KINGDOM of HEAVEN

A SERIES IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Matthew 7:13-29

(Sermon from Sunday 2 July 2023, Richard van Lieshout)

1. Information

a) Read the passage, perhaps twice using two different versions

b) Fill in any info that didn't make it into the sermon.

- There are no additional notes on this passage on anger in the CG guide.
- Following are some important additional notes for y'all.

- This is the conclusion to Jesus's epic 'Sermon on the Mount'. It thus has no new teaching per se, but rather is aimed at motivating people to put the teaching into practice!

- You can see this from the structure of the Sermon on the Mount:
  - **Introduction**: The call to Gods people (5:3-16)
  - **The body**: Greater righteousness (GR) for Gods people (5:17-7:12)
    - GR in relation to Gods **laws** (5:17-48)
    - GR in relation to **piety** towards God (6:1-21)
    - GR in relation to the **world** (6:19-7:12)
      - Introduction (6:19-21)
      - In relation to **goods** of this world (6:22-34)
      - In relation to **people** of this world (7:1-6)
      - Conclusion (7:7-12)[1]
  - **Conclusion**: Three warnings regarding the prospect of judgment (7:13-27)
    - Two kinds of paths (7:13-14)
    - Two kinds of prophets (7:15-23)
    - Two kinds of builders (7:24-27)

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- Following are some exegetical notes for the verses, most of which were not used in the sermon.

[1] The 'Golden rule' clearly summarises the Sermon's teaching, and thus marks the start of the conclusion to the sermon

Exegetical notes on the text

V13-14

- '***Many vs few***' is not so much quantitative but qualitative, ie the 'easy vs hard'. It is true though that not many will respond, as seen in the parable of sower later (Matt 13)
    - Jesus is telling us there that the way of death sometimes looks good. It is productive. It is easy. It is enticing. It offers certain pleasures and so it tricks many people into going that way, because of its ease and because of its attractiveness.
    - Prov 16:25 "*There is a way which seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to destruction*."
- Notice the **eschatology** (and judgment) background here, seen in the words '***enter***' and '***life***'
    - 'In the story of the rich young man who comes to Jesus (19:16–30) there is an enlightening interchange of expressions used concerning the kingdom and eternal life: "Having eternal life" (19:16), "entering into life" (19:17), "having treasure in heaven" (19:21), "entering the kingdom of heaven/God" (19:23, 24), and "being saved" (19:25) are all interchangeable metaphors used to describe the same thing. Most notable in connection with the Sermon, what prevents the rich young man from entering life/the kingdom is precisely his lack of teleios righteousness (19:21)' (Pennington).
    - 'Life' is the experience of eschatological fellowship with God in the future kingdom, whereas 'destruction' is the polar opposite, separation from God, which is hell.

V15-23

- '***False prophets***'
    - This part fits with the 'two ways' unit, but also has integrity of its own related to false prophets, as seen in the Inclusio in v16 & v20.
    - This speaks about those who endanger the journey of disciples.
    - This means that to stay on the narrow way disciples must exercise discernment between the true and the false
    - The New Testament teaches in multiple places that there will be many false teachers and prophets (even false apostles), especially arising in strong numbers of deception in the last days:
        - Matt. 24:11, 24; **2 Cor. 11:13–15;** 2 Tim. 4:3; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 John 4:1–6; Rev. 20:10.
    - Notice in particular the language of Paul in his departure speech to the Ephesians:
        - "*I know that after my departure* ***fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock****; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified*" (Acts 20:29-32)
    - The danger is that they don't *seem* dangerous! BUT, you can discern, through fruit.

- ***'Fruit'***
    - This idea was introduced by John the Baptist in Matt 3:8:
        - "*You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance*"
    - 'Even as the magicians of Egypt performed several miracles parallel to Moses's (Exod. 7:12, 22), so too Jesus wants his hearers to know that good works of piety (recall Matt. 6:1–21) and even miraculous prophecies, demon removals, and other mighty acts do not necessarily mean one is righteous and godly. It is possible to have an appearance of godliness without its true power and relationship to God (2 Tim. 3:5)' (Pennington)
        - Paul's arguments in 1 Cor. 12–14 also reveal that the possession and use of charismata or "spiritual gifts" is not necessarily evidence of maturity or even true faith. There are also examples in Acts of exorcisms (or attempted ones) by those outside the Christian faith (Acts 16:16–18; 19:11–17). Josephus, rabbinic literature, and other Second Temple Jewish texts witness to assorted miracle workers in the ancient world.
        - Therefore, s**u**pernatural phenomena must not be equated with genuine faith and divine endorsement (Matt 24:23-26, Ex 7:11, 22 etc, Deut 13:1-5, Acts 8:9-24, 13:6-12, 19:13-17, 2 Thess 2:9-10, Rev 13:13-15).
        - Other texts subordinate charismatic activities to humility and the exercise of character building gifts (Luke 9:51-55, 10:20, 1 Cor 12-14)
- '***Lawlessness***'
    - A direct quote from Psalm 6:8

V24-27

- Even today extreme weather shows up shoddy craftsmanship in housebuilding!
- ***'My words'***
    - This is clear that Jesus is referring to his own Sermon on the Mount!
- '***Wise***'
    - 'Phronimos' is an important word for the Greek virtue tradition and for Matthew. In the virtue tradition this term refers to one who has learned through practice to live prudently, with discernment, and "who not only knows the truth but acts upon it."
- This emphasises the them of **discipleship**:
    - "*Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 5:19)
    - Perhaps no passage in the NT expresses more concisely and more sharply that the essence of discipleship . . . is found not in words, nor in religiosity, nor even in the performance of spectacular deeds in the name of Jesus, but only in the manifestation of true righteousness—i.e., the doing of the will of the Father as now interpreted through the teaching of Jesus. [No words or random good deeds] can substitute for the full picture of righteousness the evangelist has given in the sermon (Donald Hagner)
    - As we have seen, a major Matthean theme, including in the Sermon, is the necessity of having a greater righteousness (5:20) and doing the will of God (7:21–23; 12:50; 21:28–32; 26:39; see chap. 4 above). To enter God's kingdom one must have faith in Christ, but this faith must never be construed as mere mental assent or hope apart from a life of discipleship and faithfulness.

- **This is not opposed to grace**:
    - The Christian faith, based on the writings of the New Testament, entails both the indicative and the imperative, both grace and virtue, both divine gift and human habituation, and these are compatible, not opposites.
        - "Never for one moment does Paul imagine, as one might from reading Aristotle, that morality is simply a matter of a human being deciding to adopt a particular set of characteristics and discovering in herself or himself the capability and energy to get on and reform one's life in that way."
    - "In the most direct way Matthew makes ethics depend on the gospel's transformation of the **heart**. Grace as power enables both inner being and ethical acts (13:14–17, 23; 19:25–26; 20:28–34). Thus it is not human beings as such but human beings transformed by grace who are assumed to be able to fulfill the demand of God for obedience from the heart"

Sermon Outline

- I decided to work backwards through the 3 parts of this passage and thus the outline was:

Introduction: Jesus's emphasis on 'doing'

1. **The wise and foolish builder (v24-27)**
2. **True & False Prophets (v15-23)**
3. **The Narrow and Wide way (v13-14)**

2. Activation

- Below are some activation questions based on the sermon.

Introduction

a) In the introduction I say that possibly the worst thing we could do at the end of Jesus's Sermon on the mount is to:
    - Admire the sermon, but not act on it
    - Experience some conviction, but never commit to living this way
    - To have engaged with these words over the last few weeks, meditate on them, talk about them, but never experience their reality.

This is the reason for Jesus's rather sobering ending to the sermon! **Discuss with your group why we tend to 'stand on the sidelines' rather than 'get on the field' when it comes to Jesus's teachings**.

This will likely lead to a discussion of the difficulty of Jesus's teaching, and it would be worthwhile tracking back over the sermon and highlighting some of these, like:
- The beatitudes, where 'humility, meekness, mourning' are attitudes that aren't normally 'sought after'!
- Jesus's teaching on 'Greater Righteousness', especially when it comes to Anger, Lust, Enemies
- Jesus's teaching on 'True Religion', where pious activities like giving to the poor, praying and fasting are examined according to motive.

None of this comes naturally, which is likely the main reason we avoid living this way!

b) Perhaps another reason Christians avoid intentional trying to live the way Jesus teaches is because of our view on 'grace', which sometimes seems to indicate that a resulting righteous life is not important, or at least not as important as purely having faith in Jesus.

Discuss the faith vs works tension, but prepare yourself by reading the notes at the bottom of page 3 and the top of this page.

Note: In the sermon I spoke about this tension, and highlighted classic 'Gospel' verses like Matt 1:21 and (yet to be studied) Matt 26:27-28, where Jesus is presented as one who will 'save people from their sins' through the 'blood of the new covenant'. Therefore, there is for sure a Gospel arc through Matthew (in the Pauline/NT letter sense), but we can't neglect the teachings of Jesus in the middle of this arc in Matthew (not just in the Sermon on the Mount, but in the other four discourses/sermons Jesus will teach on in chapters 10, 13, 18, and 24-25).

Point 1: The wise and foolish builder (v24-27)

c) **Discuss whether you think the destruction that came for the house built on sand is a picture of final judgment, or 'the storms of life' ie trouble we experience now**.

Note: There is an element to 'storms of this life' (ie present tense) for sure, especially if you see the end of Jesus's sermon as relating to the start, and the beatitudes (which for sure exhort a current life that leads to flourishing or 'blessing'). But even then, the beatitudes have an eschatological element to them ('They will inherit the earth' Mt 5:5 and 'they will see God' Mt 5:8). While it may not be as clear in this subsection of the closing, a final judgment is definitely in view with the False Prophets (esp v19 & v23). The sense of judgment is part of what creates a tone of urgency in this sermon closing!

Point 2: True and false prophets (v15-23)

d) The sandwiching of the the True and False Prophet segment between the Two ways and Two Builders is curious, but there definitely is a connection between these three units:
   - All have pictures of 'two ways'
   - All have the theme of eschatological judgment in the background
   - All depict internal vs external disjunction

   What could a discussion on False Prophets therefore have to do with the clear call to difficult obedience in the opening and closing parts?

   Note: I wrestled quite a bit with this! One aspect could simply be the fact that the journey of discipleship is made more difficult (ie 'narrower'!) by the presence of false prophets.
   Another aspect, and perhaps primary, is certainly the fact that in dealing with the False Prophets Jesus emphasises relationship ie 'I never knew you' (v23). Therefore, in following the 'wise builder' example, and being prompted to do, must not neglect the relationship by faith element of following Jesus!

e) In the discussion on False Prophets I said that:
   - They look the part (ie they look like sheep!)
   - They talk the part ('Lord, Lord' vs 21)
   - They act the part (the supernatural works they do)

   The danger is therefore that they don't seem dangerous! In the exegetical notes above I gave a lot of references for warnings about false prophets in the church today. **Read the following two to get a sense of thi**s:
   - 2 Cor. 11:13–15
   - Acts 20:29-32

   Discuss the need for Christians to be wary of religious personalities in the Church today.

f) Discuss how v21-23 moves the discussion from focusing on False Prophets to a challenge to ALL followers of Jesus.

Hint: 'everyone' (v21) & 'many' (v22)

Point 3: The Narrow and Wide way

g) In the Sermon I pointed out how these two verses are a classic Christian Paradox. A Paradox is a combination of two opposites (eg 'less is more'), that requires that we embrace two things that look like opposites. **Can you think of other classic Christian Paradoxes?**

***Hint*:** You discussed it earlier! The 'Grace vs Works' tension/paradox!

Discuss then how the vision of the narrow road is a Paradox.

Note: While the road is narrow, and therefore hard, it leads to life!

3. Implementation

- We are done with the Sermon on the Mount! And done with 'Season 2' of Matthew. So take some time simply to **pray that we as disciples of Jesus would both be moved in our hearts (ie to 'know him') and moved to action**. In this way we will truly be 'Salt and Light'!