

City On A Hill

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A common phrase at The Fellowship is that Christianity is supposed to change us. The longer we have been in relationship with Christ, the more transformed we should be. If this is true for individuals, then it only stands to reason that it is amplified in terms of a church or congregation of believers. The longer a church has been active in a community, the more transformed that community should be. The simple truth is that Christ living IN us should change us so that Christ living THROUGH us can change the world.

In a teaching known as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus presented God's plan for world changing Christianity...

- He taught that believers are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.
- He used The Beatitudes to describe the kind of life God blesses.
- He explained that rule-keeping cannot save us.
- He presented a new standard of righteousness based on grace.
- He contrasted the empty practices of religion with genuine Christianity.
- He addressed the importance of investing our lives in things of eternal significance.
- He identified the direct relationship between worry and spiritual immaturity.
- He emphasized the priority of self assessment and the responsibility of believers to judge others with God-honoring motivation, attitude, purpose and discernment.
- He promised that God will always provide the information believers need to discern His will and He provided The Golden Rule as a means of positioning ourselves to hear Him.

And then in Matthew 7:13-29 Jesus concludes His sermon on world changing Christianity by presenting a series of paired alternatives. He does so for two reasons...

First: To demonstrate the stark contrast between His way and that of the world.

Second: To underscore the significance of personal choice.

1. He begins with two roads...

Matthew 7:13-29 (NIV) *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”*

Jesus isn't threatening us. He's making the point that a right relationship with God cannot happen by accident - we cannot stumble into righteousness.

He's telling us that we will be drawn to the road of natural consequence, but we must make the decision to reject it.

Proverbs 14:12 (NIV) *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”*

God's promise is that when we choose the life He has for us, He will be there to meet us.

James 4:7-8 (NIV) *“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you.”*

2. Then He speaks of two prophets...

¹⁵ *“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. ²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”*

As if our natural inclination to miss God's road isn't enough, Jesus says there will be phony prophets or “spiritual” guides along the way and we must learn to identify them.

More often than not these spiritual guides are driven by a desire for...

Possessions

Power

Prestige

Since we cannot read motivations and we are susceptible to those who tell us what we want to hear, our most reliable means of assessing the authenticity of a prophet's spiritual guidance is in the fruit or results of that guidance.

There are at least three ways in which we can measure the results of spiritual guidance...

- We can measure a prophet's words for truth.
- We can measure a prophet's actions for integrity.

- We can measure a prophet's followers for Christ-like transformation.

As intimidating as this can be for those who provide spiritual guidance or teaching, the Bible is clear that with the responsibility comes a higher standard of accountability...

James 3:1 (NIV) *“Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.”*

Jesus said this more “strict” judgment for spiritual guides comes in two forms:

- First: Those who “know” Christ and teach falsely face cleansing fire.

¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

- Second: Those who “don't know” Christ and teach falsely face eternal fire.

²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

3. And finally, Jesus talks about two foundations...

²⁴ “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

The word “*therefore*” identifies a cause and effect relationship between the verse we're reading and those just prior. In this case, Jesus is referring to both the immediately preceding verses as well as to the entire preceding sermon.

He is saying that the effect of a life that withstands every challenge is caused by the choice to practice God's Word.

It's in the practice of God's Word that we access God's power.

Jesus did not promise that we would escape the troubles of life or that we would never find ourselves surrounded by devastation. What he did say was that through the application of His truth we can withstand the very worst the world has to offer.

²⁸ *“When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹ because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.”*