

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 7 (PART 3)

AS WE ARRIVE AT THE CONCLUDING WORDS OF JESUS IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, IT'S TIME TO MOVE FROM AUDIENCE TO PARTICIPANTS, HEARERS TO DOERS. JESUS IS NOT COMING WITH A NEW AND INTERESTING TEACHING TO HEAR AND PONDER, BUT A WAY OF LIFE TO BE PRACTICED, BETTER SAID, A WAY OF LIVING THAT ENCOMPASSES THE WAY TO LIFE. IT'S TIME FOR THOSE WHO HAVE HEARD TO MAKE A DECISION TO FOLLOW AND HE WILL USE 3 METAPHORS TO MAKE HIS FINAL POINT.

MATTHEW 7:12-13 - NARROW GATE

Q - WHICH WORD OR PHRASE STANDS OUT TO YOU WHEN YOU READ THESE VERSES?

Q - WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU READ THIS PASSAGE?

SIMILAR TO HOW THE NEW TESTAMENT USES "WALK" TO DESCRIBE SOMEONE'S LIFE, "WAY" IS USED IN THE NT AS A PICTURE OF FOLLOWING JESUS' TEACHING. JESUS HIMSELF IS THE "WAY" AND HIS TEACHINGS SERVE AS THE "WAY" TO LIVE IF YOU WANT TO ARRIVE IN GOD'S KINGDOM. EARLY FOLLOWERS OF JESUS WERE CALLED "FOLLOWERS OF THE WAY" (ACTS 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).

SO, JESUS IS MAKING CLEAR THAT THERE ARE NOT A VARIETY OF WAYS TO FIND ETERNAL LIFE, BUT ONE - HIS WAY. AND HE'S ALSO MAKING CLEAR THAT THERE ARE NOT A VARIETY OF WAYS TO FOLLOW HIM, BUT ONE - MUCH OF WHICH IS SUMMARIZED IN THE TEACHING OF MATTHEW 5-7. THIS WAY IS NARROW, THE KIND OF PATH THAT REQUIRES INTENTIONALITY AND EFFORT, CAREFULLY PLACING ONE FOOT IN FRONT OF THE OTHER.

IN CONTRAST, THERE IS THE WAY THAT LEADS TO DESTRUCTION - IT IS WIDE AND SPACIOUS - WITH PLENTY OF ROOM FOR THE MASSES WHO WANT TO JUST GO WITH THE FLOW. IT'S THE PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE AND POPULARITY. A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE ON THAT ROAD AND THAT'S NOT TO BE OVERLOOKED AS APPEALING. DRIFTING WITH THE CURRENT REQUIRES LITTLE EFFORT. **TWO PATHS, TWO VASTLY DIFFERENT OPTIONS - BUT TWO VASTLY DIFFERENT DESTINATIONS.**

MATTHEW 7:15-20 - GOOD/BAD FRUIT - FALSE TEACHERS

JESUS' DISCIPLES WILL BE ABLE TO DISCERN THOSE WHO ARE TRUE/FALSE BASED ON THE "FRUIT" TEST. FRUIT IS THE EVIDENCE OF LIFE AND GROWTH IN A TREE OR PLANT. THIS IS AN INSTANCE WHERE JESUS' FOLLOWERS *ARE* TO "DISCERN" (CP. OUR EARLIER VERSES ON JUDGING/DISCERNMENT FROM 7:1-6).

THIS FIRST RELATES TO DISCERNING THOSE TEACHERS (PROPHETS) WHO WOULD COME AFTER JESUS - ARE THEIR LIVES CONSISTENT WITH HIS (OR EVEN THEIR OWN) TEACHING? SOMEONE WHO CLAIMS TO SPEAK FOR GOD OR CHRIST MUST HAVE A GODLY AND CHRISTLIKE LIFE TO CONFIRM THEIR LEGITIMACY. THEY CAN'T JUST LOOK/SOUND GOOD - THERE NEEDS TO BE FRUIT - A REALITY IN NATURE THAT REQUIRES TIME AND CULTIVATION.

AS JESUS' TEACHING MINISTRY CONTINUES, HE WILL ESPECIALLY TAKE ISSUE WITH THE FREQUENT HYPOCRISY OF THE PHARISEES AND OTHER RELIGIOUS LEADERS. THIS VERSE COMES TO MIND: **MATTHEW 23:2-3** - "THE SCRIBES AND THE PHARISEES HAVE SEATED THEMSELVES IN THE CHAIR OF MOSES; 3 THEREFORE ALL THAT THEY TELL YOU, DO AND OBSERVE, BUT DO NOT DO ACCORDING TO THEIR DEEDS; FOR THEY SAY THINGS AND DO NOT DO THEM.

SECONDLY, IT IS PROBABLY HELPFUL FOR US TO CONSIDER THIS FOR OUR OWN LIVES. WE SHOULD RECOGNIZE THAT THE EFFECT OF FOLLOWING THE WAY OF JESUS IS THAT WE ARE SHAPED TO BE LIKE JESUS - WE CAN ASSESS OUR FAITHFULNESS IN FOLLOWING JESUS NOT JUST BY KNOWING HIS TEACHINGS BUT BY THE EFFECT/FRUIT THAT IS EVIDENCED BY OUR ADHERENCE TO HIS TEACHINGS (AS JESUS WILL STRESS IN THE NEXT VERSES). AGAIN, LIKE THE EXAMPLE OF THE GATE & ROAD - **THERE ARE ONLY 2 OPTIONS & 2 REALITIES. YOU'RE A FALSE, FRUITLESS PROPHET (OR FOLLOWER) & ARE GOOD FOR NOTHING MORE THAN KINDLING OR YOU ARE A TRUE PROPHET (OR FOLLOWER) AND PROVE IT BY A FRUITFUL LIFE THAT NOURISHES OTHERS.**

Q - WHAT ARE THE "FRUITS" WE OUGHT TO BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR?

MATTHEW 7:21-23 - LORD, LORD

THIS IS A REMARKABLE STATEMENT BY JESUS FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS.

ASSURED ENTRANCE: DOING THE WILL OF THE FATHER IN HEAVEN...

NOT-ASSURED ENTRANCE: VERBAL ATTESTATION OF JESUS AS LORD, PROPHECY, CASTING OUT DEMONS, PERFORMING MIRACLES (*WITHOUT DOING THE WILL OF THE FATHER IN HEAVEN*)

A VERBAL CONFESSION OF JESUS AS LORD IS NOT THE SAME AS A HEART DETERMINATION OF JESUS AS LORD. LUKE'S GOSPEL RECORDS A PARALLEL STATEMENT: "WHY DO YOU CALL ME, 'LORD, LORD,' AND DO NOT DO WHAT I SAY?" (LUKE 6:46).

BEFORE WE MAKE THE JUMP TO PAUL'S EXPLANATION ON SALVATION BY GRACE AND ALL THAT, LET'S SIT IN THIS MOMENT FIRST. SIT DOWN BACK ON THE GRASS OF THE GALILEAN MOUNTAIN SIDE BEFORE RUSHING OFF TO EXPLAIN THIS TRUTH AWAY. WHY WOULDN'T THIS BE EXACTLY WHAT SHOULD BE SAID BY RABBI JESUS? HE'S JUST OUTLINED THE WAY TO BE RIGHT WITH GOD & NEIGHBOR & THE WAY TO ETERNAL LIFE. HE'S BROUGHT LIFE TO THE LAW & CHALLENGED OF HUMANITY'S ATTEMPT TO LOWER THE BAR OF HOLINESS & RIGHTEOUSNESS.

AND SHOULD IT BE OKAY TO JUST HANDWAVE AT JESUS AS LORD AND GO BACK TO THE WAY WE WERE BEFORE HEARING JESUS? *"NICE MESSAGE JESUS - LOVED THE PART ABOUT BEING THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD AND THE LILIES OF THE FIELD. THANKS FOR THE TALK - SEE YOU IN GLORY!"*

WE'RE TALKING ABOUT LIFE AND DEATH - WE'RE TALKING ABOUT GOD'S PLAN OF REDEMPTION AND SALVATION. WE'RE TALKING ABOUT THE MOST IMPORTANT TRUTHS AND QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS IN THE UNIVERSE. IF JESUS DEMANDED FULL AND UNQUESTIONED ALLEGIANCE FROM EVERY PERSON ON THE PLANET, HE'D BE ENTITLED TO IT. AND YET HE USES INVITATION TO FIND THOSE WHO WILLINGLY AND JOYFULLY FOLLOW HIM.

HIS STATEMENT ABOUT THERE BEING A NARROW PATH ISN'T HIM BEING NARROW MINDED - IT'S HIM BEING LOVING & KIND TO TELL US THE 1 RIGHT WAY. AND, AS WE HAVE SAID REPEATEDLY, THE COMMANDS OF JESUS WERE NEVER INTENDED TO BE FOLLOWED APART FROM A RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.

THAT BEING SAID, THIS ISN'T THE FINAL WORD FROM JESUS. HIS CLOSEST DISCIPLES ARE GOING TO HAVE THEIR OWN QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW SOME OF HIS HARD SAYINGS MAKE SENSE & WONDERINGS AS TO WHETHER *ANYONE* CAN BE SAVED! JESUS HAS MORE TO SAY ON ALL OF THIS - & IT WILL EVENTUALLY ALL CULMINATE WITH NOT JUST HIS *WORDS*, BUT HIS *WORK* TO PAY FOR THE SINS OF THE WORLD...BUT LET'S NOT GET TOO FAR AHEAD OF OURSELVES

TWO PATHS AGAIN: DOING THE WILL OF THE FATHER AND ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN OR A FALSE CONFESSION OF JESUS AS LORD AND A HUMAN-CENTRIC LIFE WHICH LEADS TO BEING OUSTED FROM THE KING'S PRESENCE. PERHAPS SOME OF THE MOST SOBERING WORDS OF JESUS CHRIST TO HIS DISCIPLES IN THE GOSPEL ACCOUNTS.

MATTHEW 7:24-27, 28-29 - TWO BUILDERS, TWO BUILDINGS & AMAZING AUTHORITY

AND WITH THAT WE CONCLUDE JESUS' SERMON ON THE MOUNT. THERE WAS AN AUTHORITY HEARD AND FELT IN JESUS' TEACHING. THIS MOMENT WAS SIGNIFICANT AND WOULD LAUNCH AND SHIFT HIS MINISTRY IN A NEW WAY. THIS IS A REALLY IMPORTANT LESSON AS JESUS ENDS HIS MOST EXTENSIVE DISCIPLESHIP SEMINAR. THIS IS WHERE THE "RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD". HEARING JESUS' TEACHING IS NOT WHAT MAKES SOMEONE HIS FOLLOWERS - HEARING AND DOING WHAT JESUS SAID IS.

THE FINAL WORDS BEGIN WITH "THEREFORE..." A CALL FROM THE TEACHER TO CONSIDER THIS FINAL STATEMENT IN LIGHT OF ALL THAT HE'S SAID BEFORE. THERE ARE GOING TO BE GOOD DAYS AND BAD DAYS AHEAD - WE'RE CALLED TO TRUST AND OBEY. JESUS' WORDS NOT ONLY SERVE AS THE DIRECTIONS TO PARADISE, THEY WILL HOLD US FAST IN THE TURBULENT TIMES. DISCIPLES WHO COMMIT TO FOLLOW JESUS COME HELL OR "HIGH WATER" WILL DISCOVER THAT THEY ARE SUFFICIENTLY PREPARED FOR WHAT COMES AND OFTEN REMEMBER THAT JESUS SAID THERE'D BE DAYS LIKE THIS. HE'S A GOOD LORD.