

Responding to Jesus' Words: Four Warnings (7:13–27)

“Jesus *began* his sermon with unqualified tenderness, embracing in his Blessings those who felt least embraceable. He now *concludes* his sermon with unqualified toughness, warning that his sermon is not an intellectual option, a set of suggestions we may take or leave, one philosophy of life among others. No, the Warnings make explicit that Jesus believes his person and teaching are the exclusive way to life.”¹

“The Sermon on the Mount ends with four warnings, each offering paired contrasts: two ways (vv. 13–14), two trees (vv. 15–20), two claims (vv. 21–23), and two builders (vv. 24–27).”² In this conclusion, Jesus sets before his audience the way to life and the way to death. Life comes from following Jesus and his teachings, death from failing to do so. There are no other choices.

The Broad and Narrow Roads (7:13–14)

Matthew 7:13 “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy [broad] that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

Jesus is now concluding his interpretation of the Law with a call to action. One is reminded of Moses who after giving the Law called Israel to make a decision. This renewal of the covenant by Jesus sounds very much like what Moses said when he called the people of God to covenant obedience.

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live,” (Deuteronomy 30:19, ESV)

Enter³.... One immediately asks, “Enter where?” The answer is “the kingdom of heaven.” The Sermon on the Mount is about kingdom living. Those that live the ethics of the Sermon are those that have entered that kingdom. Those that will not and cannot live that way, demonstrate that they have chosen a different way. Notice Jesus’ use of the same word, enter, in 5:20.

“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:20, ESV)

In Matthew 5:20 Jesus explains that one’s righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. At this point, it becomes clear that one does this by implementing the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount; in doing this, one’s righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.

¹ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 349.

² Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 188). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

³ εἰσερχομαι “...to move into a space, either two-dimensional or three-dimensional—‘to move into, to come into, to go into, to enter.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Vol. 1: Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (194). New York: United Bible Societies.

narrow⁴.... “The narrow gate throws up images of the need to make a choice which is not obvious (this is not where the crowd is going to go)...”⁵

gate⁶.... “The image of the gate suggests various possible associations: the gates of the heavenly city, the entry of the righteous through the temple gates, the gates of paradise, the gates of life.”⁷

wide⁸.... “...the unstated assumptions are that everyone must go through a gate and end up somewhere and that only two gates exist.”⁹

way¹⁰.... “...the imagery expands to include a ‘way’, which is best seen as the way that leads to the gate in question. Having been initially told to enter by the gate, the reader now faces the question of the way to get to the gate. To get to the right gate, one must first choose the right way.”¹¹

This choice of two ways is not a new call but a renewed call found already in the Old Testament. To Deuteronomy 30:19, ESV, above, we can add:

“And to this people you shall say: ‘Thus says the LORD: Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death.’” (Jeremiah 21:8, ESV)

“We are to think of a main roadway, not able to be missed, constructed to carry large numbers comfortably, implicitly claiming to be going somewhere important; perhaps we are to think of easy travelling conditions.”¹²

Looking at this verse, one is reminded of two others:

“I am the door [gate]. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.” (John 10:9, ESV)

“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6, ESV)

⁴ στενός “...pertaining to being narrow or restricted—‘narrow.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Vol. 1: Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (708). New York: United Bible Societies.

⁵ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: A commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (332). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

⁶ πύλη “A door, gate, the large door or entrance of an edifice, city.” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

⁷ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary on Matthew 1–7* (ed. Helmut Koester; Rev. ed.; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 371.

⁸ πλατύς “...pertaining to being wide—‘wide, broad.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Vol. 1: Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (708). New York: United Bible Societies.

⁹ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: A commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (332). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

¹⁰ ὁδός “...a general term for a thoroughfare, either within a population center or between two such centers—‘road, highway, street, way.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Vol. 1: Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (17). New York: United Bible Societies.

¹¹ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: A commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (332). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

¹² Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: A commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (333). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

In these verses, Jesus makes it clear that He is the door and the way to life.

easy [broad]¹³.... “The “broad” road ... is spacious and accommodates the crowd and their baggage....”¹⁴ This is “a way of life which has no entrance requirement, onto which people find their way without effort or thought....”¹⁵

[the] destruction¹⁶.... The Greek text adds the word “the” in front of **destruction**. This specifies a particular destruction, not simply destruction in general. Destruction “not merely in the sense of the extinction of physical existence, but rather of an eternal plunge into Hades and a hopeless destiny of death....”¹⁷

“And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:46, ESV)

“Life outside of loyalty to Jesus Christ, which is most secular life, is a life full of the alluring width of moral permissions and of the tempting delectations of a seemingly fuller life (recall the psychology of the Fall in Gen 3:5–6). The Wide Gate is the Gate of “whatever pleases you,” for (we are repeatedly told) “God is unconditional love and religion is not a matter of rules”; religion is a matter of tastes, and morality is a matter of choices—“they’re all the same” and “everything is relative,” so “follow your own star and pleasure,” for all ways lead to God. The life of discipleship, on the other hand, passes day by day through the narrow gate of the decision to make Jesus’ one’s sole Lord and so to walk the decidedly *uneasy* road of obeying his Commands against impiety, anger, lust, divorce, oaths, retaliation, hate, ostentation, and acquisitiveness.”¹⁸

The early church was much effected by this section making it a major part of the proclamation of the gospel. In the Didache we read, “There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between these two ways.”¹⁹ And in the Epistle of Barnabas, “There are two ways of teaching and power, one of light and one of darkness, and there is a great difference between these two ways. For over the one are stationed light-giving angels of God, but over the other are angels of Satan.”²⁰

Matthew 7:14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

¹³ εὐρύχωρος “...pertaining to being broad and spacious, with the implication of agreeable and pleasant—‘spacious, broad.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

¹⁴ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 188). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

¹⁵ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 288). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

¹⁶ ἀπώλεια “...to destroy or to cause the destruction of persons, objects, or institutions—‘to ruin, to destroy, destruction.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Vol. 1: Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (231). New York: United Bible Societies.

¹⁷ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 189). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

¹⁸ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 349–350.

¹⁹ Michael William Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations, Did. 1:1*, (Updated ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 251.

²⁰ Michael William Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations, Ep. Barn. 18:1*, (Updated ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 321.

gate²¹.... The entrances to both heaven and hell have gates. God's gate is secure, Satan's is not.

"And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18, ESV)

Satan's gate will not prevail against the assault of the Church.

"save others by snatching them out of the fire...." (Jude 23, ESV)

hard²².... or difficult, oppressive, afflicted, distressed; narrow. "Christians first make an evangelical decision at the Gate and then go the hard Way of discipleship."²³

"So this text says that the way of discipleship is "narrow," restricting, because it is the way of persecution and opposition...."²⁴ This combination of *narrow* and *persecution, opposition* is an effective explanation on the meaning of the word.

"Thus it is better to understand ... [hard] as a reference to the tribulations ... that Matthew mentions in several places for the time before the eschaton.... Already [Matthew] 5:10–12, 44 speak of the persecution the community experiences. Thus the way to life is full of hardships. Thus the way to life means suffering for the sake of faith...."²⁵

leads to [the] life²⁶.... The Greek text has the article "the" in front of life. It is a specific life. This clarifies the direction, end or purpose of the Sermon on the Mount; it is about life.

few²⁷.... "The difficult way, which under afflictions leads the few to the narrow gate, is the way of righteousness prescribed in the Sermon on the Mount."²⁸

False Prophets: Good and Bad Fruit (7:15–20)

"In the Two Gates Jesus separated us from *the worldly majority* with a challenge to be one of the disciplined few; now in the Two Prophets Jesus separates us from even those

²¹ πύλη "A door, gate, the large door or entrance of an edifice, city. To be distinguished from ... a common door." Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

²² θλίβω "① to press or crowd close against, press upon, crowd ② to cause something to be constricted or narrow, press together, compress, make narrow ③ to cause to be troubled, oppress, afflict...." William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 457.

²³ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 349.

²⁴ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, pp. 188–189). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

²⁵ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary on Matthew 1–7* (ed. Helmut Koester; Rev. ed.; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 372.

²⁶ ὁ ζῶν "...to be alive, to live, life." Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

²⁷ ὀλίγος "Small or little, the opposite of *polús*..., much." Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

²⁸ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary on Matthew 1–7* (ed. Helmut Koester; Rev. ed.; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 372.

within our little Christian community who, though perhaps the most impressive and effective Christian workers, are nevertheless false Christians.”²⁹

Matthew 7:15 *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.*

Verse 7:15 serves as an introduction to both 7:16-20, the discussion on the two trees and two fruits but also to 7:21-23 the discussion on the two professions, one of which was by a false prophet.

false prophets... From chapter 5:17 through chapter 7:12 Jesus has been discussing the Law and the Prophets. He has put his imprint on the Old Testament giving it its true meaning. However, false prophets will follow and pervert these teachings. These men must be identified and rejected. This is not a new problem; the Old Testament is filled with similar warnings (Jeremiah 8:8-12; Ezekiel 13, 22:27).

“For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown,” says the LORD.
(Jeremiah 6:13–15, ESV)

The community of faith was destroyed by these false prophets, led into captivity to Babylon and these same false prophets will soon murder Jesus. This unchanged threat is present in the New Testament era and we experience it not only in cults like Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormonism, but even more destructively in theological liberalism which is a new anti-Christian religion using the symbols and language of Christianity. Never confuse liberal Christianity as simply another form of Christianity, it is not; it is an anti-Christian religion totally opposed to Christianity. It uses the vocabulary and images of Christianity to confuse and deceive those that instinctively respect the name of Jesus Christ. The result has been the destruction of most of the major Christian denominations across the globe by the false prophets, but also by those who failed to “beware” of them and stop them.

“False prophets’ are to be defined negatively as those who, while claiming for themselves the capacity to define for others the will of God, represent in their practice ... a false understanding of the will of God, specifically an understanding that is not in accord with the OT (Law and the) Prophets as now illuminated by Jesus. What primarily defines them is the falseness of their relationship to the prophetic stand of Jesus.”³⁰ They are lawless, antinomian.

Through the centuries, “the greatest danger facing disciples is not persecution but false prophets....”³¹ While persecution has often resulted in the strengthening of the Church,

²⁹ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 352.

³⁰ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: A commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (335–336). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

³¹ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 352.

false prophets have been most successful in destroying the Church. The greater enemy has proved to be within the Church not without it.

sheep's clothing.... Jesus addresses clothing in another place which also discusses the Law and its commandments.

“And in his teaching he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces” (Mark 12:38, ESV)

The specialized dress and office of the spiritual leaders appears to be Jesus' focus. The “ministers” of the gospel have ever been Christianity's greatest enemies.

ravenous wolves.... These are the greatest enemies of sheep as the false prophets are of the Church.

Paul would address this same subject in the coming years.

“I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.” (Acts 20:29–30, ESV)

Matthew 7:16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?

You will recognize them by their fruits.... This phrase begins this section here in 7:16 but then also ends it in 7:20. In doing this, the whole segment, 7:15 to 7:23, is thereby broken up into two separate but tightly woven units, 7:16-7:20 and 7:21-7:23.

Then, as now, good and bad fruit were used as symbols to identify the same qualities in people. John the Baptist has already addressed the danger of not bearing good fruit.

“Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Matthew 3:10, ESV)

Jesus will do the same later in his ministry.

“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit.” (Matthew 12:33, ESV)

“In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, “May no fruit ever come from you again!” And the fig tree withered at once. When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, “How did the fig tree wither at once?”” (Matthew 21:18–20, ESV)

James, the half-brother of Jesus, whose book so often sounds like the Sermon on the Mount said this.

“Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.” (James 3:12, ESV)

“It is thus predominantly an ethical metaphor, based on the assumption that true loyalty to God will issue in appropriate behavior by his people.”³² “This advice corresponds with a widespread human recognition that close observation of a person’s actions is the most accurate guide to what a person really is.”³³

What does the word **fruits** correspond to? In part, the answer is found in the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Those who live and teach otherwise are false prophets.

“Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven....”
(Matthew 5:19, ESV)

They are false prophets because they relax “*these commandments*”.

Matthew 7:17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. Matthew 7:18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.

“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.” (Matthew 12:33–35, ESV)

bears [does] good fruit... So in addition to observing the life of the prophet, one must take care to hear what comes out of *the mouth*—the teaching of the prophet. The life and the words of a prophet are what he does. This idea is found in the word “do” which is found 23 times in the Sermon, 8 times from the 7:12, the Golden Rule, through the close of the Sermon.

Matthew 7:12 “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Matthew 7:17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.

Matthew 7:18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.

Matthew 7:19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Matthew 7:21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

³² France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 291). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

³³ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: A commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (337). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

Matthew 7:22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'

Matthew 7:24 "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

Matthew 7:26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.

healthy tree cannot bear [do] bad fruit.... The spiritual health and sickness is found in the *doing* of faith.

Matthew 7:19 Every tree that does not bear [do] good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. "The fruit is the test of the tree; if there is no good fruit there is no good reason for the tree to exist. And the fruit is the test of one who claims to be a prophet. If there is no good fruit there is no good reason for the person to be treated as a prophet."³⁴

"Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Matthew 3:10, ESV)

In this passage Jesus identifies himself again with the teaching and judgment message of John the Baptist. In Matthew, the ministry of Jesus is almost dominated with this message. He draws our attention to the message of judgment here in the Sermon on the Mount but continues it all throughout the whole book of Matthew.

"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." (Matthew 7:13–14, ESV)

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" (Matthew 7:21–23, ESV)

"And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." (Matthew 7:26–27, ESV)

Matthew 7:20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. This phrase "You will recognize them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16, ESV) is found near the beginning of this section and now is found at its end. It is an inclusio and thereby identifies the current materials for discussion.

³⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 178.

“The central point has been the need to recognize in order to avoid the influence of those who would represent a different vision from that proposed by Jesus. By watching their deeds one is likely to expose their identity more quickly than simply by listening to their words.”³⁵

Insiders and Outsiders: Things May Not Be as They Seem (7:21–23)

Matthew 7:21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

says ... does.... True to their falseness as seen in the last section, they now lie about their relationship to Jesus.

“Set the trumpet to your lips! One like a vulture is over the house of the LORD, because they have transgressed my covenant and rebelled against my law. To me they cry, “My God, we—Israel—know you.” Israel has spurned the good; the enemy shall pursue him.” (Hosea 8:1–3, ESV)

Saying is not a bad thing, it is a good thing, but it is not enough; God expects action in keeping with our profession. The Pharisees talked a good game but John the Baptist demanded fruit.

“Bear [do] fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father...’ (Matthew 3:8–9, ESV)

to me “Jesus speaks here as the judge of the world.”³⁶

Lord, Lord³⁷.... “Kyrios, the regular LXX translation of the divine name Yahweh.”³⁸

The Greek work kyrios [κύριος] is the word the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew word *Yahweh*. The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. For Jews and the early Church, Lord was equivalent to Yahweh. In using this address, these prophets are stating “we are orthodox” we are not fringe, cult-like, we understand that Jesus is Yahweh.

Here Jesus is identifying himself as Lord, Lord of the kingdom of heaven and the one who has the authority to admit or refuse entry to that kingdom—just who does he think he is! He thinks he is God. Notice our context: In addressing his authority to regulate entry into the kingdom of heaven, he is ascribing to himself the ability to evaluate the quality and quantity of the righteousness needed to that end, as is seen in Matthew 5:20.

“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:20, ESV)

³⁵ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: A commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (338). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

³⁶ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary on Matthew 1–7* (ed. Helmut Koester; Rev. ed.; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 379.

³⁷ κύριος “Lord, master, owner. Also the NT Gr. equivalent for the OT Hebr. Jehovah.” Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

³⁸ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 293). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

the will of my Father.... “The determinative factor regarding who enters the kingdom is obedience to the Father’s will....”³⁹

“*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*” (Matthew 6:10, ESV)

We were told to pray that God’s will be done on earth; and we will be judged to determine if we were agents of his will on this earth.

“The history of the church is replete with examples of ecclesiastics who made free use of expressions like “*Lord, Lord,*” but whose arrogant and self-centered lives made a mockery of their words.”⁴⁰

Matthew 7:22 *On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’*

The phrase “**On that day**” is filled with both dread and hope.

“*I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.*” (Luke 10:12, ESV)

“... *But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.*” (2 Timothy 1:12, ESV)

“*but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me— may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.*” (2 Timothy 1:17–18, ESV)

“*Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*” (2 Timothy 4:8, ESV)

In every case, **that day** is the final day, the day of judgment. Jesus gives further detail in chapter 25.

“*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’*” (Matthew 25:31–34, ESV)

³⁹ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 192). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

⁴⁰ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 179.

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’ (Matthew 25:41, ESV)

“And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:46, ESV)

did we not prophesy.... “The question *“did we not prophesy?”* looks for an affirmative answer: there is not a doubt that they did this.”⁴¹

cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works.... Exorcisms and miracles are less easily counterfeited than prophecy, yet they do happen.

“Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, ‘I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.’ Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?’ And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.” (Acts 19:13–16, ESV)

in your name? “The use of Jesus’ name, like the reiterated address *kyrie*, can be a merely outward profession which does not guarantee genuine discipleship.”⁴²

They prophesied, cast out demons and did might works, quite a resume! And they did it in Jesus’s name no doubt deceiving many. But it was all to no avail to the one who “sees in secret” Matthew 6:4, 6, 18.

Matthew 7:23 And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

Hold it! We were just told, **Thus you will recognize them by their fruits** (7:20). Here we are given some fruit to examine, **prophesy, cast out demons, do many mighty works**. Fruits being the criteria, then clearly these are the genuine article! Right?

will I declare⁴³.... It is Jesus who will declare these things. If there was nothing in the Bible about the deity of Jesus, this passage would demand it. It is Jesus who alone makes heaven and hell decisions. “Jesus sees *himself* in these verses as the Judge at the Last Day....”⁴⁴

In Thomas Jefferson’s red letter New Testament, everything not said by Jesus is deleted keeping only the actual red letter words. However, there was one exception, these last three verses, Matthew 7:21-23 were also omitted.

⁴¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 180.

⁴² France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 295). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

⁴³ ὁμολογέω “...to make an emphatic declaration, often public, and at times in response to pressure or an accusation—‘to declare, to assert.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Vol. 1: Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (412). New York: United Bible Societies.

⁴⁴ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 358.

“Jesus’ high self-consciousness here...probably contributed to Thomas Jefferson’s elimination of these last three verses from his Sermon on the Mount extracts (the only three verses of the Sermon that Jefferson omits): ‘because in them Jesus speaks in the first person when he discusses the day of judgment’....”⁴⁵ Thomas Jefferson saw Jesus as a fine teacher of moral goodness, but not as the judge of all the earth. His God was fully transcendent, separate from the earth with no interest in us. In Jefferson’s thinking, there was no element of the immanence of God, his presence on this earth with a Lordship relationship to us. But here in this passage, the world stands in his immediate presence to be judged for the behaviors of their lives. This was more than Jefferson could endure. So, here he removed Jesus from his presence, the one who will one day remove him from His.

I never knew you.... “...fundamentally it is a denial of relationship: no link of any significance exists.”⁴⁶

“Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.” (Matthew 25:11–12, ESV)

“When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!” (Luke 13:25–27, ESV)

depart⁴⁷....

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” (Matthew 25:41, ESV)

you workers of lawlessness.... “Matthew’s desire is to provoke his readers into the shock of insight that failure to take with utmost seriousness the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon leaves one vulnerable to just this accusation.”⁴⁸

Lawlessness Jesus has just completed teaching:

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the

⁴⁵ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 358–359.

⁴⁶ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: A commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (341). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

⁴⁷ ἀποχωρέω “...to move away from, with emphasis upon separation and possible lack of concern for what has been left—‘to go away, to depart, to leave.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

⁴⁸ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: A commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (341). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:17–19, ESV)

“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 7:12, ESV)

Because of persistent error in the Church, called Dispensationalism, many Christians are startled to hear that obedience to the law is good. They have been told so many times that they are under grace and not law, that little about their life reflects obedience to the law of God. But clearly this is false:

“The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers,” (Matthew 13:41, ESV)

“So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” (Matthew 23:28, ESV)

“And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.” (Matthew 24:12, ESV)

“That these professed disciples did not even realize their religious failure, and would no doubt have rejected the term “law-breakers” with indignation, only makes the verdict the more poignant.”⁴⁹

Here is the point, we are to **recognize them by their fruits**, but we’ve been looking at the wrong fruit! We look at the flashy as proof of faith, prophesy, exorcism, might works but these “signs” Jesus rejects. What is the true sign? **You workers of lawlessness; the true fruit is obedience to the law of God.** What a most distasteful answer.

Two House Builders: Hearing and Doing (7:24–27)

(Luke 6:20-49)

Matthew 7:24 “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

Everyone.... There is no middle ground, **everyone** must decide where they will build their house—rock or sand?

hears these words of mine.... “Hearing is what the disciples and crowds have been doing throughout the Sermon, the challenge now is to do.”⁵⁰ “...it is Jesus himself who is the key to this choice; it is *his* words (and not, as one might have expected, God’s words) which must be done.”⁵¹ “...he refers us to “these words of *mine*,” as if these are the Word of God in the final sense....”⁵² ***These words of mine*** are Jesus’ interpretation and correction of the Law of God.

⁴⁹ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 295). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

⁵⁰ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: A commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (343). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

⁵¹ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 296). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

⁵² Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 360.

does them.... ““Doing” words is a somewhat curious expression, but clearly it means that the person in view is not content with admiring some outstanding teaching; he makes it his guide and models his life on it. The expression underlines Jesus’ earlier call for obedience.”⁵³ Hearing these words of the Sermon on the Mount is not adequate, one must do them as well. “But as indispensable as hearing the Word is, Christians must not fool themselves into thinking that either hearing good teaching or studying the Bible are by themselves doing the will of the Father.”⁵⁴ Doing the will of God starts when the sermon ends.

“And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain.” (Ezekiel 33:31, ESV)

wise⁵⁵.... In Scripture, wisdom is likened to skill. One can be skillful with their hands and will in that situation be called wise. One can also be skillful in their thinking. Skill in thinking results in eternally critical actions. As a result, wise in scripture is a moral, religious term, not a philosophical or academic one.

“Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.” (Matthew 25:2, ESV)

Matthew 7:25 *And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.*

rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house.... This is an apt description of the problems and difficulties of life. They come to believer and unbeliever alike. It is only the storm that reveals the quality of the work of building.

founded on the rock.... Not a rock, but *the* rock. The use of the word rock would draw from the mind of the Jewish listener verses like these:

“There is none holy like the LORD: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God.” (1 Samuel 2:2, ESV)

“The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” (Psalm 18:2, ESV)

“For you have forgotten the God of your salvation and have not remembered the Rock of your refuge; therefore, though you plant pleasant plants and sow the vine-branch of a stranger,” (Isaiah 17:10, ESV)

This association by Jesus of the Rock of Yahweh is no doubt intentional—he is that Lord, he is that Rock.

⁵³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 182.

⁵⁴ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 359.

⁵⁵ *φρόνιμος* “...to think, have a mindset. Prudent, sensible, practically wise in relationships with others....” Zodiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

“Everyone is building a house—a life, a career, a family. Everyone builds a house on some foundation, for everyone believes that *something* is true and stable. Jesus invites his hearers to believe that his words are the most stable foundation in the world.”⁵⁶

Matthew 7:26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. Matthew 7:27 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

does⁵⁷.... This is the last of 11 uses of “do” in 8 verses beginning with the conclusion on the Sermon on the Mount, the Golden rule (Matthew 7:12, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 26).

“The imagery contemplates not just damage but utter ruin.”⁵⁸

“...for they hear what you say, but they will not do it.” (Ezekiel 33:32, ESV)

and great was the fall of it.... “Jesus’ war against greatness, a war that fills his teaching career, is one of the most impressive features of Matthew’s Gospel. The quest for greatness rather than for righteousness, for the sensational rather than the simple, for doing the charismatic rather than the moral, for speaking prophetically rather than compassionately, for being up-to-date at all costs rather than a loyal disciple of Jesus in all cases, is a quest that will end only by a different kind of *great*—a great crash.”⁵⁹

“Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:19, ESV)

One can be least or great on earth and in the kingdom of heaven, it’s all based on what one is “doing.”

“Whoever keeps the commandment keeps his life; he who despises his ways will die.” (Proverbs 19:16, ESV)

“The story of the Two Houses is about two kinds of Christians, not about Christians and non-Christians (note: *both* “are listening” to Jesus’ words). The house that crashes is not the house of pagans or of those who did *not* hear Jesus’ words. The house that crashes is the house of Christians who find Jesus’ words important enough to hear but not realistic enough to live. For such Christians the Sermon on the Mount is not practical enough for the demands of modern life, or is dispensationally limited, or is too

⁵⁶ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 360.

⁵⁷ ποιέω “...to do or perform (highly generic for almost any type of activity)—‘to do, to act, to carry out, to accomplish, to perform, doing, performance.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

⁵⁸ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: A commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (344). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

⁵⁹ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 361.

naive for contemporary fast-lane life, or too spiritual for urgent modern causes, or, perhaps most commonly of all, it is just too hard.”⁶⁰

“The sermon ends with what has been implicit throughout it—the demand for radical submission to the exclusive lordship of Jesus, who fulfills the Law and the Prophets and warns the disobedient that the alternative to total obedience, true righteousness, and life in the kingdom is rebellion, self-centeredness, and eternal damnation.”⁶¹

Summary

In the Two Gates Jesus divided us from the immoral majority, in the Two Prophets he divided us from the False Prophets, in the Two Professions he divided us from the lawless and in the Two Foundations, he divided us from the sinking sand, he divided us from the faith of the world to the faith of God in Jesus himself.

It is characteristic of a suzerainty treaty⁶², the model for the covenants of the Bible, that the elements of the treaty contain stipulations or the behavioral requirements of the Great King to his vassal. The Book of Matthew is a renewal of the Covenant. In the Sermon on the Mount are the stipulations of the New Covenant.

Two characteristics of such a treaty are the blessings and the curses for keeping or violating the stipulations of the treaty. Although the blessings and the curses are primarily found in chapters 8-25, nevertheless we see a portent here in the stipulations. The Sermon opens with the blessings of kingdom membership, Matthew 5:2-17 and now ends with curses on those that fail to respond to these stipulations and instead enter another gate, follows a self-appointed prophet, makes a false profession or build on sand, Matthew 7:12-27.

⁶⁰ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 361.

⁶¹ Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 194). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

⁶² “Contemporary Near Eastern treaty-documents of the 13th century BC show that Moses was moved by God to express Israel’s relationship to God in the form of a ‘suzerainty’ treaty or COVENANT, by which a great king (in this case, God, the King of kings) bound to himself a vassal-people (here, Israel), the form in question being uniquely transmuted to the religious and spiritual plane.” K. A. Kitchen, “Moses,” ed. D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 787.