

## True and false Prophets

Matthew 7: 13 – 23 the narrow path vs the wide.

Romans 16: 17 to end: Watch out for the deceivers serving their own interests.

When you think about it, one of the clear marks of Christian faith – is seen in the fruit that develops in your life, and thus sows and reaps blessing into a desperately needy world.

Not everyone who names Jesus, and calls him Lord – will necessarily enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Why? Or why not? Because it is not about smooth words or outward appearances, it is rather about The character and qualities in a person's life who is living and actually allowing Jesus to be Lord and King of their lives. The person Who listens to God - and when redirected from their own path – plants seeds of love, in the lives of others. In effect the person who can be called righteous – a very unpopular word today.

**1.The first thing here is in vs 13: The entry point to God's kingdom is only through the Narrow Gate.** The gate is firstly via the cross and faith in Jesus. The imagery of the gate recurs in scripture often, and is perhaps at its peak when in John 10 Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd, but also as the gate, the way, the means to access the safety of the sheepfold. Jesus said “ I am the Gate for the sheep”

Most of you realise – that in this day and age, it sounds intellectually unreasonable to suggest that there is actually **only one way, to anywhere**. Our navman tells us to lock in if we want highway or local roads – you can choose. We have been convinced that you can choose whatever path you like, and somehow magically it will not impact your long term salvation. Really?

**Jesus declares here in black and white**, that **the Road to Destruction** is broad and the gate is wide for the many who choose that way.

It is for some of us, an intellectual struggle to accept that there is only **One Saviour**. It's much easier to believe, to hope, and to imagine it is fair – that a loving God would not worry at all about what we believe, or Whom we believe in , and certainly would NOT talk about a place of Destruction, a place of separation from God, a place of darkness and no light. A place without God and without hope.

**Actually, In our culture, divine Judgement is one of Christianity's most offensive doctrines.**

Yet there it is, in the words of an old tired rock song **vs 13** = the highway to hell. It is often said the Road to hell is paved with ????? good intentions. An intention is something you might do one day – **you intend to get right with God**. But no.

You must choose today which gate and which road you will choose, for only one leads to eternal life. Jesus is the One Road, the One Saviour, the One Redeemer who paid the price for our sin. We have to cross through the narrow gate of faith – to be sure of the blessing of eternal life.

In summary, Jesus is very clear here - that the **gateway to life** is very narrow, thin, focussed, - and the **road ahead is a narrow road, it's a difficult road**, and only **a few** will ever find it.

What about you? Have you found the gate of faith in Jesus and afterwards stayed on the Narrow road, the difficult road?

Robert Bellah's influential book: **HABITS OF THE HEART**, speaks of the expressive individualism that dominates today's culture. In his book he notes that **80%** of Americans today agree with this statement, that:

**“an individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs independent of any church or synagogue”**. He concludes that our most fundamental belief today ...is that **moral truth is relative to individual consciousness**. Actually, the Gospel will offend every human culture at some point. Because Human cultures are constantly changing. Our kiwi culture in 2017 is often in conflict with Christianity.

A Yale theologian Miroslav Volf, a Croatian, who has seen the violence in the Balkans, says **the best antidote to Gross Violence, is the Christian belief in divine Justice**. He declared: If I don't believe that there is a God who will eventually put all things right, I will take up a sword or gun or nuke and be sucked into an endless vortex of retaliation. Only if there is a God who will eventually put things right, can we refrain from vengeance. ( tell the Don b4 he nukes Nth Korea).

Ps 145 : 17 – 20 says “ the lord is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made... He watches over those who love him but all the wicked he will destroy.

Today many believe their acts of injustice, Violence, Murder, rape, racial cleansing will disappear into nothingness. If.. there is no God and No judgement, and no hell, then they believe **they can act with impunity**.

The parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man in luke 16: 19 supports the view of hell, as a place **of a self - absorbed life going on forever**. In fact the status of the rich and poor are reversed, and to build your identity outside of God, is to build a disastrous heritage now, and in the world to come. This simple parable gives a picture of **judgement**, much like the one in Matthew 25. God will judge on whether we have helped the poor, the naked, the hungry etc.

Hell is actually being locked in a prison of one's own self centredness!

C.S. Lewis said there are only two kinds of people – those who say to God “Thy will be done” And those **to whom God in the end says** “thy will be done!.

**Moving on then, to vss 15 to 20. True and false prophets or teachers.**

**The Election:** Hasn't the election been fascinating. But more important than all their promises and words – is whether they actually make a difference that betters the life of people in our society. People who walk the talk with real change for the good for the poor, the homeless, the disempowered.

**In Myanmar**, we have all watched as, - Ang Sung Su Chi.. famous nobel peace prize winner, herself previously exiled & imprisoned for her hopes and aspirations - climbed up to finally lead her people – yet appears now to be letting down a massive Yasidi muslim minority group in her largely Bhuddist Country. A people whose lives are being destroyed. There are calls for her Nobel award to be taken off her. This apparently tireless advocate for the suffering – is now enabling racial/ religious cleansing. Was she really the true advocate of peace and justice?

Here Jesus is warning those listening to his teaching, that there are True Prophets, and there are False Prophets. He begins” **Beware the false prophets.**

**Note that** they look like sheep, harmless sheep, but are really vicious wolves. Jesus digs down to the intentions of their hearts and their words – they are wolves who rip apart the unsuspecting sheep. To put it in theological terms - Remember the Lloyd Geering Years? What his teaching did to Christians in the Presbyterian church of his day? He destroyed the belief of many.

**False Prophets**, were common in O.T. times, and prophesied only what the king and the people wanted to hear!, claiming it was God's message. False teachers are just as common today. People who are motivated by Money, Fame, or power. You can tell who they are because they minimise Christ and Glorify themselves. **The prosperity preachers tend to fit into this category.**

Some of you will know of the t.v. preacher from the south, **Pastor Joel Osteen**. It is worth listening to his sermons to sift out how little he talks of sin, salvation and redemption through Jesus, compared to feeling good about yourself, how you will prosper, and should pay him money. It is not my job to judge him but when he was interviewed on his view of marriage, he refused to discuss Marriage directly. "I only tell people good things" – said Joel.

During this Cyclone he did not open his church – (the biggest building around) to suffering people, nor his \$7m home to help them – I have to Wonder. In Twitter he posted: "Victoria & I are praying for everyone affected by Hurricane Harvey," wrote the millionaire self-help book author and televangelist. "Please join us as we pray for the safety of our Texas friends & family." He then returned to his regularly scheduled positivity. Meanwhile, people of far lesser means than the Osteens were conducting their own rescue missions in improvised aquatic vehicles.

As it turned out, some people thought Osteen should do more to help, the most common suggestion being that he open up his sprawling Lakewood church building – which holds 16,000 people – to displaced Houston residents in need of shelter. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a flood victim to enter into Joel Osteen's church," tweeted one critic. Another asked what else everyone expected from a pastor who charges people to attend his sermons. In contrast people like **David Jeremiah**, who preaches the cross and Jesus, sin and salvation – lives and speaks what he preaches about. It is not that being a Christian will make you rich. It never made Jesus rich. He is Clearly a good shepherd.

Vs 16 gives us the clue to discerning these – by their fruits, by the way they act towards others, especially towards the poor and needy. True leaders show humility and servanthood. **How did Jesus live?**

It's surely a law of nature, that you can't pick Grapes from thistles. Trees are consistent in the kind of fruit they produce, good teachers consistently exhibit good moral character and seek to live out the words of scripture.

Now nobody is perfect, apart from Jesus. The worthless trees Jesus talks about are teachers who **deliberately teach False Doctrine.**

Not everyone who talks about heaven belongs to God's kingdom. What you do cannot be separated from what you believe.

In the Romans 16 Reading, Paul gives final instructions to the church in Rome. In v17 He says "( read from Romans 16: 17 ff )

### **To Conclude:**

1. There are 7 "I am" sayings of Jesus.. – Few of them are popular.
2. Do you realise none of them Naturally appeal to people today who have been taught that truth and morality is whatever you think it is.
3. Jesus Teaching has never changed, but it has changed the whole world. He declared himself the One Gate, the narrow gate, who calls us to the one road, the narrow road, which is difficult and few find it. yet his followers started most every university and school and hospital or charity we can name.

4. Finally Jesus warns us that there will be false prophets and teachers who will appear to be sheep, but whose' heart is to act like a wolf. Wolves hunt down sheep and devour them to their own gain. They are trees which produce bad fruit, and must be chopped down and burned.

**Simple message: Christianity is now counter cultural, but it is still the glorious hope of salvation and eternal life. Will you stay on the narrow path?**

**Amen.**