

SIMPLE FAITH

Simple yet Serious Warnings for Complicated Times

Matthew 7:13–23



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The closer Jesus drew to the conclusion of His magnificent Sermon on the Mount, the greater His intensity. By the time He got to the passage in this message, it was clear He was not mildly suggesting we simply resolve to try a little harder and do a little better. He pressed for absolute, radical transformation of our inner convictions and external lifestyles. He aimed for His followers to go far beyond the formal piety of superficial religion. Remember His words in Matthew 5:20? Our righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees!

Such a lofty ideal calls for some terribly unpopular decisions, each of which has a more pleasant and appealing counterpoint that could be chosen instead. Interestingly, Jesus concluded His sermon with four sets of paired alternatives: two paths, two trees, two claims, and two foundations. In this message, we'll consider the first three choices.

Jesus' teaching may be unpopular, but it is essential.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. A Brief Review

Before we examine this portion of the sermon, let's recall the outline of Jesus' key points that we used in the first lesson. The sermon begins in Matthew 5 with this principle: *Out with hypocrisy!* In Matthew 6, Jesus implored: *Down with performance!* Early in Matthew 7, Jesus taught: *Up with tolerance!* In the last half of Matthew 7, Jesus emphasized: *On with commitment!*



Quotable

*Jesus called
for inner
transformation. He
cared little about
the surface. He
looked at the heart.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. A Strong Reproof

Jesus spent the bulk of the Sermon on the Mount dealing with practical matters and common attitudes. As His comments neared an end, He drilled down to the most basic of truths, clearly defining good and bad for any who will follow Him.

We all make choices about the path we will take going forward in life. Jesus boiled down the choices to two: the broad path through the wide gate or the narrow path through the small gate. Will we follow the masses, those who “choose their own path” apart from God and strike out to do their own thing in their own way as they head toward the wide gate? Or will we take up with that smaller group, those who choose the small gate and devote their lives to serving others rather than themselves?

Even more important than realizing the small dimension of the gate and the narrow width of the way is understanding the identity of the gate and the way. The gospel of John identifies both: the gate and the way are Jesus, who identified Himself as *the door* or *gate* and *the way* (John 10:9; 14:6). Regarding both, Jesus used a definite article—*the*—to emphasize the singularity of the way forward. The few of Matthew 7:14 only move forward toward eternal life by going *through* Jesus. This means that the narrow path that Jesus spoke of lies in relationship—with God and, as a result, with His people, the body of Christ. The narrow way does not lie in isolation or in a lonely quest for some vague spirituality but in connection with God and in community with His people.



DOORWAY TO HISTORY

Two Ways

In the first and early second centuries, the generation of Christians just after the apostles made regular appeals to people’s wills by presenting Christianity as one of the “two ways.” Drawing from the pattern of Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, these early Christians presented life in terms of choosing the way that leads to wickedness or the way that leads to righteousness. In the middle of the first century, the writer of the Didache, a document about Christian morality and worship, opened his work, “There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between these two ways.”¹ Written in the first half of the second century, another early Christian document called the Epistle of Barnabas teaches that “there are two ways of teaching and power, one of light and one of darkness.”² These expressions highlight the truth Jesus taught in Matthew 7: there is no middle ground on the most basic questions of life. All believers must make hard choices to follow Jesus.



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LET'S LIVE IT

So where are we in these teachings of Jesus? Are we on the path toward the wide gate or the narrow? Do we allow false teachers to tickle our ears, or do we listen only to the true? Do we follow Jesus only on the surface, or has His word penetrated our hearts and borne fruit in our lives? If we answer these questions contrary to Jesus' ideal, we must call into question our possession of eternal life.

Are you on the broad path with the masses? Or are you headed toward the small gate along the narrow path? What about your beliefs and deeds informs your answer?

ENDNOTES

1. *The Didache* 1.1. in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3d ed., ed. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 345.
2. *The Epistle of Barnabas* 18.1 in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3d ed., ed. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 433.



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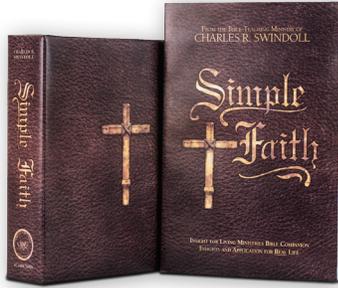
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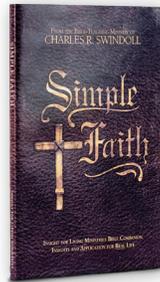
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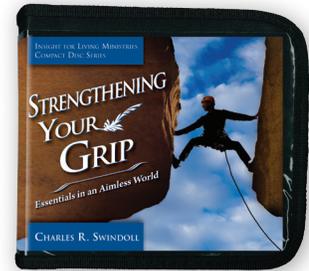
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