

# WEEK 11: TWO WAYS AND TWO TREES

Matthew 7:13–20



## The Place of the Passage

Throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus has set before his disciples the good life of blessedness and flourishing. The Beatitudes introduced this vision, and then Jesus unfolded this further by contrasting the life of true righteousness with a hypocritical and self-oriented life. Now Jesus begins to bring his sermon to a close with a series of contrasts, leading those who hear to a point of decision regarding him and his claims. He contrasts two gates and two ways to illustrate the decision all must make, and then he exposes false teachers by contrasting two kinds of trees. In all of this, he leads his hearers to understand the truth and goodness of the way of his kingdom and to embrace it wholeheartedly.

## The Big Picture

Jesus teaches the importance of aligning decisively to his way and his teaching by means of illustrations of two ways and two kinds of trees.

**Reflection and Discussion**

Carefully and thoughtfully read this section of Jesus' teaching, Matthew 7:13-20. Then use the provided questions to help you think more deeply about the text. (See *ESV Study Bible* notes on page 1834; online at [www.esv.org](http://www.esv.org).)

**The Narrow Way versus the Wide Way (Matt. 7:13-14)**

Jesus begins to bring his teaching to a conclusion by contrasting two gates and two ways. What is the "gate" that Jesus calls people to enter and the "way" he calls people to join?

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Many people think there are multiple ways to salvation and eternal life<sup>1</sup> and that most, or even all, people will be saved in the end. How would you respond to such claims in light of Jesus' illustration here?

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What does each of the following texts teach us about the exclusivity of Jesus—that is, that there is only one "gate" and one "way" of salvation, and that this way is through Jesus Christ? Consider also John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5; and 1 John 5:11-12.

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Jesus says the gate is "narrow" and the way is "hard" that leads to life (Matt. 7:13-14). Sometimes Jesus highlights the easiness of salvation: we simply trust him, come to him for rest, and receive life in his name (Matt. 11:28; John 1:12-13; 3:16). At other times he highlights how difficult it is truly to receive his grace, trust him, and follow him (Matt. 19:23-24; Luke 9:62; 14:26-30). How do these perspectives fit together?

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What aspects of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount seem uniquely hard for you to embrace or practice?

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**The Healthy versus the Diseased Tree (Matt. 7:15-20)**

What does it mean for a false prophet to come in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15)? What are some modern examples of the way in which false prophets disguise themselves in order to appear winsome, trustworthy, or appealing?

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What do we learn about false teachers and false teaching from each of these texts: 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 4:1-5; 2 Timothy 3:1-9; and Titus 1:10-16?

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What are a few common messages that false prophets and false teachers promote today? Why are these messages so appealing to people? How do you resist their lure?

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Since false prophets look like faithful disciples on the outside, we often cannot discern their true motives or character from their outward appearance. What does Jesus mean when he issues the criterion of recognizing them by their fruits (Matt. 7:16)? In light of this, what are a few ways in which you can spot a false prophet today?

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In your own words, summarize the point of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:17–20. How does this relate to what Jesus has just said in verses 15–16?

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What are three ways in which Christians can fortify themselves against the deception of false teaching?

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Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections have for you.

**Gospel Glimpses**

**THE NARROW GATE OF GRACE.** Trusting Jesus is the easiest thing in the world to do, and yet it requires that we humble ourselves and admit that we need his salvation, which is hard for prideful people to do. It also requires that we believe that he really is this gracious—that he would welcome “repeat offenders” of his glory with such open arms. This is hard to believe because it is so radically and counterintuitively *kind*. Receiving grace with empty hands of faith is easy, but it requires that we let go of our prideful commitment to the claims that we are not all that bad and that we can do something to earn God’s favor. Amazingly, it is the very posture of humble faith that produces a transformed life of obedience and leads us to embrace hardship in Christ’s name.

**ONE WAY OF SALVATION.** Jesus describes a narrow gate that leads to life and a wide gate that leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13–14). He says elsewhere that he is the only way to the Father (John 14:6). Some may hear this and think it sounds like bad news, wondering why Jesus sounds so exclusive. However, Jesus is the only way to the Father because there is no other possible way for our sin to be forgiven besides the cross of Christ. We cannot live a good enough life to cancel the eternal debt required for our sins. No other philosophy or religion acknowledges the depth of evil in the human heart, and no other philosophy or religion shows the greatness of love in the heart of God. The exclusivity of Jesus as the only way of salvation points us to the greatness and graciousness of our salvation. He is the only solution to our deepest problem.

**Whole-Bible Connections**

**THE PROMISE OF LIFE.** As Jesus calls people to enter the narrow gate and follow the hard way, he promises that such a response leads to “life” (Matt. 7:14). This promise of “life” is not only everlasting existence but true joy, flourishing, and enjoyment of God’s presence in a new creation forever. It is the flourishing for which we were made, the heart of which is knowing God (John 17:3). We were originally created for this fullness of life in Eden (Genesis 1–2), but humanity rejected God and earned an eternal future of death (Genesis 3). Jesus came to take our death on himself on the cross, he rose again as the first one to experi-

ence the resurrection life, and he now extends forgiveness and a share in life with him forever.

**Theological Soundings**

**REGENERATION.** Jesus repeatedly indicates that real Christians will live transformed lives. He teaches us to identify true or false teachers by their fruits, for healthy trees bear good fruit while diseased trees bear bad fruit (Matt. 7:15–20). He also teaches that those who confess him as Lord but do not live transformed lives will not, in fact, be saved (vv. 21–23). This assumes the doctrine of regeneration—that those who are truly saved are “born again,” “regenerated,” given new and transformed hearts to live transformed lives (John 3:3–8; 1 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:4–5; 1 John 2:29). In other words, all those who experience justification<sup>2</sup> will also experience sanctification.<sup>3</sup> Those who come to Christ do not merely make a mental assent to truth; they are given new hearts with new desires and thus they live transformed lives.

**SOUND DOCTRINE.** Theological faithfulness matters. Jesus warned his people to “beware of false prophets” (Matt. 7:15) because false doctrine is dangerous. False teachers misrepresent the truth. They seek to bend reality to the will of the teacher rather than submitting their lives to the will of their Maker. False doctrine also often leads to immorality, for that which people believe inevitably shapes how they live. Followers of Jesus embrace the importance of both gospel doctrine and gospel character. Every church must embrace the necessity of upholding both truth and love and must therefore reject false teaching and immoral living.

**Personal Implications**

Reflect on how to apply what you have learned in this text to your everyday life. Make notes below on personal implications of (1) the *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) the *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) the *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole. Also write down what you have learned that can lead you to praise God, repent of sin, trust his gracious promises, and live in obedience to him.

**1. Gospel Glimpses**

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**2. Whole-Bible Connections**

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**3. Theological Soundings**

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**4. Matthew 7:13–20**

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**As You Finish This Unit . . .**

Take a moment to pray and ask for the Lord’s blessing and help as you continue in this study of Matthew 7:13–20. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.

**Definitions**

- <sup>1</sup> **Eternal life** – For believers, the new life that begins with trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation and continues after physical death with an eternity in God’s presence, with resurrected and glorified bodies in the new heavens and the new earth.
- <sup>2</sup> **Justification** – The moment God declares a Christ-trusting sinner to be in right standing before him; i.e., becoming positionally righteous.
- <sup>3</sup> **Sanctification** – The incremental, Spirit-empowered process of being conformed to Christ’s image; i.e., becoming progressively more righteous.