

A Stark Choice

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[0 : 0 0] Now we come to our reading, continuing in Matthew's Gospel, Matthew chapter 7, on page 812. Really, it will be continuing later on in the service, in this passage in the Sermon on the Mount.

So, if you turn, please, to page 812, and we're reading Matthew 7, verses 13 to 20. And Jesus says, Inwardly, ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits.

Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? So every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.

A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Thus you will recognize them by your fruits. Now, I'm also going to read from the book of Jeremiah. You don't need to turn this up, but it's part of Jeremiah chapter 23, reminding us that this has been an age-old problem for God's people, the problem of false prophets and false teachers.

[1 : 4 2] And Jeremiah says, Both prophet and priest are ungodly. Even in my house I have found their evil, declares the Lord.

For whom, thus says the Lord of hosts, Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes.

They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, It shall be well with you.

And to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, No disaster shall come upon you. For who among them has stood in the counsel of the Lord to see and to hear his word?

Or who has paid attention to his word and listened? Behold the storm of the Lord. Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest. It will burst upon the head of the wicked.

[2 : 4 3] The anger of the Lord will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his heart. In the latter days you will understand it clearly.

I did not send the prophets, yet they ran. I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Well, if you'd turn with me to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 7.

Well, as we come to this final section of the Sermon on the Mount, and if you still have our original outline, you'll see we've come to the section I've called The Message of Christ's People, where Jesus himself exhibits what we might call the preaching of true Christianity, according to the Lord Jesus.

And that is because all God's revelation calls for response. From the very beginning of the story of salvation, God has revealed himself in grace and mercy to mankind.

[4 : 03] So the book of Hebrews begins, as you know, long ago at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. And that's because the true God, that is the God of the Bible, is the covenant God.

He is a relational God. And he makes himself known to man so that we might respond to him and know him and love him. And his revelation to us, therefore, always calls for a personal response.

And that response, of course, is what the Bible calls faith. Faith, that is trusting and believing God's word of revelation and submitting to it, and therefore submitting to him in humble obedience to his lordship.

Faith, as J.I. Packer puts it, is a technical term, really, in the Bible. He says this, it means wholehearted acceptance of, trust in, and obedience to God, branched out into a threefold object.

The word of God, that is the teaching of the Old Testament and the apostolic witness as such, the promises of God, categorically, and the Son of God, personally.

[5 : 17] Faith is credence plus commitment. It's assurance plus allegiance. It's devotion plus discipleship. And from the beginning, it's been that way.

If you read the book of Deuteronomy, which unfolds God's covenant of grace to Israel through Moses and expounds the whole way of obedience, what it is to live and walk with God as his people, as his treasured possession, as the apple of his eye.

And you get to the end of that great sermon, and Moses says this, see, I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse, therefore choose life.

Loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, holding fast to him, for he is your life. See, God always reveals himself so that we might respond with loving obedience and trust and find life in his word.

And so when God reveals himself ultimately and forever, in the climax of that whole story of his great redemption, in the personal work of Jesus Christ, in God himself, in the flesh, in our world, he reveals himself not to be ignored, but that we might respond to that ultimate self-revelation and find ultimate life, life in all its fullness, life that comes through knowledge of Jesus Christ the Son.

[6 : 46] And we've been listening, haven't we, to many weeks of Jesus' unique revelation of the words and ways of God in this Sermon on the Mount. And we've heard, just as his first hearers heard, we've heard teaching with a new and awesome authority.

Because it's the authority of God Almighty himself standing on the earth, speaking to human beings. And the crowd certainly recognized that. Look down to the last two verses of chapter 7, verses 28 and 29.

They were astonished at his teaching. Because he was teaching them as one who had authority, not as the scribes, not as their clergy sermons. Well, of course, he had the unique authority of heaven itself.

He was the king of heaven. And so also, he calls for a response, a response from every human being. And he does so with a unique divine authority.

The revelation of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ demands a true kingdom response. And that means, of course, doesn't it, that the preaching and the sharing of true Christianity, according to the Lord Jesus Christ, it will always demand a response from people.

[8 : 06] A wholehearted belief and behavior commitment to Jesus Christ. And that is what Jesus says here if you look at our passage, verses 13 to 20.

It's a response not just of hearing, but of doing. Verse 13, of entering by the narrow gate. Verse 17, of bearing good fruit, not bad.

It's the same done in verse 21. Doing the will of the Father in heaven. And verse 24, hearing and doing the words of Jesus. himself. Do you see, when Jesus preaches the gospel of his kingdom, he calls for a real and life-changing response.

Always. And therefore, all true preaching of Christianity must call for a real response. And that response is what the Bible calls repentance and faith.

Jesus' presence in the world confronts the world and it brings the moment of decision to men and women. And it can't be avoided. It's a moment of supreme revelation.

[9 : 11] It's a moment of truth. And it was so for the people of Jesus' day, the Jewish people. Will their apparent devotion to the one true God of Israel, will it be shown to be real or will it, in fact, be exposed as just a sham?

Will they bow the knee to God himself, the God of Israel, in the flesh, in the person of God the Son? Will they recognize him? Will they obey the voice that Moses pointed them to and that Moses spoke of?

Will they recognize at last that all the promises of God in their scriptures have come to fulfillment in Christ, the promised Messiah? Will they bow down before him and worship him and pledge their allegiance to him?

Will they know that now to be faithful to God, to be faithful to his word, they must, above all, bow to the authority of the king whose word is God's ultimate law.

Will they do that? Well, when God himself stands before you and summons you to obedience and worship, there's no more hiding, is there? You're exposed. And the moment of decision is a moment of revelation about where you really stand and what you really think deep in your heart.

[10 : 33] Think about a long courtship. All the letters, the phone calls, these days, I suppose, the texting, the talking. Eventually, it leads to the engagement.

And then at last comes the climax of the whole story as bride and groom stand at the altar at the front together and the vows are put.

Will the bride really say I do? Will she promise that lifelong commitment that will make it a reality?

That's the moment of truth, isn't it? If there's no I do when that question is asked, let me tell you, that is a big disaster. There's no going back, is there?

That relationship is ruptured forever. forever. And that is the moment for Israel as a nation when they are confronted by Jesus.

[11 : 27] He is their king. He is their Messiah. He is their Lord and God come at last to call his people to himself. And it was the decision facing every single Israelite who heard Jesus speak then in the Sermon on the Mount on that hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee.

But it's also decision time for every person in this world since then when they hear the voice and the call of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the King of Heaven in the Gospel of Jesus when it's proclaimed.

Because he is the climax of all truth for this world. All revelation that there is about God. All revelation about this world, about its meaning and purpose.

all revelation about salvation and forgiveness of sins and restoration with God which is what every human being needs. Jesus' presence and his words, the Gospel of the Kingdom, they confront and they expose and they force a decision, they force a response, they force a choice on everyone, every person in this world.

You see, as someone has put it, the Sermon on the Mount is not something to be read and admired, it's something to be obeyed. Don Carson is absolutely right when he says nothing could be more calamitous than to meditate long and hard on Matthew 5-7 and then to resolve to try and improve a little bit.

[13 : 04] No, what Jesus is demanding is something absolute and radical, just as Moses did. but with an even greater, indeed with ultimate authority, he sets before us this day life and death, blessing and curse forever.

And now this is God's final word. And if we refuse him, well, it's not just folly, it is utterly fearful. That's why here in the second half of Matthew 7, in the climax to this great sermon, Jesus speaks with total clarity about the enormity of the consequences of refusing him.

And he urges us, do not do that. Choose life. Verse 13, enter, enter the kingdom the one and only way that you can.

And he leaves us here in absolutely no doubt at all what he does and does not mean by that. The second half of Matthew 7 is extremely black and white in a day when, of course, we don't like binary choices of any kind, do we?

But Jesus is unashamed to show us that the preaching of true Christianity must always involve preaching a message of stark choice about a future that involves a shocking contrast between those who respond and those who do not.

[14 : 37] And he therefore issues a solemn warning not to foolishly fail to hear his word of summons. And what that means, friends, is that you and I are to be true preachers, true proclaimers of the Christian message.

We need to take what he says very seriously indeed. So I want this morning to focus on verses 13 to 20 and on the stark choice that Jesus tells us his gospel forces on everyone who encounters it.

These verses could not be more striking in their contemporary relevance because they speak about the unavoidable, scandalous exclusiveness of Jesus' one way of salvation over and against a culture that insists, doesn't it, on tolerance, on relativism, on inclusiveness and on the values of this world which we can see so often deeply penetrating the life and the thinking even of the professing church in our western world.

Look at verses 13 and 14 first. They emphasize, don't they, the beginning of the Christian life of true discipleship. And it's all about entering onto a roadway that leads to life and the choice, says Jesus, is utterly stark.

He's impressing on his followers what his true message really is just so that it will be their true message also. People who preach true Christianity must preach as Jesus did.

[16 : 10] And so he says we must recognize and we must revere and we must ourselves be true preachers of the narrow way. True preachers of the narrow way.

No doubt Jesus set forth two clear absolute alternatives and only two. There is no third way, is there? Two ways. Two gates. Two destinations.

Two groups of travelers. Now that language is very offensive in our pluralistic world. No doubt it would be at odds very much with Mr. Cameron's British values. That's extremist talk.

We don't want that. Our world wants to talk about middle ground, about centrism, about mediating positions, about a third way for everything. But no, according to Jesus Christ, there are only two ways to live.

And they lead, says Jesus, to two very different, indeed to polar opposite destinations. He calls them life and destruction. That is very shocking, isn't it?

[17 : 14] To our postmodern world of non-binary thinking. By the way, if you notice that word binary is the latest swear word. The bad word binary. When I was at school it was all to do with mathematics and computers.

Binary. Binary numbers. But it's all part of the latest assault on sexuality, isn't it? We're not to think of it as binary, either or, male or female, but it's to be both and or neither.

You wonder how much more idiotic we can become in our world before we realize the emperor has no clues. But look at how binary Jesus is here. It is unavoidable what he says.

First of all, he's clear and stark. Look at verses 13 and 14. There are not many ways to life but only one, says Jesus.

not two ways to life but one. And the only way that leads to life, he says, in verse 13, is not the way of broad, tolerant, diverse opinion.

[18 : 16] That way, the wide and easy way, the majority way, says Jesus, leads only to destruction. And by the way, that word means everlasting ruin and perdition. It's not the way of mainstream majority opinion, the way of life.

Jesus says, many are on that road but it's heading to disaster. Whereas in the world's eyes, those who are on the way to life are just a despised minority. That's how believers look to the world, isn't it?

But Jesus says, you cannot get onto the road to life by following the world and trying to impress the majority. No, you are flying in the face of the world if you're actually on the road to life.

That's how I think it's best to understand the narrow way. It's not like Jesus is talking about two parallel roads, one narrow and one wide. It's not a separate road, I think.

We're to think of it rather as going the opposite way to the world on the same road. We're right in the middle of a broad and bustling road but we are flying in the face of it. I always think about trying to struggle through one of the tunnels in the London Underground at rush hour time and you realize you've gone onto the wrong platform and you have to go back and the whole of London is coming at your face and woe betide you if you're trying to drag a suitcase behind you because the Broadway wants to push you back, wants to carry you with it.

[19 : 41] But no, says Jesus, that is the road to ruin. It's the hard, narrow, against the tide of the majority way of the world that leads to life.

And that's the two ways and that's the two kind of travelers, says Jesus. They are very, very different. And then look, Jesus is utterly binary again.

He says, secondly, there is not just one destination in the end for all people but two. And those two destinations, he says, are life, that is everlasting life and verse 13, everlasting destruction.

No in between, no third way. Now notice carefully, the way that he is speaking of in these two verses is not all that there is. Our life here on earth is not an end in itself nor is it the end of the story.

Jesus says it's leading to a destination that is ultimate. And yet Jesus says, many are merely going merrily along their way in this life, the broad way, without any thought at all about where it's going to end.

[20 : 58] It's rather as if you got onto one of these broad, wide bits of motorway that we have around the edges of the M8 in Glasgow. You know, where the flyover suddenly ends in midair and doesn't go anywhere at all.

Just imagine if you find yourself driving on one of those bits and you had no idea that you were going to come to an almighty precipice and fall right over the end. But Jesus says that's what people are doing.

Walking along in life, giving no thought to the destination. And that's why that they're unwilling to face the fact that Jesus says clearly that there are two gates and a choice must be made one of the other.

You see, Jesus is saying the life he is speaking about here that leads to life is not something that comes naturally. It is not something that just comes by going with the flow. No, it requires a definite decision, a difficult decision, a contrary decision.

It's the broad way to destruction that comes naturally to people, he says in verse 13. It has the wide gate. Or in fact, if you look at the footnote in the Bible, you'll see perhaps there's no gate at all. It could just read the way is wide and easy that leads to destruction.

[22 : 12] The point is there's no difficulty at all in getting onto that way. No decision has to be made. Nothing has to be left behind. There's no need to confront or forsake your sin or your pride or your ambition or your self-righteousness.

Nothing. You can waltz on gaily on this road and all those things can remain fully intact. But not so, verse 14, the narrow way.

Do you see? It has a narrow gate. It's hard to find. You won't drift through that gate by accident. You've got to be clear. You've got to make a definite decision. And it's hard to pass through that narrow gate.

It's like going through the eye of a needle to use one of Jesus' other pictures. Squeezing through that gate will strip you of all sorts of things. Think about the airline security gates. Passengers only beyond here.

Only with essential items. All sorts of things have to be left behind. Can't be taken through those gates. And Jesus says, yes, you have to strip off all your pride, all your self-determination, all your self-righteousness.

[23 : 27] Maybe some precious relationships have to be left behind if you're to pass through this gate. can't push through the gate to life with all your earthly baggage intact.

It's like a turnstile in a football ground. You ever been through them? They're very, very narrow. It's just enough room for you to squeeze through but not with a lot of bags. Looking at these verses, we cannot possibly mistake, can we, that Jesus Christ is an unashamed preacher of the narrow way to life.

There are only two ways, says Jesus, and all of us, therefore, are on the one road or on the other. Either we're walking with the crowd on the broad way or we're walking against the crowd in the opposite direction, purposefully battling against the sheer weight, the sheer power, the fierce flow.

And we won't do that, will we, unless we're acutely aware of that struggle that we're in. And there's no third way. So we have all made a decision already because no decision means that we have decided to go on that broad and easy way of the world.

And only if you've purposefully and painfully entered through the narrow gate will you be on that hard road, that buffeted road of difficulty and opposition.

[24 : 59] The road that looks to the crowded mass of the world that you're utterly foolish and backward, you're going the wrong way. But the road whose destination alone is life everlasting.

Now friends, our world hates that kind of binary talk and binary choices. The world wants to have the broad way now and all through life but then of course to end up at the destination that Jesus says can only be reached by the narrow way.

And so of course any gospel and any church that will offer that will be supremely attractive to the world. Will it not? Because our world wants spirituality but without any of those constraints of Jesus.

It's delighted to have religion but without any of that tiresome morality that Jesus and his apostles preach. And so it should be no surprise to us that there will always be those who are keen to offer that even within the professing church.

And in the West today for the most part the mainline churches are all falling over themselves to preach precisely that third way. Yes, we take Jesus' teaching seriously.

[26 : 15] Yes, we agree with what he says for example on marriage and sexuality. But yes, of course in practice you can just embrace the opposite and all will be well. You'll still end up at the same place in the end.

You can stay on this broad and easy and attractive road that you want to be on in life and you'll certainly end up in the place of life. Oh, we love that gospel. And that's all around us today, isn't it?

Increasingly, even among those who want to claim the language and the history of orthodoxy and even evangelicalism and who speak these words in the name of Jesus Christ and in the name of his church.

And of course it's what people want to hear. People want reassurance, don't they? With all the authority of officials who know best, the officials of the church who can tell you all is well and I can go on doing merrily everything that I please.

It's a bit like if you were in Perth for the day and you got the train home to Glasgow and you were a bit late so you're running for your train and you just get on before the whistle goes and the train goes off and you sit back and think, oh, thank goodness for that.

[27 : 27] And as you get your breath you just begin to wonder, I hope I'm on the right train. And then the conductor, the guard, comes along and you think, oh well, I'll ask him, am I on the train to Glasgow Central?

Yes, yes, all's well, you're on the train to Glasgow Central. You sit back and relax and you read your book and you look out of the window now and again and you think, seems a bit of a strange route going through Fife.

But it must be something to do with the work at Queen Street Station. I know all the trains are being delayed and going a different way. And the conductor, he speaks for the company, he knows, I can trust him.

By the time you see Edinburgh Castle and you're pulling into Waverley Station, it's too late, isn't it?

You realize it's not Glasgow Central and you're at the wrong destination. And the conductor who told you exactly what you wanted to hear and made you feel so happy at the time is exposed as an untrustworthy liar.

[28 : 35] the official spokesman of the route has led you completely astray. And Jesus says, friends, that is what will happen with my gospel and from my church right until the very end.

And that's why he teaches us in this passage not only are we to recognize and revere the true preachers of the narrow way, but we must recognize and resist the false preachers of the broad church.

That's verses 15 to 20. People who look genuine, who look orthodox, who look Christian and who speak in the language of Christ and his church, but the reality is far from that.

Often they're very impressive with their official recognition. But they are in fact according to Jesus. Look at his words. They're ferocious. They're destructive.

They're evil. They are wolves who only harm and destroy. I think we must admit Jesus Christ was not politically correct.

[29 : 46] He would never have got on thought for the day. He would never have been the flavor of the biased broadcasting corporation. He would never have been a convener of church committees or a moderator or a queen's chaplain.

The people who do that tend to love, don't they, to talk about a broad church and want to broaden out Jesus' rather unsophisticated views and his opinions, especially as apostles.

When I was studying theology, it was always thought necessary to broaden out these evangelicals. And we got sent to attachments with the most liberal people they could find.

But notice, friends, what Jesus' take is on this language of broadness. The broad road, the broad church, where does it lead according to Jesus? One place.

Destruction. And that is sadly where most of the mainstream broad churches in our country and in the western world in general are rapidly heading in our day. Demise, disintegration, decrepitude, and coming destruction.

[30 : 52] Because those who advocate such broadening out of the gospel are not bringing new enrichments and additions from other perspectives.

They are not progressing things in the church. That is not Jesus' language here in verses 15 to 20. He says, such are false prophets.

Verse 17, diseased trees producing bad fruit, dangerous, ravenous wool, roves. Anything dogmatic, anything definite is so much frowned upon today, isn't it?

But look how dogmatic Jesus is in his assessment. And he warns us to be alert so as to recognize and to resist such false Christianity, however attractive it might seem to us.

And it is very, very attractive to many people. Now, all through the Bible, as we read earlier, there are false prophets. When you read the Old Testament, you will find what?

[31 : 53] They were always in the majority over against the despised minority who truly spoke for God. Think of Elijah on Mount Carmel, all on his own against the great host of the prophets of Baal who wanted God and Baal.

Read about Micaiah in 2 Chronicles 18, the prophet that Ahab hated because he only ever prophesied things that Ahab didn't want to hear. But all the rest told him exactly what he wanted.

And Jesus himself tells us in Matthew 24 that we shall have false prophets within the Christian church right until the very end.

And the New Testament letters tell us exactly the same things. And so we need to be utterly realistic. We need to be able to recognize them and to resist such people. Because outwardly, they're all innocent, like lovely, attractive sheep with lovely words about breadth and inclusiveness.

But in fact, says Jesus, they're giving you the false assurance that you're on the right track, going to the right destination. When in fact, you are utterly on the wrong train, heading for destruction.

[33 : 08] And we've got to recognize that kind of false and dangerous teaching in the church. That's why these verses are here. Now that is not to say, and please do not misunderstand, that is not to say that all Christians are to have a heresy hunting mentality.

That we're to become ultra-censorious. That we're to be utterly fault-finding doctrinal critics all the time. Seeking something ill in everyone. Seeking to brand everybody a heretic except me and one or two who are like me.

No. Remember the context here. Look back to verses one to five we were on last week. What's it all about? It's not about pecking specks out of other people's eyes. When there's a log in your own eye.

No, Jesus is not telling us to be that kind of ultra-critical doctrinal censor. But he is telling us that it's right that we should have a real care and concern for Christ's precious flock so that they are not damaged and not misled and not led to destruction.

So how do we discern these sheep or rather these wolves who look like sheep? Who look orthodox and may sound orthodox on the surface but are anything but?

[34 : 25] Well, Jesus gives us the answer twice in verse 16 and verse 20. You will recognize them he says by their fruits. The healthy tree the healthy gospel bears good fruit and the disease tree like the disease gospel bears bad fruit verse 17.

So what are these fruits that we're to recognize? Well, repeatedly all through his teaching Jesus tells us to look in two places. He tells us to examine their words what they're teaching or what they're not teaching and to examine their ways.

What is their life and legacy really like? Think first about their teaching the message about the way of life that these people hold and teach. Later on in Matthew 12 Jesus talks in exactly the same way about tree and fruits good and bad when he's talking about the words of the scribes and the Pharisees that is the official clergy of the day and he calls them not wolves but a brood of vipers.

That's just another one of his sayings about them. But here you see these wolves who deny Jesus' teaching are those who deny the truth of this clear binary choice that there is only one way to salvation through Jesus alone.

There are people who use the language of Lord, Lord as we see down in verse 23 but they are not his and they don't belong to his kingdom. And there are people who are therefore leading people to build their life on sand and not upon rock which is the way of sure disaster.

[35 : 55] Just as many today will use the language of the true gospel but will deny all Jesus' stark absolutes about life and death and about heaven and hell. They are against all that kind of narrowness.

They want a broader easier way. They want less black and white and many more shades of grey. And they may be orthodox it seems in many things but they leave out these stark absolutes that are now so offensive in our world.

And they especially do not want to talk about things like judgment and God's anger and the reality of hell.

And that was always the mark of the Old Testament false prophet. They had a popular message. That was the reading from Jeremiah in Jeremiah 8. The false prophets are all saying to the people peace, peace but God says there's no peace.

And in chapter 29, 23 that we read they're saying God doesn't mind about your sin. It's fine to live as you please. God will never hold out against you for that.

[37 : 03] It's the way you're made. God will never judge you for that. But God says woe to the false prophets who say there's no judgment who say God will never judge anyone.

I'm against those prophets and I'm against their words. Well nothing has changed friends in our world today. A friend of mine was told when he was due to be a missionary at a Christian union mission in this country that the committee of the Christian union would not support him as the missionary if he was going to mention anything about judgment in his talks because they didn't want to put off people inviting their friends.

Another friend of mine told me about a church where somebody went to be on the staff and they were told when they joined the church we're not allowed ever to mention sin here in this church on Sundays because we want to be seeker friendly.

When can we mention sin? He said well in home groups on Wednesdays but never on Sundays. That was an evangelical church. Now that is just what Paul warned Timothy about in 2 Timothy 3.

He said there will always be people who just want to hear what they want to hear and they will find teachers who will only say what they want to hear. Who will appease their own passions.

[38 : 22] Who will tell them all is well when in fact they're on the wrong train heading for destruction. On the wrong road the broad road that they have to turn from and start going the other way if they're to find life.

And that's all around us today. All around us in the broad church that is heading for destruction. We can't tell people to repent. We can't tell people to change their life and behavior.

Of course not. We've got to affirm everyone and include everyone. No says Jesus. That is dangerous teaching. That is evil teaching.

They have deceived themselves and now they are deceiving others also. And you must see it for what it is. Bad fruit comes from bad diseased trees.

And look at verse 19. Every tree that bears that kind of diseased fruit is heading for one place the fire of judgment. You'll know them by their words by their teaching says Jesus especially by the things that they will avoid teaching the things they will not want to see.

[39 : 32] But you'll know them also he says by their ways by their life and by their legacy. True prophets gospel teachers must surely exhibit lives that are characterized by the kingdom. And so the fruit of the spirit of Jesus will be evident in their lives but also in their work and what they leave in their wake.

Now of course that can be put on it can deceive people for a time. That's surely Jesus point in verse 16. From a distance thorn bushes can look like vines. And apparently these thistle flowers looked exactly like figs from a distance but not right up close.

Sooner or later it's all going to become clear isn't it when you try to pick it as a fruit and eat it whether it's a fig or a thistle. And in the same way says Jesus we're not to be taken in by appearances.

We've got to assess people. We've got to assess popular movements by the real lives of their leading lights and proponents and also by the real legacy that they leave behind.

Where does it really lead in the long run? And that is so so important. The liberal theology that began in this country in the 19th century towards the end of it.

[40 : 46] It was all part of the great goal of the church to remain relevant in a changing world. A world of enlightenment. A world of Darwin. A world of increased science and industrial progress and so on.

It was a concern to keep the Bible relevant to society and to keep the church's light burning. But it led by contrast to the decimation of the church in the 20th century.

Looked like the church's salvation to its first proponents. But it led to its utter ruin. And that's important isn't it? Sort of warning for us today.

When we want to be cutting edge when we want to embrace the latest in vogue things that might be around in the evangelical world because without this we'll become irrelevant. We need to look where these things are going to lead.

It's exactly the same with the progressive reinterpretation of the New Testament's teaching about the complementary roles of men and women and male headship in the church and family in the 1960s and 70s in a world of feminism.

[41 : 51] The church had to be relevant. It had to become more egalitarian. It seemed the right thing. What is the fruit of that movement? Well, for one thing in the mainstream church in our country today it has become totally and utterly feminized.

The vast majority of churches you find hardly a man in the congregation never mind a man in leadership. And most men in our country just assume that if the church is for anyone it's just for women and children.

When I used to get sent out to visit as an assistant minister in Aberdeen if ever I knocked on somebody's door and a man came to the door what was the first thing he said to me? Oh, the wife's not in. The wife's not in.

Just the assumption that anybody coming from the church nothing to do with men and also where it has led is exactly the same way of interpreting the Bible has led on to the present issue in our own churches today of the reinterpretation supposedly of the Bible's view on homosexuality and the latest great assault we're facing with this transsexuality nonsense.

So just last Sunday on the BBC Sunday morning program it was all about a transsexual former man now woman clergy man woman in the Church of England. Well, Jesus is saying to us friends don't be surprised there will always be false prophets in the church and it will always become worse as the last days reach their end and they'll be plausible they'll be cuddly they'll be lovable fluffy sheep beloved by the media and fettered by the institutional church but Jesus says look underneath and see that in fact they're dangerous wolves they lead only to destruction they are heading for the fire of judgment and they are taking others with them to destruction.

[43 : 50] that is the view of the Lord Jesus Christ so watch for teaching that loves to blur the clarity of scripture that hates and despises anything that is binary any black and white anything that is clear and distinct about heaven and hell about life and death or indeed these days about male and female watch their words and watch their ways look at their lives look at the legacy and what it does to the church of God the Bible is clear the true gospel is unmistakable and above all Jesus is clear his message demands a stark choice there are two ways and only two leading to two destinations and only two and there are two gates says Jesus and only two the one gate of course needs no choice no decision no thought at all and therefore every living person in this world is on that road by default perhaps even without knowing and according to Jesus you can come to church and associate with God's people all your life and still be on that way that leads to destruction because the other way must be entered it must be chosen must be pursued it must be embraced and that's hard says Jesus it's a hard gate to enter you have to leave an awful lot behind you all your pride for one thing all your autonomy all your self-determination none of these things can pass through that gate that's what we've seen in this sermon on the mind only the poor in spirit can pass through that gate only the meek and the penitent who mourn for their sins can pass through that gate as they turn from their sins only those who hunger and thirst for God's righteousness and know they need God's mercy and know that it's found in one place alone through that gate and on that road only that person will single-mindedly force their way into the kingdom of God but friends

Jesus says the gate is open to all who will seek it that way and it is the way to life to real life life in all its fullness life that's everlasting and so the preachers of true Christianity will never hide that truth they will never collude with you and tell you that everything's fine and that you're on the right track and there's no need to worry that you're going to end up in the wrong destination like the false prophets of the broad church like the lying conductor on Scotrail now the true Christian will tell you a decision must be made to get off this way and to choose life the true Christian will force a choice upon you but he'll never say oh it's life and death it's heaven or hell it's your choice do as you please I don't care no he'll never say that he'll urge you to choose life not death to enter by this gate not to stay on this road to follow Christ not to follow the world don't do that but he will never tell you you can have the world's way and Christ's destination in the end

I can't do that none of us can do that because it just isn't true and to think it is true would be the single greatest mistake any human being could ever make in this life no Jesus says you must face this stark choice but don't be afraid of that choice friends Jesus tells you right here that he wants you to choose life he wants you to enter by that gate he's urging you to enter that gate I am the door he says in John's gospel enter through me so don't let anything or anyone prevent you from entering through the gate of life in Jesus let's pray enter by the narrow gate for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter it are many for the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few

Lord you are the way and the truth and the life the only way to the only life that matters no one can come to the Father but by you but you've said that where anyone knocks it will be open to them when anyone seeks you will be found so help us we pray to find this way to enter that way to walk that way forever and ever keep us there we pray by your power for we ask it in Jesus name Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Jesus the Lord as we Klopfin close to you to be P MR County and have them to be para Consciousness Let us eat together let us watch ignorance and have them let us live in Jesus name because we pray in Jesus name why does that me or at us in Jesus name

In Jesus name Jesus name nor an He■ for me I do know