

Matthew 7:13-28 Firm Foundation or Sinking Sand- By Amanda A. Nevin 1-24-10

Our passage this morning comes at the end of Jesus' most famous sermon the Sermon on the Mount. Up until this point in the sermon Jesus has been laying the foundation for faith and discipleship: starting with a series of blessings for the community preaching to those on the margins of the community faith including them in the promises and hope of faith. Jesus concludes his sermon with three warnings. These are not suggestions on how to live or set of intellectual opinions no, these warnings make explicit that Jesus believes his person and teaching are the exclusive way to life.

Matthew loves putting things in groups as a way to further illustrate the point he is trying to make. In our passage there are three examples the two gates, the two prophets and the two houses. There is the one that leads to life and the one that leads to destruction.

In the first illustration there are 2 gates, the narrow gate that leads to life and the wide gate that leads to destruction. The narrow gate is a call to conversion, the call to make Jesus Lord and yet it is more than just a simple saying yes to Christ. The wide gate leads to an easy life and yet to destruction. Life outside of loyalty to Jesus Christ is the secular life- the way is easy, the path is wide; it seems fuller it is the gate of whatever pleases you. Many will take this gate because a life of discipleship requires a response to the Gospel message of Christ. Taking the narrow gate means accepting the truth of Christ and then living out his message to the world around us. The gate is narrow, it is hard because it is counter-cultural, it requires discipline, it means often being in the minority, it means that we seek God's help to stand against the temptations of this world. It means that we live a life of discipleship which requires daily passing through the narrow gate of the decision to make Jesus' one's sole Lord and so to walk he decidedly uneasy road of obeying his commands against anger, lust, divorce, oaths, retaliation, hate, injustice, ostentation, greediness, and so on. Jesus is telling us in this passage that it is a daily commitment, it is not easy to pick up the cross of Christ and follow him, that is why the path to destruction or temptation is so wide- we are in constant need of the grace of Christ to lead us on the straight and narrow.

The second set of stories is about the two prophets. Jesus moves from the greater picture of the world of those in the world who would follow Christ to those who are claiming faith and yet we need to be worried about. We are called to be aware of the false prophets- those who appear to be Christian but who are not living out the ways of Christ at all. False prophets wear "sheeps" clothing they seem to be like Christ and yet they are wolves ready to come steal and destroy. Jesus warns us that we will be able to tell who the false prophets are by their fruit, by what they are producing, what they are teaching, how they really live and how they present the gospel to others. In everything we are called to hold people against the truth of the scriptures in its entirety. For example there are preachers out there who preach a message about prayer that says if you simply have enough faith then all your prayers will be answered and yet when we pray fervently for healing and we have faith that healing will happen and it doesn't people will say "you didn't have enough faith." Well that theology doesn't hold true to the entirety of the scriptures. Yes we are called to ask, knock and seek and yet what is the line in the Lord's

prayer “thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” We don’t often understand God’s will and we don’t often understand why prayer is answered for some and not others- but prayer is about our relationship with Christ, our deepening our faith with him as much as it is about getting what we ask for. Another example are those who proclaim a gospel of wealth- that God wants all his people to be wealthy, but no where in the scriptures is that proclaimed. The fruits of a person isn’t their track record of getting people converted but rather do they encourage faith in Christ along, the narrow gate, or do they lead others into everything else. Does a person point to the road of Christ, the hard choices that we have to make as his followers or does the person make excuses, water down the gospel and say “it doesn’t really matter all that much because after all we have grace.” Jesus demands more of us than a watered down faith. Christ wants us to make our lives so focused on him that we are striving to live out his message to heal the wounded, care for the orphaned, give to the poor, fight for the those who cant’ fight for themselves, to cloth those in need, feed the hungry, throw away the temptations towards lusting after another’s spouse; seeking to get rid of our greediness, selfishness and work towards healing and wholeness for each other. ???

The third story is that of the two houses, the house built on the solid rock and the one on shifting sand.

There is a Christian song called “Shifting Sand” by a group called Caedmon’s call. Listen to these words: “Sometimes I believe all the lies, so I can do the things I should despise; and every day I am swayed by whatever is on my mind.” The chorus says this “my faith is like shifting sand, changed by every wave; my faith is like shifting sand, so I stand on grace. Verse: waters rose as my doubts reigned, my sand-castle faith; it slipped away; found myself stand on your grace It’d been there all the time.”