

# Sermon Text for August 6, 2023

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## *Psalm 5, Matthew 7:13-23* *“The narrow gate”*

We have seen a lot of progress in the construction this week. The painters were here all week and so it did create a bit of an interesting dynamic being in the fumes all week of the painters and concentrating on what I would be presenting to you. So today will be a bit of paint fumes induced result, so you never know what you are going to get. This week is a hard week to follow from last week. Last week we said that if you were to summarize all of Jesus’ teachings, if you only remembered one of Jesus’ teachings, last week would have been the week to remember.

All of Jesus’ teachings can be summed up in the golden rule. Love your neighbor as yourself. All the other things that we have heard and that we have learned can be summarized in that one rule. No need to think that we have a list of rules and regulations that we have to follow, that isn’t the Christian life, that is legalism, just love God and love your neighbor. Sounds pretty simple.

But today we get to that point on the sermon on the mount, and ultimately to that point in our own life. Where we don’t receive any more ethical teachings. Jesus’ doesn’t tell us today you need to love your enemies, you should never take vengeance, you need to control your anger, if you lust you need to set up structure in your life so that it isn’t a problem, pray without ceasing. He doesn’t tell us any of those things today, because he has already shared that with us.

No more ethical teachings. Now the listeners, we are confronted with a choice. Will we choose to follow Jesus’ words that he has given us over these past few months, or will we choose to follow our own way which has brought us to where we are today. Following Jesus’ words isn’t easy, in fact it is harder than to keep doing what we have been doing all along, in case you were wondering. Now comes the time to decide. You have the choices in front of you, now what are you going to do?

Our launch today of Prayer, Scripture and Action is a way in which to help us decide to follow Jesus. It is a way in which we are able to choose to follow Jesus through prayer, Scripture, and action, or choose to continue to flounder about in our lives without direction and purpose. Both of our Scriptures provide a choice for us to make. We don’t like to be confronted

with choices, why can't I just keep doing what I've been doing? I don't like to confront people with choices, I want people to live as things come to them and not really present things in a black and white fashion. Life is grey, it is true, but in the opaqueness there come times when we have to choose. Today is such a day.

We have a chance today to regain our focus on our faith by choosing Jesus. Let's read.

## **READ**

It isn't only Jesus who places in a position where we feel like we have to make a choice and a decision on how we are going to live. We find it all over the Old Testament, including, but not limited to, our first reading today. In Psalm 5 the terminology that David uses is that there is a clear difference between those whom he calls evildoers and those who would obey God. Look at vs. 6 where we read that God will destroy the evildoers who are described as those who speak lies and those who are deceitful. That is countered with vs.12 where the Psalmist uses our term, the one that we are so familiar with and states that you bless the righteous, O Lord, you cover them with favor and with a shield. I mean, who doesn't want that?

So while the Psalm gives a clear understanding of where God stands in regards to the righteous and the wicked, all of Scripture tells us that we can choose which camp we decide to be in, those who obey God and those who do not. Look at Deuteronomy 30:19 – Moses tells the people of Israel, and again as we have seen in the past he tells us today, it is up to you to choose between life and death, blessings and curses.

Another popular verse is Joshua 24:15 where Joshua tells the people of Israel, and so tell us as well, choose this day whom you will serve. I'll tell you who I'm going to serve, I'm going to serve the Lord, but you can't keep going on thinking that you are just going to go with the flow and be neutral. There is no neutrality. You either choose righteousness, or you choose sin. Those are the choices. We see the same in Jeremiah where he tells the people that he is setting before them the way of life or the way of death. When the people of God speak to the people of God it is clear that they are confronted with a choice to either follow God or not.

That is where we find ourselves today. You are being asked to make a choice today, and we are giving you an opportunity to understand what that choice looks like. When we pray, when we read Scripture, when we act in righteousness we are then confronted with a choice. Some of us would rather not get involved, but that is also a choice. No one here can remain neutral. If you are in the stadium watching the game and not on the field playing, that is a

choice. I have said over and over again that we can all take the field, we can all be involved, and there are no cuts, everyone makes the team.

But Jesus also warns us in Matthew that when we do choose, if we choose to be a follower of Jesus, if we choose to be a disciple, it is the more difficult of the choices. Let's look at Matthew. He says very clearly that many take the easy way and the wide gate. It is easier to follow along with what culture tells us and to either sit this one out or to not get involved. But if you choose to be a disciple of Jesus, well, that is a hard road, look at vs. 14, that is a narrow gate and it is a hard road, and few people find it. So, it is your choice.

What does the easy road look like? When we follow people who say they know the truth and it is completely antithetical to the teachings of Jesus, if they say if you know you know, even if they say they are following God, it is all for their own benefit. I have said in the past that you have to beware of those who have a fish on their car, because often that might seem like all you have to do is proclaim that you are Christian and that will make up for a world of sin. Look at vs.22, many will say that we proclaimed your name.

So what's the problem? You can call yourself a Christian all you want, but if you make the choice to not act in righteousness, then you are denying Christ. Jesus says disciples produce good fruits, and you can see those fruits. The tides of culture can easily take us to a place where we are following someone that if we were to take a moment and think, it would be clear that they are not following Scripture, a mob mentality never leads to anything good. It leads to destruction, destruction of not only our way of life, but destruction of our own life as we follow that person to sin. But many take that road, because it is the easier road. The hard road is the way of Christ.

If someone sows chaos and confusion and anger and bitterness and division, then they are probably a wolf, even if they say they are a sheep. This Scripture more than any other Scripture in the Bible tell us that even if a person says something, it does not mean that it is true. There is a world of evidence that shows that when the wolf says they are sheep, they are actually a wolf. No matter how hard a person says the opposite, the reality is clear to all, unless you choose to see a sheep because you want to see a sheep.

When Stacy was gone she gave me a charge to tend the garden. We have cucumbers and beans and tomatoes. I love cucumbers and so I picked one a day, but there were so many that were growing that by the time Stacy got home they were genourmous and inedible. The same with the bean, they take a lot of work, so I didn't really pick them so they got big and fat and

inedible. The tomatoes were easy, I picked them as they needed to be picked. But it takes work. The easy way was to let them lie, but now that which I let lie you can no longer eat.

It takes work to be a follower of Christ, and that type of work can be seen in prayer, Scripture and action. So we have work ahead of us, and it is not going to be easy work. It is going to take sacrifice of our time and our resources. It means that we are going to rearrange some of our current priorities. It means that we are going to have to go against that which in the past has been important for us, because if we follow it then it will take us to the wide road and not the road of Christ.

Not everyone who says they are Christian will be recognized by our Father. We have to do the will of God. But those who strive to be righteous should not expect to receive popular acclaim, there aren't going to be crowds of people cheering you on. When there are crowds cheering you on, you need to beware that you may be making the wrong choices. The emphasis is on proper living as opposed to correct belief. The ones who do the will of God will enter the kingdom of heaven. It is at this point that some give up and say, I simply keep failing so why would I ever try?

Matthew stresses the importance of being devoted to Jesus by obeying his ethical teachings. He addresses those followers today who have boasted of their relationship with him but have denied him in their conduct. I Corinthians 13:2 tells us that we can have all sorts of power and people who like us, but if we do not have love, we are nothing. We can have millions of people follow us and think I am their leader, but if I don't obey God, then I am nothing. All people are going to be judged not by their religiousness, but for what they have done and left undone.

The true disciple must not only claim Jesus as teacher, but also put his teaching into practice. The easy way, it has no demands to be met, no discipline to acquire. The way of Jesus, if it is a rigorous way, and it is, it is unmistakably also a way of grace. What finally matters to God is obedience. No passage in the Bible reflects more that participation in the kingdom is the essence of discipleship, is found not in words, or even doing spectacular things in Jesus' name, but only in the manifestation of true righteousness. Religion can never take the place of true obedience. Amen.