious activity with a genuine relationship with Jesus. The question is not, “Do you attend church? Do you know how to walk and talk like a Christian? Or Do you appear religious?” No, the real question is, “Do you know Christ? Do you follow Him? And does your life reflect a genuine surrender to the King?”

As we close, this passage leaves us with a decision to make. Jesus places two roads before us. Two destinations. Two kinds of trees. Two kinds of disciples. And, in reality, all of these are, again, illustrations of the same thing. There are only two kingdoms. The kingdom

of God and the kingdom of this world. And the most dangerous place to be is near the kingdom without actually entering into it.

The tragedy of these verses is not open rebellion, it is false assurance. People who assumed they belonged to Christ while never truly surrendering to Him. And yet the invitation of Jesus remains open. "Enter by the narrow gate." That invitation is gracious because the narrow gate is not earned by being perfect. It is entered through repentance and faith in Christ and the gate is open to all who would enter into it.

The broad road says, "Live for yourself." But Jesus says, "Come follow Me." The broad road promises freedom but only leads to destruction. The narrow road demands surrender but ultimately leads to eternal life. For, the narrow gate is not just a system of rules and morality, it is a person and His name is Jesus. And He is the only way to the Father. Through His death and resurrection, sinners can be forgiven, transformed and brought into the kingdom of God through repentance and surrender.

So today, the invitation is clear. Enter the narrow gate. Follow the King. Pursue the kingdom of God with genuine faith and wholehearted surrender. Because in the end, what matters most is not whether you did all the right things and appeared religious, but whether you truly belonged to Christ. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the truth of Your Word, even when it confronts us. We confess that it is easy to drift toward outward religion while neglecting true surrender. Search us today, Lord. Reveal any false assurance, pride or divided loyalty within us.

Help us to enter by the narrow gate and to follow Jesus faithfully on the path that leads to life. Give us discernment to recognize truth from error and hearts that genuinely desire obedience to You. Produce in us the fruit of true discipleship, not merely outward performance, but inward transformation shaped by Your Holy Spirit.

Lord, guard us from empty religion and draw us into a real relationship with You. May we not simply say "Lord, Lord" with our lips while resisting Your rule in our lives. Instead, teach us to pursue Your kingdom with humility, repentance, faith and perseverance.

And, if there is anyone here walking the broad road today, we pray that Your grace would lovingly call them to repentance and life that is only found in Jesus. And it is in His name that we pray. Amen.

Benediction: May you go forth through the narrow gate, walking faithfully in the way that leads to life. May the Lord guard you from deception, produce in you the fruit of true discipleship and deepen your love for Jesus. And may your life be marked not merely by religious words, but by genuine faith, wholehearted obedience and joyful pursuit of the kingdom of God. Amen.