

# Sermon on the Mount #12

## Who to listen to

w/c 16 July 2023

*"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4)*

### Read Matthew 7:13–20

We start with the second part of the reading where (verse 15) we seem to be back with the hypocrites mentioned several times in the Sermon on the Mount. These false prophets are essentially actors – faithful superficially but in practice pushing false and damaging values. Isaiah 58 (vv1–9) springs to mind where the prophet berates those whose religion is merely superficial and outlines the things that God truly values: freeing the oppressed, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked. Similarly for Amos (5:21–24), the best worship services cut no mustard. The call is not to do more church or do church better but rather to live out the life God has called us to. If that is God's response to 'religious observance', what does this say about our focus on Sunday services?

Various New Testament letters make it clear that false prophets (and teachers etc) were already widespread in the first century. In what form do we encounter them today? Are they within the church or seeking to seduce the wider population? If so, how? Once the fruit of false prophecy has matured, the damage has been done. How might we seek to identify misleading directions and claims sooner than that?

Turning back to the start of the passage... The idea of there being a way of life and a way of death (with a choice to be made between them) was not unknown in Jewish thinking – see Jeremiah 21:8.

'Easy' and 'hard' as used in some older translations do not (my commentary informs me) properly reflect the original text. The Greek words used reinforce 'wide' and 'narrow' rather than bringing in any new concept. In his parallel passage, Luke simply refers to the need to enter through the narrow door (Luke 13:24). Interestingly, the right to enter that door seems to fall to those who know the owner of the house. We are back to our image of the Christian faith being relationship with God, and indeed, that all that is needed to accept his 'yoke' is to come to him – see Matthew 11:28-30. How do we balance thoughts of faith being both a narrow way and an easy yoke?

The road of our calling is not one away from the world, rather it takes us through the world – a space run on different priorities where power rather than peace is valued, where greed trumps grace and where self is seen as key. It is though still a world full of those loved by our Father and for whom Jesus died. Secure on our road it becomes our work/life/duty, through the Spirit, to engage with that world and open our road to them. How do we show that the way we are on is better? How might we persuade people to move over from the wide road to the narrow one?

Jesus' picture emphasises the journey – we don't dip in and out of the road; it's our entire life. How do we stop ourselves thinking that some parts of our journey are more special (sacred) than others (secular)?

Too often we prioritise firstly what happens inside the church building and then other church-sponsored activities leaving little time to focus on our Christian presence and mission throughout the overwhelming majority of our life. We're Christians for 168 hours each week but too often only seem focussed on those first two chunks – usually no more than 5 to 10 hours of each week. Would it not be more 'profitable' if the focus of our discipleship lay on the time we spend in the contexts that are not part of the daily life of the church?

*"Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God, at His disposition, and listening to His voice in the depth of our hearts." (Mother Teresa)*