

**“Three Warnings: Enter the Narrow Gate,  
Bear Fruit, Be Wise Builders” (Matt 7:13-27)**

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**A. Introduction**

Today we conclude our series on the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7.

The SOM presents a core sample of Jesus instruction for his disciples. That’s why Anabaptists and Mennonites have stressed the importance of the SOM and why Anabaptist and Mennonite confessions have quoted more from the SOM than any other part of the Bible.

Today, we are going to focus on the conclusion of the SOM, which consists of three warnings regarding the Narrow Gate, Bearing Fruit, and Being Wise Builders.

But before we look at the conclusion, let’s review by taking a bird’s eye view of the SOM.

**B. A Bird’s Eye View of the SOM**

**1. What is the theme?**

The theme is righteousness. The term, righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) means being a right relationship—harmony, peace, and justice—with God, others, and our selves. The term “righteousness” is used in five key places in the SOM; for example:<sup>1</sup>

**Matt 6:33.** But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness (δικαιοσύνη), and all these things will be given to you as well. (NRSV)

If you notice, righteousness and the kingdom of God are nearly synonymous. If we are righteous with God, others, and our selves, we have already entered the kingdom of God.

**2. What is the structure of the SOM?**

*[Walk-thru outline and have congregation fill in blanks (double underline).]*

**a. Nine blessings (5:3-16)**

- i. Blessed are the poor, those who mourn, the meek
  - ii. Blessed are those who hunger for righteousness, the merciful, the pure
  - iii. Blessed are the peacemakers, those who are persecuted, blessed are you
- ↳ Result: We are a community of salt and light

**b. Three relational tasks (5:17 - 7:12)**

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<sup>1</sup> Matt 5:6; 5:10; 5:20; 6:1; 6:33.

i. In relation to the law & our selves: Keep the law as Jesus instructed (5:17-48)

- Dispel Anger · Honor Boundaries · Keep Commitments
- Speak Truth · Resist Evil Nonviolently · Love Without Limit

ii. In relation to God: Love God as Jesus instructed (6:1-34)

- Give · Pray · Forgive · Fast · Live Simply

iii. In relation to others: Love others as Jesus instructed (7:1-7:12)

- Don't Condemn · See Clearly · Seek God · Keep Golden Rule

That leads us to the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, which consists of three warnings.

### c. Three warnings (7:13-27)

i. Two types of gates: Enter the narrow gate (7:13-14)

ii. Two types of trees: Bear good fruit (7:15-23)

iii. Two types of builders: Be wise builders (7:24-27)

## C. Enter the Narrow Gate (7:13-14)

**Matt 7:13-14.** <sup>13</sup> "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. <sup>14</sup> For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it. (NRSV)

### 1. What is the Wide Gate?

What is the Wide Gate? Jesus says, "The Gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it." The point is that vices—harmful behaviors and attitudes—are attractive and easy to succumb to (give in to).

Jesus has alludes to quite a few harmful behaviors and attitudes in the SOM.

- Anger and power trips over others (5:21-26)
- Not keeping proper sexual boundaries (5:27-30)
- Failing to keep marital commitments (5:31-32)
- Lying and deceiving (5:33-37)
- Retaliation or getting even with people (5:38-42)
- Hating people (5:43-48)
- Judging and condemning people (7:1-3)
- Greed and manipulation (7:12)

It's easy to enter the Wide Gate and take the easy path of harmful behaviors and attitudes. Many advertisers, television producers, and purveyors of entertainment use vices to seduce people in order to make a buck. The path of vice and evil is easy to take ... and well supplied with travelers.

## 2. What is the Narrow Gate?

What is the Narrow Gate? Some Christians have understood the Narrow Gate and the Hard Road<sup>2</sup> to represent correct theology; that is, if you have the *right belief* or *orthodox belief*, then you are saved, you are in.

However, right beliefs (*orthodoxy*) is not the focus of the SOM; rather, the focus is on doing what is right (*orthopraxy*).

Jesus says the scribes and Pharisees have correct beliefs, but they do not practice what they teach (Matt 23:2).<sup>3</sup> The SOM encourages disciples to walk-the-talk, so their righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20).

What do the Narrow Gate and Hard Path refer to? From the context of the SOM, we can infer a number of behaviors and attitudes:

### Chapter 5

- Beatitudes: poor in spirit, meekness, pure in heart, peacemaking, etc (5:3-12)
- Dispelling anger (5:21-26)
- Having proper sexual boundaries (5:27-30)
- Keep relational commitments (5:31-32)
- Speaking the truth (5:33-37)
- Nonviolently resisting evil (5:38-42)
- Loving one's enemy (5:43-48)

### Chapter 6

- Giving generously (6:2-4)
- Praying faithfully (6:5-13)
- Forgiving others (6:14-15)
- Fasting (6:16-18)
- Living Simply (6:19-34)

### Chapter 7

- Not judging/condemning others (7:1-4)
- Taking the log out of our eyes to discern clearly (7:5)
- Seeking God (7:7-11)
- Keeping the Golden Rule (7:12)

We can see why Jesus says that few travelers find the Narrow Gate and even less walk the Hard Path.

## 3. Why Enter the Narrow Gate and walk the Hard Path?

So, why enter the Narrow Gate and walk the Hard Path? I think there are two reasons:

First, positively speaking, when we enter the Narrow Gate and walk the Hard Path, we discover our True Self and harmony with others and God. Here is how it happens:

- When we practice putting others' interests ahead of our own,
- We are able to go beyond our own narrow perspectives,
- We slowly learn to transcend our own egocentric self,
- We learn to see and experience life from Christ's perspective.

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<sup>2</sup> Literally, the "restricted path" or "having been made narrow path" (τεθλιμμένη ἡ ὁδός),

<sup>3</sup> **Matt 23:3** therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach" (NRSV); πάντα οὖν ὅσα ἐὰν εἴπωσιν ὑμῖν ποιήσατε καὶ τηρεῖτε, κατὰ δὲ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν μὴ ποιεῖτε· λέγουσιν γὰρ καὶ οὐ ποιοῦσιν.

In this way, we become united with the Mind of Christ, infused with Christ Consciousness (2 Cor 2:16), we leave behind our ego centric self and we take on our Higher Self. We unite with our Source of Life. That is ultimate happiness.

Second, speaking negatively, Jesus says if we take the Wide Gate and the easy way of vice and corruption, we will experience Divine Judgment. The Wide Gate and easy way leads to self-destruction (7:13). It's like being thrown into the fire (7:17). We will be separated from Christ (7:23). Our life will be flood-like disaster (7:27).

#### **D. Bear Good Fruit (7:15-23)**

Next, Jesus amplifies the first warning with a second.

**Matt 7:15-21.** <sup>15</sup> "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. <sup>16</sup> You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?"

<sup>17</sup> In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Thus you will know them by their fruits.

<sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. <sup>22</sup> On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?' <sup>23</sup> Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.'" (NRSV)

##### **1. What's the connection?**

What is the connection between this passage and the previous one about Two Gates? It seems to be this: The false prophets prevent people from entering the Narrow Gate and following the Hard Path.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the false prophets even usher people through the Wide Gate toward destruction.

##### **2. Who are the false prophets?**

Who are the false prophets? We really don't know. Whoever they were, they had two characteristics.

First, they claimed to be Christians. They called Jesus "Lord, Lord" (7:21).

Second, they are described as "ravenous wolves" (7:15), suggesting that they were not simply people with heretical or misguided ideas. They were intent on harming others for their own ends.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Dale Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 165.

<sup>5</sup> Dale Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 166.

### 3. How can we detect false prophets?

How can we detect false prophets? Jesus' assumption is that like produces like. Evil produces evil. Good produces good. The Good Tree produces good fruit and the Bad (rotten) Tree, bad fruit. We will know them by their fruit.

The “bad fruit” refers to bad behavior, not bad doctrine. When we look at verse 17—“Every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit”—the word “bear” is the word *poieō*, meaning “to do” or “practice”. So the focus is on right practice (*orthopraxis*), not right doctrine (*orthodoxy*).

### 4. What is the good fruit?

What is the good fruit? When we look at the Beatitudes, we get:

- Poor in spirit (emptying self, detachment),
- Mournful (sensitivity to pain, but also God's presence),
- Meek (gentleness and nonviolence)
- Righteous
- Merciful
- Pure in heart (right intention)
- Peacemaker
- Steady under persecution

The fruit would also all the behaviors mentioned in the Three Tasks of God's people (5:17-7:12) and could also include Paul's list of the Fruit of the Spirit:

**Gal 5:22-23.** ... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, and self-control ... (NRSV)

All of this invites us to do some self-inspection. Our conduct reveals our true character.

- Am I bearing good fruit?
- What do my outer, external deeds indicate about my inner being?
- What behaviors do I routinely exhibit?
- What do I do that demonstrates genuine faith in God?

### 5. Does this passage deny free will?

Does this passage deny free will? Matt 7:18 say that “a good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor a bad tree good fruit.” Does this mean our nature (DNA) determines our behavior?

I think Matthew text assumes we have free will. Why? Because the text invites us freely choose, “to make good fruit,” which is in our power to do.

Elsewhere Matthew says: “Either make (ποιήσατε) the tree good, and its fruit good; or make (ποιήσατε) the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit” (Matt 12:33; NRSV). Matthew uses an imperative “make the good tree”—we have the free will and ability to remodel our inner nature!

## 6. What is wrong with the confession, “Lord, Lord...”?

What is wrong with the confession, “Lord, Lord...”? Jesus says that not everyone who calls him “Lord” will enter the kingdom of God. Why?

Jesus says “only the one who does the will of my Father” will enter the Kingdom of God. Again, Jesus focuses on behavior. In today’s vernacular, Jesus would have said, “Look, words are cheap! Action speaks louder than words!”

One thing is needed to enter the Kingdom of God: Obedience to the Jesus’ words:

- Keeping the law the way he instructed (5:17-48)
- Loving God the way he taught (6:1-34)
- Loving others the way he demonstrated (7:1-12)

## E. Be Wise Builders (7:24-27)

Finally, Jesus concludes with a third warning.

**Matt 7:22-27.** <sup>24</sup> "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts [*poiei*] on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. <sup>25</sup> The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. <sup>26</sup> And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act [*poiei*] on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. <sup>27</sup> The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!" (NRSV)

### 1. The goal of SOM: Action (Gk *poieō*)

What is the goal of the SOM? This text tells us. The word *poieō* is the key word. It is translated by the NRSV as “bears” (17-18), “do” or “does” (21-22), and “acts” (24-27).

The fact that the verb *poieō* is repeated nine times in the three concluding warnings indicates the goal of the SOM—to call us to action!

In the context of the SOM, to build your house on the rock, means basing your life on the words of Jesus. And that is the same thing as doing the will of God.

Too often Protestant sermons on this text are quick to add that what really matters is faith, not works. But, as Catholics emphasize, this text makes it explicit that works matters, that “authentic discipleship is ethics.”<sup>6</sup>

### 2. The rain fell

Throughout the Bible the storm represents God’s judgment. Think about Noah’s flood (Gen 6-7). The story of Noah’s flood is a poetic account of God’s judgment falling on human beings. It’s like a flood.

Who survives God’s judgment? The one who does the will of God. Noah did the will of God. And the wise man who built his house on the rock did the will of God. We are invited to be like that.

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<sup>6</sup> Dale Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 170.

### 3. What is the foundation?

What is the foundation? Outwardly, the houses of the wise man and the foolish man may have been the same, but their foundations were different. Again, from the context, we can surmise that the foundation is the instruction of Jesus in the SOM.

Both the foolish and the wise man heard the words of Jesus, but only the wise man acted on them. It's not enough to simply to hear Jesus words, we need to put them into practice to benefit from them (7:24).

### F. Conclusions

**Matt 7:28-29.** <sup>28</sup> Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, <sup>29</sup> for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes. (NRSV)

Matthew emphasizes that Jesus is not simply a wise teacher, but He is Lord—He is the Gate, He is the Path, He is the Good Tree, He is the Foundation.

To conclude: When we put into practice what the SOM teaches, Jesus is Lord. Our actions speak loader than words. We become the righteous of God on planet earth. We discover our True Self, we know God, and we love others as God loves us.