

## ***“Doing Things the Hard Way”***

*Matthew 7:13-29*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • April 28, 2013

We all love choices, don't we? I think it's human nature to want to have choices in our lives. Having the ability to choose from various options is an expression of freedom. Of course as Americans we like to take that concept to extremes. Just turn on your television. When I was growing up we had three stations and they stopped broadcasting at midnight each night. Today if you have cable or one of the satellite providers you have hundreds of channels with programming available 24 hours a day.

Some local restaurants have now installed a new kind of soda dispenser from Coca Cola called a "Freestyle." This one machine offers you over 120 possible flavors of soda. If you are in the market for a new car there are currently over 300 different makes and models available. When I was about eight or nine years old our local movie theater was closed for a few months while they divided it into two so that they could show two different movies at the same time. Theaters today frequently have twelve or sixteen theaters so that they can offer more choice. Whether it's breakfast cereal or coffee makers or entertainment, we are constantly offered a tremendous amount of choice and we've come to expect it.

The problem is that many people take the same attitude regarding matters of faith. Today there are many people who take sort of an a la carte view of religion, choosing what they see as the best of different religions and sort of making up their own mix. This is what's called pluralism. The argument goes something like this: God is metaphorically on the top of a mountain and there are many paths that lead up to the top. No matter what you choose, all roads lead to God.

Here at the end of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, "it doesn't work that way." There are only two paths, and we all have a choice, but not all paths lead to the top. Jesus gives us a series of comparisons to illustrate his point. He tells us about the two roads and the two gates, then two trees, and finally two builders building on two foundations. Let's look at each of these.

In verse 13 Jesus says, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." In other places Jesus made it clear that *he* is the gate and the road. In John 14:6 he says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." This is not a popular idea these days and many people in our society today would say that it's exclusive and insensitive. How can we claim that Jesus is the only way to God? The answer is in knowing who Jesus is. Jesus said, "I and the Father are one," and "if you have seen me you have seen the Father." In Jesus of Nazareth God came here himself! Jesus is the only way to God because Jesus *is* God. How could there be any other way?

The other thing we find in these verses is that following Christ is hard work. God doesn't require a lot from us, he requires everything. To become a follower of Jesus is a life-changing event and it affects every aspect of our life. Entering by the narrow gate means making hard choices in my life. There are certain things in this world that I must be willing to give up or do without as a result of my decision to follow Christ and I must make that decision every day.

There are two things that make the way that leads to life hard. One is that the other

way is easy and there are lots of people on it. We can just go along with the crowd. But the other thing is that there are people who try to lead you down the wrong road. Jesus says, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves." By sheep's clothing he means that they come looking like part of the flock of God. Jesus is called the great shepherd and we are referred to as his flock. These false prophets look like part of the flock. They may come with titles like reverend or professor but what they teach is not the Word of God.

There are a couple of ways to determine whether someone is a false prophet or teacher. The first is to make sure that you know what the Bible says. If you know the truth you are much less likely to be deceived. Spend time every day if possible reading God's Word. Try to follow a systematic plan of reading. I like to read a chapter a day out of an Old Testament book, the Psalms, and a New Testament book. Jesus tells us the other way to know if someone is a false prophet and it's so important he says it twice: "You will recognize them by their fruits." What does Jesus mean by fruit? What kind of fruit are we talking about?

Chapter one of the book of James is a good place to look. Beginning in verse 21, "put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." What Jesus is saying is that it's not enough for a person to *talk* about following him, we actually have to live it.

Now all of a sudden Jesus shifts the focus from false prophets to us personally. He says, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and *does* them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock." Each one of us is expected to be doers of the

word, not just hearers. If we don't build our lives on the foundation of the Word of God, we are like a foolish man who builds his house on the sand. And Jesus says that when the rains fall and the floods come and the winds blow and beat against that house, it will fall. The storm he's referring to is the day that we pass from this life into the next, the day we stand before Jesus and give an account of our life. The life that's built on God's Word and bears good fruit, the life that is centered in Christ, is the one that will stand on that day.

Finally, our passage ends this way: "And when Jesus finished these sayings," that is the Sermon on the Mount, "the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes." The scribes would teach by referring to the teaching of other rabbis. But Jesus taught with authority. This doesn't mean that he merely sounded authoritative. You've probably heard the saying that people will believe anything you say if you just say it with authority. That's not what the Bible is saying about Jesus. He actually claimed to have authority to give them new teaching and to speak for God. He said, "you have heard that it was said...but I say..." What this means is that Jesus claimed God's authority for himself. A guy could get crucified for doing something like that.

So my question for you is this: how are you choosing to live your life? Are you choosing the narrow gate and the hard road? Are you choosing to build your house on the rock? Are you bearing good fruit in your personal ministry? When the final storm comes and you stand before God will you hear, "well done, good and faithful servant?" Or will you hear, "I never knew you; depart from me." My prayer is that you will take the road less traveled that leads to life.

*Amen*