



Two Roads Diverged...

Devotional Thoughts for the Week of
November 22, 2020
by Ed Green

This is the last week of our series on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. We are focusing on

Matthew 7:13-29. Our devotional author this week is Ed Green. Ed serves as Pastor of Equipping & Care here at BCC.

Week 12 Day 1: The Road Less Traveled

Have you ever gone hiking and got “lost”? When I was in high school, I went with a group of students on a week-long wilderness trip, canoeing and backpacking in central Missouri. We had a guide, but each of us participants took turns leading the group, using a topographical map. There were a couple times when, let’s just say, our “leader” for the day didn’t do the greatest job reading the map!



As Jesus wraps up his sermon on the mount, he issues four distinct calls to obedience. Jesus is providing a map for his disciples to follow that will lead to their flourishing in the kingdom of God. Read Matthew 7:13-14. In the tradition of Jewish wisdom literature, Jesus speaks of “two ways.” Do you hear the urgency in Jesus’ words? The small gate vs. the wide gate. The narrow road vs. the broad road. Life vs. destruction. What is the heart of Jesus’ warning?

Think of the times we live in. How do they line up with Jesus’ words? Jesus highlights the reality of our choice in the matter. He didn’t mince words about the consequences of our choices in these last verses of his sermon. What if Jesus was serious?



Week 12 Day 2: Watch Out!

Jesus stands in the tradition of the true prophets of Israel as he warns about false prophets, who don’t speak for the Lord, even though they claim to. Read Jeremiah 23:15-18 for an example of God’s words against false prophets.

In Matthew 7:15-20 Jesus compares those who would dare speak falsely in the name of the Lord to “wolves in sheep’s clothing.”

That is a recognized image of evil intent and “sneakiness” to achieve their own ends of selfishness and destruction. But he says that there is a universal test to recognize them: the fruit of their lives. They can only hide their true motives for so long.

We have witnessed the fall of several “false prophets” in our own generation. Men who have built a reputation of being strong Christian leaders, but leading secret lives of avarice, immorality, and a desire for power. Do we need to name names? A simple Google search will provide examples. They have not only harmed the believers and churches who trusted them, but the very witness of Christ in our day.

What Jesus calls us to is discernment, a theme that runs through much of the New Testament. It’s really easy to “pull the wool over people’s eyes.” So, nobody gets a pass. Jesus calls us to examine the fruit of their lives; not to be critical or judgmental, but to be wise and discerning about those who would lead us.

Week 12 Day 3: Danger, Will Robinson!

Growing up, I was a fan of watching reruns of *Lost in Space* (the original series, obviously, not the remakes). It was like the Swiss Family Robinson in space, a campy example of mid-60s science fiction. The Robot in the show was a B-9 model environmental control robot, who became a member of the family, despite often



being sabotaged by the selfish and lazy Dr. Smith. When the family was unaware of upcoming danger and needed warning, The Robot would flail his “arms” and shout, “Danger, Will Robinson! Danger!”

That’s how I feel when Jesus issues his warning in Matthew 7:21-23. This is a danger faced by all of us who desire to do good and follow Jesus. It’s easy to focus more on what we do for the Lord than our life with him. Skye Jethani in his book *What if Jesus Was Serious?* refers to these kinds of folks as “Christmas Tree Christians;” showing off their beauty with decorations and fake fruit, but ultimately cut off from the roots, in the process of dying.

The temptation to focus on doing more than being is always with us. Both are important, but the truth is that it is a cycle: Being precedes Doing, and Doing shapes Being. Perhaps one of the best antidotes to being a “Christmas Tree Christian” can be found in the words of Jesus in John 15:1-8. Take some time today to reflect on Jesus’ teaching in these two passages. How can you work to ensure that the things you do for God flow out of your life with God?

Week 12 Day 4: What will you build on?



Jesus was a master storyteller. He often told parables, which could range anywhere from a simple comparison (“the kingdom of heaven is like...”) to more involved stories (“a man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho...”). Jesus ends his sermon on the mount with one of his more familiar parables: the parable of the wise and foolish builders. Read Matthew 7:24-27.

The message of Jesus’ parable is simple: one who puts these words into practice is wise, like the man who built his house on the rock, a solid foundation. Those who do not are like the foolish man, who built his house on sand. This was a common parable among Jewish teachers, but the rock for them was always the Torah, God’ law.

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Jesus, as one with authority (7:29), boldly equates his words with the Torah.

Again, James comments on the same choice that people have when confronted with the word of God. Read James 1:22-25. He says, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”

What are you building your life on? That is the heart of Jesus’ story. We never know what storms will blow into our lives: heartbreak, disease, disappointment, tragedy. Jesus wants the house of our life to stand, no matter what comes.

Week 12 Day 5: The Greatest Sermon Ever

Several years ago, Fred Craddock wrote a book entitled *As One Without Authority*. It’s a book about a particular style of preaching that allows God’s word to have the authority and not the one preaching it. It is a scary thing to stand up and preach. It’s not just about public speaking, which is actually one of the most feared things for people to do. But when someone preaches, they are actually speaking on God’s behalf. Whether it’s in front of a crowd, or speaking the good news into someone’s life across a table at Starbucks.

Jesus preached as one with authority, unlike other teachers in his day, who would quote other rabbis and teachers ad nauseum. Jesus speaks as the king of God’s kingdom, with all the authority that comes with it. I invite you to read Jesus’ sermon one more time in one sitting. What would we be missing if we didn’t have it? What would it look like if you made it one of your goals in life to live out the truths of Jesus’ words here in his sermon? What one or two things stand out to you that the Lord may want to work through in your life? Make these things a matter of prayer for yourself and discussion with those who may be able to come alongside, to help you and encourage you.

