

# **The Kingdom Path**

## **Matthew 7:12-20**

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January 4, 2026

Good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. If we haven't met and I'm the senior pastor here and friends, it is good to be with you. If you are a guest or visitor, we're glad that you would join us this morning. Glad that you would join us in worship as we come to God's word. This morning, we are returning to a sermon series that we were in during the fall and that we took a break from for the last six or five weeks, I guess, last five weeks. The last five weeks, we were in an Advent series idea of God being with us and looking at various passages about God being with us: God with us in the garden, God with us on the mountain, in the temple, in the manger, and last week, God with us in heaven. But before, we were in our Advent series in the Sermon on the Mount. And so, we still have a couple weeks left of that.

So, we're going to return to Matthew 7. So, if you have a Bible, you can turn to Matthew 7. We also have Bibles in the chairs and we project the passage on the screen there. But we only have two weeks left. So, this week and next week, looking back on this, maybe I could have planned the fall a little bit better and not need a break at that. So, since it's been a few weeks, it might be good for us to be reminded of what the Sermon on the Mount is about. You remember, this is some of Jesus's most famous teaching and what he is like in the kingdom of God, right? What are the qualities that the kingdom of God is to embody? And what are the qualities that the people of the kingdom are to embody? And so, we heard things like in the kingdom of God are the meek, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness' sake. And people like that, they are the ones who are blessed. And we heard that in the kingdom of God, we are the people of the kingdom. And as people of the kingdom, this means that we are salt and light. We are the city set on a hill, pointing others towards Jesus. That we are going to be outward adherents to God's law, but a heart, inward reality as well. That we're a people who depend upon God, and we lay up treasures in heaven, and we love our enemies. That this is what the kingdom of God is like.

And so, every week, I think what we've been confronted by is the reality that the kingdom of God is very, very different than the kingdoms of this world. And that how we live is to be more in line with the kingdom of God and not of this world. So, that's what we've heard, right? That was the first, you know, three and a half chapters. But now, even as we come to the end of chapter 7 and the end of the sermon, Jesus is continuing to press this idea about what kingdom living is supposed to look like. And in the last bit of chapter, by contrasting two ways of living, he gives us four examples. And there's two ways to live. There's two roads, and two trees. Two ways to call on Jesus, and two builders. And in each of them, this is demonstrating and teaching us what the way of the kingdom is to be like. Okay, so with that in mind, and having been caught up now, let me begin in verse 12. Jesus says,

“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, 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 their fruits.” (ESV)

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

*Father, as we come to your word, we ask that you would open the narrow gate, and that you would lead us along the narrow path, and that you would show us what it means to live as kingdom people. The gift that you give. And so we ask, Father, open our eyes, unclog our ears, soften our hearts. Let us behold your glory and know what it means to follow your name. Amen.*

So, Mike Matheny was a four-time Gold Glove Award winning catcher. Now, this means that Mike Matheny, four years, the best defensive catcher in baseball. Okay, that's what the Gold Glove Award is given to. It's given to the player at every position who was the best, was a four-time Gold Glove Award winner. Now, his career wasn't super amazing. I don't think he made an all-star game. He's not in the Hall of Fame, but he was an incredible defensive player. And after his playing, two different major league teams, he coached for the St. Louis Cardinals and then the Kansas City Royals, and then he was an executive for the Cardinals. Okay, so playing career, managerial career. But in between that time of playing and becoming a manager in major league baseball, he was a little league baseball coach. And that would be when you're a 10, 11, 12, 13-year-old boy, and you show up to the first practice, and you've got your hat, your glove, your bat, and you're being introduced to your coach, and it is a four-time award-winning catcher. That is your coach.

I mean, this would be amazing. This is every little league player's dream. This is every person's dream. Forget little league, right? There he is. There he is, because this is amazing because he's going to have incredible insight, incredible knowledge, far more than the dad who's coaching the other. But along with this great insight, with this great knowledge, also came great expectations. You see, Mike Matheny had to be encouraged by his team to coach for his team. In fact, there were some dads who had a team. They had these players and they needed a coach. And one of the dads, a guy I knew who was in our church in St. Louis, he knew Mike. So he went to Mike, and he said, come coach our team. And after a little while, Mike was finally convinced, but he said, I will coach them only if they abide by certain guidelines, certain stipulations that I'm going to set. This is a former major league catcher, a future major league manager, that the stipulations, the conditions were that he's only going to coach the best players, that he's going to only coach the most skilled, the strongest, the fastest players that the St. Louis area could offer.

But those weren't the conditions. No, he outlined a 7-page document of conditions and stipulations. It was called the Matheny Manifesto. You can find it online. And there were stipulations for the parents as well as for the players. And for the players, he said things like, every single player, when they show up, they're ready to play. They're going to have their shirts tucked in, their hats on, going to be drooping, that they're going to be ready as soon as they walk out of the car. And that there's going to be no excuse for not hustling. And that we are going to run ground ball, and when we get out, we're going to run back to the dugout.

And when you're on the bench and you're not in the game, there's no fooling around. No, you're going to be focused. You're going to be locked in and watching, and you're going to be talking to the other coaches. So you are ready when you go in. There's a whole host of other things he outlined. I mean, 7 pages, right? If you are going to be one of the few who are

going to play on this team, 10, 11, 12, 13 year old players, if you're going to be one of the few, then you are going to play the Metheny way. There is a way that it's going to be played. The game is going to be played, and it's this way.

## **We Strain**

And in essence, that's what Jesus is saying, that there is a kingdom way. That there are only some who enter into the kingdom, and that those who enter in, that there is a way that we are going to walk. He tells us in verses 13 and 14, right? There are two ways, two roads, two gates, right? There's a wide and a narrow gate and kingdom. Not all will enter into the kingdom, but the few who do will enter through the narrow gate. And the narrow gate is Jesus, right? We know this because in John chapter 10, Jesus is the good shepherd who cares for his sheep. In the context of talking about the good shepherd, he says, "I'm the door or the gate. I'm the door of the sheep. All who come, but the sheep do not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. I came that they may have life."

The narrow door, the entryway to the kingdom of God is Jesus himself. He says that there is no other entry. And that when we walk through along that narrow path, what we're going to experience is that the kingdom of God is hard, that there is strain, that we will strain, right? He called it, he said, this path is hard. There is no pie in the sky here for Jesus, right? He's not saying the kingdom of God is just Sunday strolls, right? Like there will be strain. And as we've gone through the Sermon on the Mount, we've experienced that, haven't we? Because we've come across teaching that Jesus has given us, like things like, don't hate those who oppose you. Don't hate your enemy, but love them. Don't store up treasures on Earth, but treasures in Heaven. Don't be anxious about this life but entrust it to God. Do not judge others but leave judging to the Lord. And every week, right, I've felt myself reading these things thinking I've got it wrong, because it's hard, right? We don't naturally do these things.

I mean, think about how different this is from the world. Our world says, hey, our world loves to judge, not to be judged, but to judge others. And our world is very, very anxious. Now, we don't do these things naturally. The life of a disciple is hard. It is hard. And it's not just hard because of what Jesus is calling us to. The theologian, New Testament theologian, Dan Doriani, he notes that that word hard, the Greek word there, it comes from a family of words that is often used in the context of persecution. One of the things that makes the life of a disciple hard is the opposition that we will face. And Jesus is saying that if you enter by the narrow gate, you go down. This is what you're signing up for. I mean, he said explicitly, right, if the world hates me, it will hate you. If the world hates me, it will judge you. Now, listen, in 21st century Roanoke, Virginia, right, I don't think that we are concerned. We're not worried, probably because of our faith, that our lives are threatened. But for some of us, our reputations are, or our relationships, or maybe even our livelihoods demonstrate that to follow Jesus is hard. So we have to ask ourselves, like, why would we sign up for that then? Like, why would we?

Well, there's lots of reasons. I mean, that's an important question, actually. But there are lots of reasons that I could give, lots of answers. But let me just give you two this morning.

The first is, Jesus is the truth. He said that explicitly in John, "I'm the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me." And so, because of that, we give our lives to the truth, wherever it may lead, right? And so, if Jesus isn't the truth, y'all, if he, his words

are not true, if they are not faithful, then do not follow. But they are. They are true. That's one reason why we follow him, why we walk along this way, why we don't concern ourselves with the hardship or the strain. Because it's true.

But the second is that this is where life is found. What he said, right? The narrow gate, the narrow path leads to life. Do y'all remember Psalm 73? In Psalm 73, the psalmist is actually wrestling with this very thing that Jesus is talking about. In Psalm 73, the psalmist sees the arrogant and those who are walking along the wide path, and he's envious of their lives. He's envious of them because their life is easy. They have not a care in the world, and it seems like everything that they do turns to gold. And, you know, it's just a simple, easy, luxurious life. And he's envious of them. He's envious, that is, until he sees their end. In Psalm 73, he sees their end, and he sees what Jesus is saying, that the path may be wide, and it may be easy, but its end is destruction. But the path of Christ, though narrow, though hard, is life.

Now, the truth is, is we don't seem to have a problem with things being hard, or us having to strain in lots of areas of our lives. Professional life, we have lots of medical people here, right? You went through undergrad, and med school, and residency, and maybe specialty, right? And you spent many years of your life sleep deprived, or other professions, right? You don't have to be a doctor. You could be an engineer, a lawyer, an educator. Maybe you started your own business, right? And you spent many years working, and toiling, and pushing, and for what end? Why? Or maybe you're an athlete, and you've pushed your body as far as you can and you've pushed through pain, and soreness, and injury, and you've restricted your diet, and you've beat your body into submission. Why would you do that to yourself? Or moms? We have many moms. I mean, labor and delivery, is there anything harder? There is not anything by the way, okay? I'll go on record, right? Why would we do any of these things? Why would we be content? Why would we be okay with it? Why would we persevere through the strain, and the difficulty, and the hardship of these things? We would do it because at the end of the path, it is worth it. And if that is true of our professions, and it's true of our hobbies, and it's true of our relationships with our life with Christ, as we walk with Christ, as we walk the path of the kingdom, there will be hope. But that's not all we'll do.

## **We Watch**

Jesus says, as we walk along this path, we also need to watch. So we strain, but we also watch. And what do we watch for? Well, we watch for wolves. That's what he tells us. Verses 15 through 19, or pointing to this, he says, "beware of the false prophet." "Beware of wolves dressed in sheep's clothing." Now listen, when he talks about wolves dressed in sheep's clothing, and false prophets, he's not talking about people outside the church. What he is talking about are those who would be in the church, who would claim to be followers of Jesus, who put themselves as leaders, or officers, as pastors, whoever, who actually may look like they are part of the church, but are resisting to the ways of the church. They are opposed to the ways of God's kingdom. Jesus is warning us that the hard road is that there will be those who seek to lead us astray. And what makes this difficult is that those who would lead us astray, they intend to, right? They convince us that they have our good in mind, but actually, they're seeking destruction. And this shouldn't surprise us. People who deceive, they don't show up and go, "hey, I just want you to know, I am a liar. I'm a manipulator. I am annoying. I only care about you so long as I can benefit from you," right? People don't do that. They hide. And they mask.

So, how do we see through the disguise? What are we watching for? Jesus tells us we're watching for fruit. You see it in verses 16 through 20. He says, you will recognize our grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles. So, every healthy tree bears good fruit. But the disease bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. A tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, you will recognize them by their fruits. So, we need to know what the fruit is.

Now, a number of years ago, some of you, most of you know, I have a garden in my backyard. I planted a garden. I've got fence around it so deer can't get in, tomatoes and peppers and all these good things, right? It's wonderful. It's beautiful. And so, a number of years ago, after I finished constructing my garden, I decided I wanted around the outside of the fence some pretty flowers. Some flowers that rabbits wouldn't eat, but flowers that would attract butterflies and other pollinators, okay? This is what I wanted to plant because I had this romantic vision of like on a summer day, harvesting that beautifully ripe tomato as a butterfly just flies by. Just be very, you know, very peaceful, very surreal, right? Very one with nature. This is what I was thinking. So, I go and I buy some seed and I put it around my garden fence and up, right? And there's these beautiful flowers and beautiful, like, berries that are forming, beautiful things.

And it's getting taller and I can't wait, right? Like, when are the caterpillars going to show up? And so, Lane, my daughter, is one day out there watering for me. I was out of town. It was hot and she, like, you know, she helps me out. She waters my garden when I'm not home. She comes and she says, hey, dad, those plants that are around the garden, some of them are pokeweed. And I went, okay, that's awesome. Like, butterflies like pokeweed? They do not. Lane told me, I didn't know this, pokeweed is, it's poisonous. That the berries that were forming that I thought, you know, maybe some animal would enjoy eating, yeah, they're poisonous. They know not to eat them. And the stalk, the big purple stalk that looked really pretty that maybe, you know, a butterfly might land on, no, no, no. It will irritate your skin and it will give you a rash like poison ivy. That's what I planted. That's what was in my garden. And I had no idea. Because I didn't know what I was looking at. And I didn't know what to look for. I didn't know what the bad weeds were.

But Lane did. Watchful eye. And she knew exactly what the fruit pointed to. And that's what we need with the wolf. What is the fruit of the wolf? Of the false prophet? The fruit of the wolf, the false prophet, it's going to be that they're going to say things like, take the wide gate. Not the narrow one. Take the easy road. It'll lead to death. It'll lead to a life of comfort. Don't you want comfort? The wolf, the false prophet, they'll say things like, oh, you're experiencing hardship, pain. Oh, that must mean that you're just not, you don't have enough faith. If you just simply repent, then God will give you a life of ease. That's what they'll say. They'll say things like there's only one way to life. No, no, no. Whatever you wish. In other words, they will say things that may sound completely in line with the world and the culture, but they're in word of God. That is how we discern the fruit.

We discern it by looking through the lens of God's word. Because what Jesus is telling us is that the false prophet, their fruit will eventually appear. And that fruit will be in contradiction to God's word. And so, if we see that, if we do not follow, we turn away from that. We walk along the narrow path, and by the work, we seek to discern and to weigh and to watch as we walk. But that's not all we do. The last thing we do as we walk on this path is to turn to God. And now we turn to where Jesus began this section in verse 12. So, whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them for they will be in the prophets. So, here's the golden

rule, right? The golden rule. Now, I have to tell you, it's kind of hard to know where verse 12, where the golden rule fits. So, theologians have different ideas. Some think that it comes with the verses immediately that preceded it. Others think that it actually ties more to verse 1, where Jesus says, judge not that you may not be judged. Some commentators and theologians think that it doesn't really fit anywhere, that this is just like a prelude. Jesus wanted to make sure he got in there, and this was like, I took a breath, I'll say it, and then I'll move on kind of thing. I don't think that's a good interpretation, just for the record.

## **We Serve**

But actually, I think it fits perfectly with the passage, the section that we're in. And the reason is because moves in, Jesus moves into this discussion about the narrow way and the path and the way in which we are to live. This is one of the defining characteristics about the way that we will walk. That we, as we walk along this path, we would do unto others as we would have them do unto us. In other words, as we walk this kingdom way, we would serve our brothers and our sisters and our neighbors, because that's what this is. It's a call to service. Now, oftentimes, the way we think about the golden rule is don't do to others. Don't do to others. It's kind of a restrictive way of thinking. And of course, that's true. We don't want to do to others what we wouldn't want them to do to us. But it's more than that. There's a simply reducing the golden rule to this kind of like live and let live sort of approach to one another. And I don't think that's what Jesus is calling us to do. I think what he's calling us to, what he is driving at, is something much more positive and proactive. He's calling us to act for the benefit of others.

So, what's that going to look like? Well, how do you want to be treated? How do I approach you? Well, I know for me, I would want you to approach me with grace and truth, with respect and patience, with hope and accountability, with prayer and encouragement. I mean, if we were to hurt someone and we were to sin against them, if we were going down the path that we would not want someone to love us enough to come and tell us, to come and reveal it to us, to redirect us back to them, right? To tell us and to show us and to point out that the end is destruction. Wouldn't we want them to point us toward them? And wouldn't we want them to do it, to share that truth with us with grace and love and compassion? I mean, that's how I'd want you to treat me. And that's how I would want to treat you. And that's how I hope we would treat one another. And I hope that this is how we would treat one another, how we would live along this way, because this is how Christ has treated us.

Because the fact is that we all were once walking towards the wide gate, and we were all going towards the path of ease and destruction. But Jesus, but Christ, out of his love and kindness, he looked upon us in our sin, and he did not ignore our sin. He did not turn his eye to it, but no, filled with compassion, he did for us what we needed. And what no one else could do, he gave his life so that we'd be forgiven, and that leads to life. He gave his life so we wouldn't go down the path of destruction, but we would enter through the narrow gate, and we would walk into his kingdom, and we would walk his kingdom way, straining and wanting life in him. Y'all, the reason why we live with one another in this way, the reason why we push through the strain, the reason why we watch and we serve, is because he has given himself to bring us into his kingdom and lead us to life. Amen. Let's pray.

*Heavenly Father, thank you. Thank you that you have not left us in our sin, and you have not left us to ourselves, but you have sent your Son, who has lived and died, and we would have life. And so we pray, Father, that we would walk in through the narrow door, and we would*

*walk along the narrow path, and we would fix our eyes. Who is the author and perfecter of our faith? Who is the one who brings life? And so, Father, as we as we strain, as we walk, as we serve one another, I pray that you would turn our eyes towards Jesus, and that we would cling to the life that he's given us, that we would walk that he is leading us upon. We pray all this in the name of Christ, and all God's people said together, Amen.*