

A SERMON SUPREME

Once an old farmer attended church every single Sunday. He said he always benefited from the sermon. He commented, "To tell you the truth, I've never heard a sermon, but what I didn't get something good out of it." Then after thinking for a moment he added, "However, I've had some mighty close calls."

I think we've all had some mighty close calls... But the sermon Jesus delivered in Matthew 5-7 was definitely not one of them. If sermons were pizzas, the Sermon on the Mount would be a *sermon supreme*.

It's been said, "There are three types of

sermons: those you *can* listen to, those you *can't* listen to, and those you *can't help* but listen to." This was the latter.

For the folks sitting on the grassy knoll overlooking the Sea of Galilee - those who heard Jesus' sermon... this was a sermon they'd never, ever, forget.

Jesus had been traveling the countryside preaching the Kingdom of heaven was at hand, now He explains the nature of His kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount is "*the Christian Manifesto*" - it's the very heart of Jesus' message.

A WISE BUILDER

Jesus closes His sermon with the story of two builders. But it's a warning that should be read before you study the sermon, and kept in mind throughout.

One man builds his house on the sand, while the other man builds his house on the rock. Apparently, both men built houses that looked similar from the outside - but when the rains came the foundational differences became apparent. This is what happens when tough times come our way - trials and tears test our foundation. Have we built our lives on the rock of God's Word, or the shiftier ideas of man?

Here's the outcome of the wise man who hears and obeys God's Word, verse 25, "the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock."

But of the foolish person who fails to follow God's Word, we're told in verse 27, "the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

Do we base our decisions on God's timeless truths - or take our cues and get our inspiration from Oprah, or our favorite beer commercials, or a radio talk show, or the latest self-help fad?

On what kind of foundation are we building our lives?

Devotion Box - To Do or To Be... That Is The Question

The Sermon on the Mount starts with 9 *be-attitudes*. The Pharisees said, "do-do-do", while Jesus says, "be-be-be". Frank Sinatra says, "do-be-do-be-do", but that doesn't matter. What matters to God is not what you *do*, but what you *be*. The Pharisees did all the right things, but evil lurked in their hearts. Jesus teaches right-ousness comes from the inside out.

Paul was a Pharisee before he became a Christian, yet after His conversion he said of the self-righteous life he'd manufactured, "I count it but rubbish." Literally, dung or manure. He says this emphasis on "do-do"... was just that, dung! God knows if you'll *be* the right person, you'll *do* the right things!

"If sermons were pizzas, the Sermon on the Mount would be a *sermon supreme*."

BONUS PAGES IN THIS ISSUE

Bible Scan - Matthew 5-7

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THE BELIEVER'S BIRTHMARKS

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

"Poor in spirit" – here are some synonyms, *"bankrupt"*, *"empty"*, *"desperate"*. Some folks are full of themselves. The poor in spirit look outside of themselves, and throw themselves on the mercies of God. Jesus promises to bless this attitude with the kingdom of heaven. What an irony, spiritual beggars end up royal heirs.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN

Jesus blesses the person who'll "mourn" - who knows there's a time for tears. There's sin in us, and sin around us – and our eyes can't stay dry when we really understand sin's consequences. The first step in fixing what's broken is realizing it's broke. Jesus promises comfort to the person who stops pretending all is well.

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

Meekness is strength under restraint. A "meek" person knows it's better to win his opponent's respect, than the game. *He's* not drunk with the desire to conquer. *She* realizes God and people are more important than the final score. The meek *will* inherit the earth. God will trust *authority* to a person with the right *priority*.

BLESSED... HUNGER... FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

What's your driving passion? What yanks your chain? Life is full of *stuff* that creates a bloated feeling for a time – that's why we call it *stuff* - but it never slakes our spiritual thirst. Jesus is the true thirst-quencher. He promises that if we "hunger and thirst" for Him we'll stay full. Seek Jesus, and you'll be a satisfied seeker.

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL

I need mercy. Apart from God's mercy heaven is out of my reach. And that's why I need to be "merciful". Can I

Each beatitude begins "Blessed..." which means "*happy*".

In the preamble to our Constitution our founding fathers guaranteed us the right "to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". But the founding fathers were some wise old goats – they knew they could guarantee us the right to *pursue* happiness, but *finding it* was a different matter. Make happiness your goal, and that's the best way to end up unhappy. Happiness is never the result of a direct pursuit.

Always remember, real happiness is a by-product of living life God's way.

deny you my forgiveness, when God forgives me so freely? Jesus says *the more mercy I show, the more mercy I'll know*. Hey, don't you think it's time to bury the hatchet? Cut that brother, or child, or spouse some slack – show mercy today... tomorrow, you might need some.

BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART

Purity is important. If there's a fly in my coffee, I won't drink it. Coffee can be brewed too strong, or too weak, and I'll still down a cup – but a bug makes it intolerable. Likewise, my love for God is sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker, but it should always be sincere. Hypocrisy is the fly in the cup. Jesus always blesses genuine faith. He says, only "the pure in heart... shall see God."

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

"Peacemakers" like to fight. They confront hostility, assault misunderstanding, attack problems with peaceful solutions. They war for peace. A peacemaker tries to destroy his enemy by turning him into a friend. And never are we more like God than when we fight for peace. Jesus calls the peacemakers, "*sons of God*".

BLESSED... PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Take a stand for what's righteous, and those who are in the wrong will take a shot at you. Just remember, the people the world calls *chumps*, God calls *champs*!

BLESSED... PERSECUTED FOR JESUS' SAKE

And when you take a stand for Jesus, those who oppose Him will try to shoot you down. You'll be persecuted for His sake. Don't be surprised when it happens, but rather "rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven..." Guys, in the final analysis, God will look us over - not for medals, but for scars.

Devotion Box - How To Be Happy

SPRINKLE AND TWINKLE

In 5:13-14 Jesus tells us, "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world." We're *salt and light*.

Salt serves 4 functions: It's a *preservative*, a *seasoning*, a *thirst-producer*, and an *antiseptic*. And this is the kind of influence we should have on our world...

Our presence should arrest and slow down the corruption going on around us. Our joy should add spice to the blandness of this world. We're salt on the grits. The quality of our lives should create a thirst for God in the people we know. And the love we show should help to heal the open wounds all around us.

We're salt, but we're also light – and light's primary function is to drive out the darkness. It exposes misconceptions and dangers, and reveals the truth.

Jesus tells us in verse 16 to be a winsome witness, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

Guys, there are two reasons why a person does not believe in Jesus Christ... First, they've never met a Christian. Or second, they *have* met a Christian. The influence of a single Christian is powerful – we're either a positive or a negative witness for Jesus - but we're all a witness!

LOVE OR LAW

In 5:17 Jesus makes an important statement, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." The intent of the Law was to show us how to love God and love each other, but the Pharisees kept the Law out of duty, not love. Their righteousness was loveless and legalistic. Jesus though obeyed the intent of the Law because He loved.

Here's a poem, "To work and run the law commands, yet gives me neither feet or hands. Better news the Gospel brings, it bids me fly, then gives me wings."

The Law tells me to do loving deeds, but it fails to put love in my heart. The righteousness it produces is loveless, legalistic, and self-righteous. But Jesus fills me with His love - then sets me free to act in loving ways.

This explains Jesus in verse 20, "I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." *Love* is better than *law*.

The difference between the Pharisees and Jesus was the difference between "I've got to" and "I want to".

Devotion Box - The Seed And The Deed

In the remainder of chapter 5, Jesus contrasts His righteousness with the righteousness of the Pharisees.

The Jews boasted they had done their duty - they had never murdered. But Jesus says in 5:21, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire." Don't be proud you haven't done the *deed*, when the *seed* is in your heart.

So you've never pulled the trigger - powder burns and medal filings aren't on your hands - but your anger has blown up at your wife and kids. If every angry outburst killed someone, your morning drive to work would be a killing spree.

Jesus also warns us in 5:27, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say

to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Every guy in this room knows it's one thing *to just look*. You see a pretty girl... "Yep Lord, *she's a pretty girl!*", then you move on. But it's another thing *to look to lust*

It's the lingering look - it's when the imagination takes over the image. Jesus is saying, "Promiscuity begins in the *head*, long before it ends in the *bed*."

Certainly, the consequences of the deed and the seed are different. The deed will get you the electric chair, or a venereal disease. No other human may know about *the seed*. But in God's eyes *the seed* and *the deed* are one in the same - they're the same sin, just at different stages of development.

True righteousness begins in the heart. Love overcomes anger and lust. When I love my enemy I'll treat him as a friend. When I love people I won't selfishly look at a pretty girl as a means to gratify myself, but as a person who belongs to God.

WHAT ARE MY PRIORITIES ?

Jesus says in verses 38-39, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also."

The human tendency is not eye for eye - it's you take my eye, and I'll take your two. It's one-up-man-ship. Jesus says love goes the opposite direction. It shows mercy, rather than demands justice. When we're attacked, retaliate in love.

Let me make 3 points in reference to these verses... First, Jesus is not stripping governments of their right to wage war. Second, Jesus isn't stripping individuals of their right to self-defense. He says if someone slaps you on the right cheek.. 90% of people are right-handed. So how can a right-hander hit you on the right cheek - there's only one way, and that's with the back of the hand. This is not an attack, but an insult. If you're insulted turn your cheek, but if someone harms your family, sock it to them. And third, Jesus is not suggesting we let people walk all over us. That isn't love. Sometimes loving someone means standing up to them. Here's what Jesus is saying at the end of chapter 5...

Is my priority *a love for people* not *a demand for my rights*? Here's the challenge Jesus asks, "Am I willing to give up my rights, in order to show you love?"

My right to dignity - hit me on the cheek - your insult won't stop my love.

My right to possessions - take my cloak - your soul means more than my shirt.

My right to liberty - I'll walk a second mile - your salvation is more important than my convenience. A second mile is my opportunity for further witness.

My right to security - I'll be generous - I'd rather you survive than me thrive.

Devotion Box - Drastic Action

Jesus tells us when it comes to anger and lust we need to stop going about business as usual, and take drastic action. If hostility is brewing, "leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

Don't worship God, if you and a brother are at each other's throat. Do all you can to be reconciled.

A lustful heart also calls for drastic action. "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you..."

Obviously, Jesus doesn't mean to be taken literally. If I can lust with my right eye, I can also lust with my left eye. But God does want me to do whatever it takes to overcome my weakness. Perhaps I need to recruit a friend to hold me accountable. Or cancel my cable, or restrict my internet access, or break off contact with a bad influence. I know we all need to make a deliberate effort to renew our minds with God's Word.

Bible Scan - Matthew 5-7

Calvary Chapel

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org
For back issues of Bible Scan study guides: www.calvarychapelstonemountain.com/biblescan.htm

Calvary Chapel Announcements - September 30, 2001 - Ladies Retreat, October 19-20, "It's A Jungle Out There: Choosing The Better Part" ...Calvary Connections, Home Fellowships, check out the Announcement Sheet ... Pick up the latest edition of *LikeMinds* in the foyer.

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." - Matthew 6:33

Bible Scan
Memory Verse

THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

The Game of Giving - The Performance of Prayer - The Farce of Fasting

In chapter 5 Jesus contrasts the righteousness of the Pharisees with the true righteousness - in chapter 6, He contrasts the worship of the Pharisees with true worship.

In verses 1-18, He teaches us *how to give, how to pray, how to fast*. And notice first, Jesus never says, "if you give", or "if you pray", or "if you fast". Three times (verses 2, 5, and 16) it's always "when" you give, or pray, or fast. Since Jesus has given us so much - He assumes we'll want to give to Him. Since He's gained for us the privilege of prayer - He assumes we'll want to take advantage of it. Since the blessings of fellowship with Him are so rich - Jesus assumes we'll miss a meal or two to spend more time with Him.

In Matthew 6:1 Jesus sets out the guiding principle in all our acts of worship. He says, "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven."

Rather than give glory to God, the goal of the Pharisees was *to be seen by men*. The Pharisees turned the worship of God into a circus - a 3-ring circus... *The game of giving*.

The performance of praying. And the farce of fasting.

Every circus has its clowns, and the Pharisees were the clowns of Judaism.

When a Pharisee entered the temple to drop an offering into the collection boxes, a brass band would strike up a jazzy tune to draw attention to him. When he prayed, he addressed his prayer to God - but the volume and inflection and eloquence and length was designed to impress people.

And when the Pharisees fasted, they tried to look the part of a martyr. They would spread a white paste on their face that made them look pale and anemic. They wanted everyone impressed with their incredible act of self-denial.

Jesus says when you give, pray, and fast to be seen by men, the moment you're seen, you've got the only reward you'll get. Better enjoy the accolades, and pats on the back, and the esteem of men - you'll get no reward from the Lord. As G. Campbell Morgan once said, "Motive is everything in the Kingdom." *When acts of worship are staged to impress man, they cease to impress God.*

Devotion Box - Overcoming The Sin Of Worry

Matthew 6:25 contains the most disobeyed command in all the Scripture. In fact, there are many Christians who don't even think of it as a command... But our Lord tells us, "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on."

Hey, worry is not a weakness, it's a sin.

Jesus helps us overcome worry, by pointing out 3 truths about it - in verse 25, He says it's *irresponsible* - verse 27, it's *irrelevant* - verse 28, it's *irreverent*...

First, worry is *irresponsible*. It's a waste of limited time and energy. Jesus asks, "Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" 90% of the stuff we worry about is not the stuff that's important - it's temporal rather than eternal.

Second, worry is *irrelevant*. Jesus asks again, "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?" So you're short. You bump your head on people's belt buckles. So start worrying... worry hard... Take 3 weeks off from work just to worry... Worry day and night - but it won't add one inch to your stature.

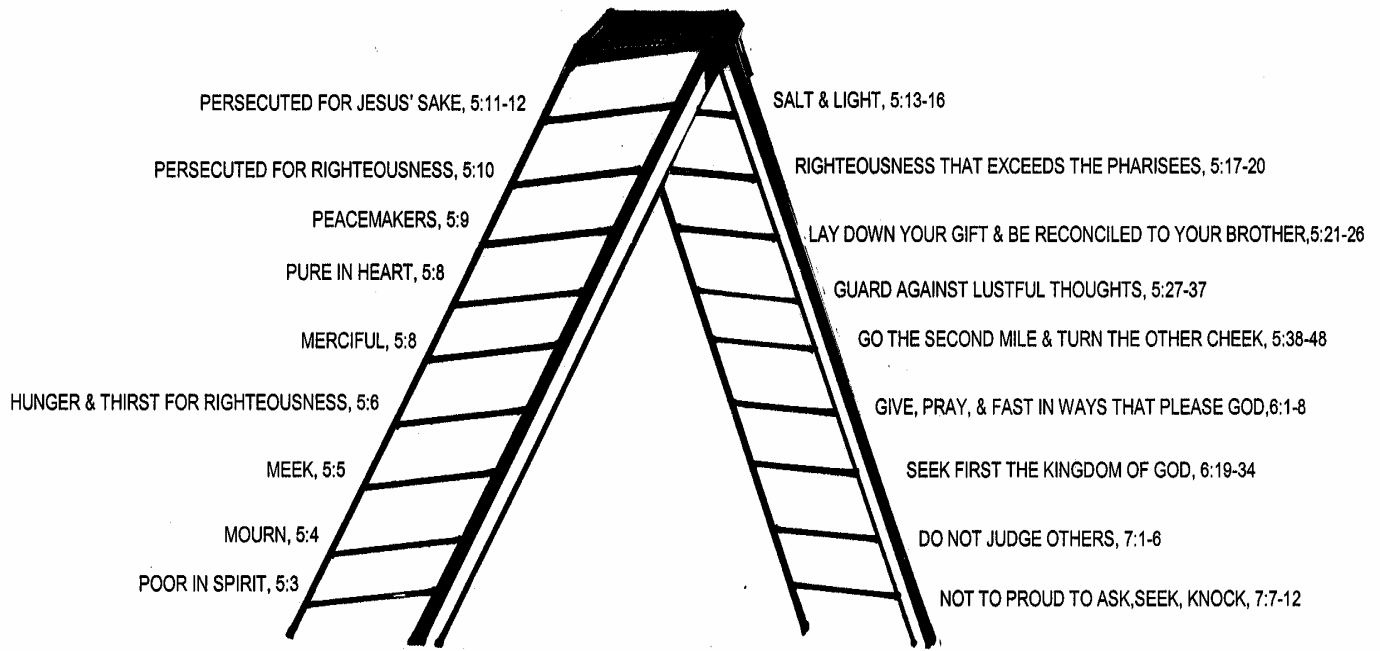
Former outfielder for the Texas Rangers, Mickey Rivers, once said, "Ain't no sense worrying about things you got control over, 'cause if you got control over them, ain't no sense worrying. And there ain't no sense worrying about things you got no control over either, 'cause if you got no control over them, ain't no sense worrying." Worry accomplishes nothing!

Third, worry is *irreverent*. It's a slap in God's face for you to worry. God clothes the lilies - He feeds the birds - and when they die, they'll disappear into oblivion. Yet, you're His child. You'll live with Him forever. Jesus died to save you. How much more will He care for you? It's been said, "Worrying is praying to the wrong god." If you believe in God, and the love of God, there's no need for you to worry.

Verse 32 says the unbelievers, the Gentiles, worry about many things, but Christians should worry about only one thing... verse 33, "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." *Worry about God's concerns, and you'll have no time to worry about your own.*

Bible Scan - Matthew 5-7 - Bonus Page 1

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT



Here's a way to understand the Sermon on the Mount - the kingdom of heaven is based on 9 attitudes - we call them *beatitudes*. Jesus lists them in 5:3-10, then He illustrates them with the rest of the sermon in descending order.

Picture a two-sided ladder, with 9 rungs on each side - and each rung relates to the corresponding rung on the other leg of the ladder. The beatitudes go from bottom to top, ascending one side of the ladder.

Rung 1, blessed are the poor in spirit.

Rung 2, blessed are those who mourn.

Rung 3, blessed are the meek.

Rung 4, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Rung 5, blessed are the merciful.

Rung 6, blessed are the pure in heart.

Rung 7, blessed are the peacemakers.

Rung 8, blessed are you when you're persecuted for righteousness. Rung 9, blessed are those who're persecuted for Jesus' sake.

Now think of the other leg of the ladder as the rest of the sermon. It illustrates those nine attitudes... but descending from top to bottom...

Rung 9, why are we persecuted for Jesus' sake? We're salt and light, 5:13-16.

Rung 8, why are we persecuted for righteousness? Because our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and

the Pharisees, 5:17-20.

Rung 7, peacemakers refuse to let anger brew in their hearts. They lay down their gift at the altar, and seek to be reconciled to their brother, 5:21-26.

Rung 6, the pure in heart guard themselves against lustful thoughts, and if married they honor their commitment, 5:27-37.

Rung 5, the merciful go the second mile and turn the other cheek, 5:38-48.

Rung 4, those who hunger for righteousness will want to learn how to give, pray, and fast in ways that please God, 6:1-18.

Rung 3, the meek don't try to serve two masters. They seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, 6:19-34.

Rung 2, mourn over your own sin, and you won't be tempted to judge others, 7:1-6.

Rung 1, the poor in spirit are not too proud to ask, seek, and knock, 7:7-12.

People think the Sermon on the Mount was a collection of rambling thoughts, but not so. Jesus used a teaching method often employed by the Jewish rabbis. Jesus taught using a format that was familiar.

There's actually a term for this inverted parallelism. For those of you who want to learn some fancy terminology - this ladder approach is called a *chiasm*

Bible Scan - Matthew 5-7 - Bonus Page 2

JUDGE NOT

Chapter 7 begins with the verse that everyone likes to hide behind. Point out to someone they're living in sin, or believing a lie – and they'll fire back, "Wait a minute, doesn't the Bible say, "Judge not, that you be not judged." They may not know any other verse, but they can quote you Matthew 7:1.

If my judgments are based on Scripture, then it's not me doing the judging – it's God's Word. Besides the Greek word translated "judge" means "to judge with the intent to condemn". When condemnation is your motive, don't judge.

But there're situations when it is proper to judge. Chapter 7:15 tells us, "Beware of false prophets..." A false prophet is not going to wear a badge that says, "false prophet" – this verse requires that we make a judgment. We're called by God to judge for the purpose of *identification, preservation, and restoration*.

I believe Jesus intended Matthew 7:1 to cover issues not spelled out in the Bible – issues open to differing interpretations – issues based on assumption or tradition. Here's where Jesus says to us, "Judge not, that you be not judged."

Too often we pigeon-hole and stereotype folks. Generalizations need to be avoided. Never judge based on appearance, or try to assume a person's motive. I don't care how good your eyesight is, you can't see into another person's heart.

If you make assumptions and draw ill-informed conclusions about other people, don't be surprised when other people make the same assumptions about you.

Listen to a favorite poem, "I dreamed death came the other night, and heaven's gates swung open wide. An angel came to meet me, and usher me inside. There to my astonishment – stood folks I'd known on earth. Some I'd judged and labeled – unfit, of little worth. Angry words rose to my lips, but never were set free. For every face showed stunned surprise. No one expected me!" Don't judge!

Jesus even gets humorous. He talks about the guy with the plank in his eye trying to get the speck out of his brother's eye. Always remember, "Faults are like headlights – the other car's headlights always seem more glaring than your own."

THE GOLDEN RULE

Matthew 7:12 is called *the golden rule*, "whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them..." It's been called "*The Mount Everest of Ethics*".

But Jesus was not the first person to utter this ideal for human relationships. The Talmud stated, "What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow man." Buddha said, "Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful." Confucius put it, "What you do not want done to yourself do not do to others." Even Socrates phrased it, "What stirs your anger when done to you, that do not to others."

Yet here's the difference – Jesus gave new life to an old saying by giving it a new twist. Everyone else phrased it in the negative, but Jesus put it in the positive. It's not enough to avoid doing harm – look for ways to do good. Jesus took the golden rule, and made it genuinely golden.

TWO OPTIONS IN AN EITHER/OR WORLD

People today like options. We live in an either/or world.

There was a time when all Americans drove either a Ford or a Chevy, but today there are over 752 models of trucks and cars sold in America. Remember when bread was white? Checks were green? Telephones were black? No more. We like multiple options.

And this is true spiritually, as well. People like to pick and choose from different religions, and put together their own belief system. Individual freedom is the ticket.

There's only one problem – this multiple-option orientation flies in the face of Jesus' words in verses 13-14. Jesus cuts down our choices - it's just 2 gates, 2 ways, 2 crowds, 2 destinations... It's either *eternity in heaven* or *eternity in hell*. When you enter eternity there's just two sections - *smoking* or *non-smoking*.

In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus said, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Devotion Box - Don't Follow Anyone Until You Know Who They Follow

Matthew 7:15 tell us to "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves." In other words, beauty is only *fleece deep*. Don't be deceived by a pleasant, even pious appearance.

Jesus says in verse 16, "You will know them by their fruits..." In one sense, we're not to judge, but in another sense, we are called to be fruit inspectors. We've got to be careful.

Jesus warns us in verse 21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father..." There will be people who prophesy in Jesus' name, cast out demons, and even work wonders... but Jesus will say, "I never knew you, depart from Me..."

Works are not fruits. Remember, it's not what we *do*, it's what we *be*. Always ask, is the man's ministry characterized by the nature of Jesus - the beatitudes? Here's a good rule: "Don't follow anyone until you first find out who they follow."