

"Walking the Narrow Way" Matthew 7:13-29 Trinity 8 2023

Grace, peace and mercy be unto you all from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters, Jesus describes the two ways: the broad way which leads to destruction, and the narrow way that leads to life.

The broad way is easy, it is spacious. Tolerance is its password; its watchwords are diversity, permissiveness and synchronism; its mottoes are come as you are and remain as you are, do what you want, follow your own inclinations. It is 'the way of the ungodly' and leads to death.

The narrow way is that which is taken by those who have had the righteousness of Christ imputed to them. They are called 'the righteous' in Psalm 1:6. We cannot take this way unless we are born again, our eyes set upon Jesus, and we are following after 'holiness without which no man shall see God'.

The one has a wide gate, the other a narrow gate. People pass through the wide gate with ease: in fact they crowd through without much difficulty. The narrow gate is more of an obstacle: a turnstile too narrow for us to go forward with the baggage of the life we are supposedly leaving behind. We pass through as individuals, each with our own testimony.

Later in the gospel we heard earlier, Jesus warns against false teachers. They are wolves in sheep's clothing. They are like the false

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prophets of Old Testament days, who preached 'peace, peace' when there was no peace.

Jesus warns us that there will be false prophets in the last days. These are the days in which we live. These false teachers lurk around our doors, and the doors of our churches.

The false teachers are not always obvious: they may wear clerical collars - or not; or have strings of initials after their names - or pride themselves on the fact that they do not. They may seem to subscribe to the right creeds, carry their Bibles, be civil and polite and all: but changing the analogy from wolves to trees, Jesus twice tells us that we will "know them by their fruits".

But what are these fruits? Elsewhere, Jesus equates fruitfulness with Christ-likeness. The branch is attached to Jesus, the true Vine, and brings forth much fruit in the exercise of His grace and the performance of good works. A true minister must surely possess and demonstrate "the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. A true minister, too, must be judged by his teaching. Jesus repeats the analogy in Matthew 12:33-34 and adds 'by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned'.

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In the end false teachers, unless they repent, will be with those who are finally rejected. They will profess, "Lord, Lord." Interestingly, Jesus responds to the title "Lord, Lord," thereby identifying Himself with the Lord God of Israel. And in this context too, He announces Himself as the Judge of all the earth.

"Lord, Lord," they say, "have we not prophesied in your name, and in your name have cast out demons, and in your name done many wonderful works?" To whom He will Profess, "I never knew you: depart from me, you (all) that work (literally) Lawlessness"!

To build our lives on anything less than a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is the very height of madness. The alternative is to be disowned forever.

Mere profession of Jesus' deity: "Lord, Lord" - even if accompanied by our vaunted "many wonderful works" - will not fit us for entry into "the kingdom of heaven." The person who will "enter the kingdom of heaven," says Jesus, is the one who "does the will of my Father which is in heaven"; i.e. the one who, "hears these sayings of mine, and does them."

What we are looking at in the account of the wise builder who built his house upon a rock is one man's relationship with Jesus. This man is not a hearer only, but a doer also. That is what it is to build our

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house upon the Rock. We are not spared the rain, the floods, the winds: but when our lives are built upon Jesus, we are on solid ground.

It is also true to say that the edifice could be the church: for Jesus later said, 'Upon this Rock will I build My Church'. On what Rock? Peter? - No, but upon what Peter had said: 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God'. The Rock upon which the Church is founded IS our Lord Jesus Christ.

Conversely, we have the man who was only a hearer of Jesus' words, but not a doer of them. Jesus likened this man to a foolish builder, who built his house upon the sand. Faced with the same rain, floods and winds his work did not endure, but at last came tumbling to the ground: "and great was the fall of it," Jesus punctuates!

"And when Jesus had ended these sayings, the PEOPLE were astonished at His teaching: for He taught them as One having authority, and not as the scribes."

The scribes used to teach on the authority of others, as in 'Rabbi A. said that Rabbi B. said that Rabbi C. was of the opinion that (this Scripture) means this or that.' But Jesus taught them as One having His own authority! That's why this is the truth we need to hear. To walk the narrow way is difficult, but it's the way to the cross and the way heaven,

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thanks to the redeeming blood of Christ. Don't be just hearers of the word, but doers. Amen.