



**THE
BRIDGE
CHURCH**

Good & Bad Fruit

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It's probably no surprise to you that advertisers love superlatives, right? They love superlatives. They know that superlatives sell. Every business wants its product to be the most prescribed, the most trusted, the most watched for, the best-selling. These phrases communicate the same thing to the buyer: that millions of people couldn't be wrong.

It's sort of like every time I was in high school, and I would ask my mom if I could go and do something foolish with my friends, and she would say no. And of course, we would say, "Mom, everyone's doing it," right? My mom would ask, "Well, if everyone was jumping off a cliff, would you do that, too?" We found out later, yes—the answer is yes. Ian would do those things, cliffs and bridges. We used to drive pickup trucks on the freeway and jump from the bed of one to the bed of the other. Right? I would not recommend doing this, by the way.

But this is why superlatives work, though because, well, okay, if a million other people are doing it, then they can't all be wrong. Have you seen some of those social experiments where... I saw one where it had a bunch of people standing in an elevator, but they were facing the back and they would just stand there, committed to facing the back, and someone would walk in and they'd sort of look confused and then they'd slowly turn and also face... and the door would open and they'd feel like an idiot. Or another one I saw where they were all hanging out in a doctor's office, and three people were in on it, that there was a beep that would go off and they would just stand up for no reason. And the other people in the waiting room were like, "I guess we're all standing." And then one by one, the people that were secretly in on it would leave, and for the next 5 hours, every time there was a beep, everyone would stand up and no one had any idea why.

For the vast majority of us, we love and prefer even to go with the crowd unless you're in Enneagram 4 or an Enneagram 8. Most the rest of us, though, just prefer to do what everyone else does. And in today's passage, Jesus' dismissal of popularity may not only

confuse us, my guess is it might even offend us. So real briefly, last week, we ended on what's called the Golden Rule, showing preferential love to other people, which I think we can all admit is hard to do. That's not our inclination.

And in verse twelve (of Matthew 7) of last week, when Jesus mentions the law and the prophets, he was wrapping up his main block of teaching that began back in Matthew 5:17, which means, I think, that verse 13 (of Matthew 7) is the beginning of some kind of conclusion to all that Jesus has been saying. Jesus begins his sermon with blessings, but he concludes the sermon with warnings. Remember, he begins with the Beatitudes—the divine benediction rests on those like these. And then he ends with caution.

So as we dive into this text today in Matthew 7, let's remember the context of Jesus' sermon. He's speaking predominantly to Jewish people. So as they were listening to him, most of the people listening would assume that they were good with God simply because they were Jewish—that is, the vast majority of the people listening to the sermon. In the same way, many self-proclaimed Christians think they are good with God simply because they attend the church or because they serve on a team or because they tithe or because they have one of those Jesus fish on the back of their cars. My driving cannot be trusted with that kind of witness. You'll never see me with one of those stickers. I can't be trusted. But Jesus had something else to say to that particular posture, that way of looking at our lives.

So here's what he's going to give us today: two gates, two trees, two disciples. Two gates, two trees, two disciples. We begin Matthew 7, verse 13. He says, "Enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life. And only a few find it."

So I don't know what this says about me, but when I hear those two verses, does anyone else picture a street preacher? The guy with the sandwich sign? He's got a megaphone, he's just, like, condemning people to hell? Anyone else? Just me? Okay, that's kind of what I picture when I read these passages. It's either that or it's like ACDC's "Highway to Hell". Am I allowed to reference ACDC? I just did. But it's like there's a "Highway to Hell", and

then just like this thin little path to heaven. In fact, I saw this online earlier this week, something that says, "The fact that there's a highway to hell and only a stairway to heaven says a lot about anticipated traffic numbers."

And I think it's fine to laugh at some of those depictions. But I also think a passage like this brings up a lot of questions. Questions like, is Jesus a fundamentalist? Is he like those street preachers? Is God playing hard to get?

So I want to focus for a moment on that word "road". The word road in the original Greek is the word *hodos*. Let me just say *hodos*. *Hodos* can be translated as "road", "path", or "way". It shows up 845 times the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and it refers both to a literal way under your feet, but it's also used to paint a word picture. The word *hodos* is someone's way of life. It's their patterns, their behavior, their ethical system—that's their *hodos*.

And Jesus is actually not the first person to talk about two different paths, two different *hodos*. Maybe the first example in scripture is in Genesis 1 & 2, where we see that there are two ways to live on offer. "You can eat from every tree in the garden except for this one." [One] way of living leads to life, and [one] way of living ultimately leads to death. So at this point in the sermon, Jesus has laid out his vision for the Kingdom. And here in verse 13, he begins his outro.

He moves from teaching to an invitation. The reason for that is this: Jesus did not intend his sermon to be a beautiful ethical theory or a righteous but unattainable ideal. The evidence is overwhelming that he expects us to do what he taught. So as a listener, as a church, as a community, we've heard Jesus' vision for this upside-down kingdom that he talks about. And now we are faced with a decision about how we will respond. We can no longer keep the teachings of Jesus at arm's length, like a nice theory or a suggestion. Jesus is demanding a decision to be made. Something will be required of us. Aren't you so glad you came to church today?

So he talks about these pairings of two opposite gates. Two ways, two destinations, two groups—two, two, two. He's using this as a phonetic device to show us that ultimately, in

the complexity of all that is the human existence, it comes down to two. And I think Jesus wants us to be shocked. In fact, I think he even wants us to be challenged, to be uncomfortable. So let's unpack these first couple of verses together. He talks about wide and narrow, easy and hard, destruction and life, and many and few. So he talks about this wide way, this wide gate. And a gate, by the way, leads to a way. The point of a gate isn't just to stand on the other side of the gate, especially in the first century context. They would have understood that a gate leads to a path.

So on the wide gate, anything goes. There's no need to leave anything behind. It's like the default gate. You don't have to change a thing. You can just attend church week after week, hear the teachings and do nothing. The wide gate is essentially the ancient version of you. "Do you, boo boo." That's the way we talk, right, isn't that?

Years ago, my brother and I went on a trip, and we'd actually been planning this trip for about a decade. The joke of my brothers—and I'm the oldest of seven, six boys and a baby girl—the goal had always been the first person to get married, we're going to go on just like a breakneck European trip. We did like seven countries in ten days. I would not recommend that. The catch was, though, is that if we ever actually saved up enough money to do this trip, the rule was the only thing you were allowed to bring was one three piece suit. That's it. By the end of the trip, we smelled real bad. But the photos looked awesome, right?

And so because we were on a shoestring budget on one of the flights, we were trying to fly to Ireland, and I had like a thing of peanut butter, a thing of jelly, and a loaf of bread. And when we got, of course, to the TSA, check-in at security, they said, "Oh, so you can't bring a whole jar of jelly, a whole thing of peanut butter onto the plane." Well, that was going to be our lunch. And I thought about it for a second and I said, "Can I bring peanut butter jelly sandwiches on the plane?" And they said that would be fine. So we actually exited out of the line, and I realized that's not sanitary. Right then and there, we made 15 peanut butter jelly sandwiches.

I was thinking about this picture and thinking about how often we do this with sin. When it comes to the narrow way of Jesus, we say, "Oh, you can't bring this in," but we try to

repackage it. We try to repackage our behaviors and our vices and our sins and make them look like something else in order to fit through the gate. The wide gate says, "Do whatever you want." But the narrow gate is to call Jesus both Savior and Lord, not just King for some future reality. He's not King elect. He's King now, which means we might have to change course to break our default way of doing things. And you will likely have to leave some things behind.

On the same trip, we were traveling to Germany, and there was a lot of commotion about my particular backpack. And I don't speak German, so I just thought that they were angry, right? Which, in my experience, was a lot of them. But there was this commotion, and they kept pointing at my backpack, and I was kind of freaked out because it's TSA, and you don't want to make those guys upset. They kept pointing to this opening compartment. So slowly, I went and I opened it, and they were still yelling. They were still upset. So I reached in and I pulled out my harmonica.

Now they still seem a little bit, like, confused. So I'm trying to calm them down. So I took the harmonica and I held it to my mouth and I went [plays short harmonica noise] and they were like, "Okay, yeah, I think we understand what that is." And I go [plays longer harmonica tunes] and they're like, "Yeah, that's enough." And my brothers, who are also in suits, came skipping out of security. I would not recommend doing that in Germany, just for future reference.

But in the narrow gate of Jesus, our lives are going to be scrutinized in a way that at times will feel like the chiseling of the statue. It will feel like things might be pruned from our lives. And I think that's kind of the point. The wide gate says, "Do whatever, bring whatever, live long and prosper." But the narrow way of Jesus says you might actually have to leave some things behind.

I talked about the easy and hard. Easy is essentially life uninterrupted. It's appealing, again, because no effort is required. You ever done one of those floating down the lazy river things? They literally call it "lazy" river, right? It was like, "Here you go. Do nothing. That will be \$25." I'm like, "I can do nothing for free at home." It's the path of least resistance. But if

you've been alive for any length of time, I think this rings true that easy things are rarely good, and good things are rarely easy.

Easy is appealing, though. But when it comes to our marriage or relationship with our kids or our career or our own spiritual devotion or loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us, easy things are rarely good and good things are really easy. Then he says there's a way that's hard. It's difficult. Remember back in chapter 5, he said, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account." Now, the word *hard* here isn't just like me with algebra and it's difficult to do. It actually means "hard-pressed or afflicted". It's the same root of the word that Paul uses to the Church in Corinth that he was "hard pressed on every side". In the King James version, it reads, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way." The old English *strait* means to be crushed, squeezed, strangled. That's where you get the phrase "dire straits".

It's sort of like that scene in Star Wars where the garbage master is weighing on them, right? This path will sometimes feel like it's going to crush you. Jesus is depicting something that on the surface, looks like it's going to close in on us. It looks like death. And none of us like feeling stuck, right? Most of us aren't signing up for, like, "Oh, where's the line where I feel like I'm getting crushed?"

Just for fun, I Google image-searched images of things getting stuck. Here are some of my favorites. Here's a truck stuck under a bridge, and the fact that it says "You can do it" is just too good, right? It's not just truck drivers, though. Sometimes pets can get caught in this, sometimes... That poor dog. It's not just pets, though. Sometimes children can sometimes find themselves stuck. That face says, "I know what I did. I understand." It's not just children, though. Sometimes even adults find themselves in situations where we're stuck. [Shows image of a man stuck inside a playground fixture.] I don't even know how that works, to be honest.

Most of us don't look at those images and say, "Sign me up." It looks like being crushed. But if you've walked with Jesus for any length of time, you know that sometimes that's how it feels. Denying the ways of the world, fighting against temptation, thinking of the

needs of others, submitting our ways to God... When it comes to which path to take, the easier thing to do is to go with the flow. But we must choose a harder and more narrow path.

And Jesus likens it to picking up a cross, a symbol of execution and shame that on the surface looks like what? Death and defeat—the vehicle by which the greatest victory the world has ever known. On the other side is resurrection, and Christ followers swim upstream, opposing the lure to react. As the world reacts, we jump hurdles, build bridges, and we tear down walls that divide us. But Jesus says those who find it are few. He's saying, don't be surprised if you find yourself in the moral minority.

I'll put it this way: the narrow road is less about what you're choosing and more about who you're becoming. What we're choosing matters. Like right now, with my four year old, he wants me to pick out everything he eats and everything that he wears. If he's still asking me that at 18, there's a problem there. I think some of us, we get so obsessed with "this path, this path, this path"... For us, the response would be to surrender your heart and will to Jesus, and then go live your life by the power of the Holy Spirit. Right?

It's less about what we're choosing and more about who we're becoming. And there's a gate that looks more inviting, but it leads to a narrowness that eventually strangles us. On the other hand, there's a tiny gate that looks like it's going to crush us, but on the other side is life. The gospel sometimes looks like that from the outside.

So I was homeschooled, which meant I had to read *Chronicles of Narnia*, right? Any other homeschoolers? Not the movies. Those don't count. *Chronicles of Narnia*, in the last book, it's called *The Last Battle*. And in one particular scene, King Tyrion is in a battle and he sees this stable up on a hill, and he runs inside and he looks around, and this little tiny stable is enormous from the inside. There's like a forest and waterfalls and lakes and eagles and whatever. And this is what he says: "It seems then," said Tyrion, smiling, "that the stable seen from within and the stable seen from without are two different places." "Yes," said the Lord Diggery, "it's inside is bigger than it's outside."

That's the gospel. We tend to think, if I go down that path, if I actually surrender to myself, if I actually love that person rather than retaliating the way that I want to, that's going to crush me. But it's actually where life is truly found. And this is what Jesus says. The gospel says that this is your significance, that you are absolutely and completely accepted, loved, treasured, and delighted in by the only person in the whole universe whose opinion really matters and whose opinion will truly last.

He's saying, do you understand how restrictive the wide path actually is? Does anyone know what I'm talking about? How restrictive the path of seeking my acceptance and approval from everyone and everything else is? The constant need for acceptance or success, or to climb some ladder, or to be perceived as better off than I am? That ultimately strangles us. It's exhausting.

Jesus says, the way that looks narrow, that looks like it's going to crush you, is actually the way to life. He goes on, verse 15 says, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people will pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?" The answer, by the way, is no. "Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit. And a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit, you will recognize them."

So I want to hone in for a second on this word *beware*. Matthew uses the word six times, and each time, it's for a spiritual leader. Now, this word *beware* here in this passage is actually part of a much larger warning throughout Matthew, and I would argue an even larger warning throughout the entire Bible. This warning is not a one-off. It's a major theme and it's one very few of us talk about. But Jesus says, "Beware. Pay attention to. Be alert to."

Now, we don't tend to use the word *prophet* all that often, at least with a "ph". We don't tend to toss around false prophets all the time. But a true prophet is a guide to help us navigate the journey of life. I think it's maybe helpful to think about a true prophet as a cartographer— someone who says, "Here's a map to the good life, to the life of flourishing, to the life in the Kingdom."

A false prophet points down the wrong path, leading to the wrong destination. But the problem is they're not nearly as easy to spot as some assert. He talks about this idea of sheep's clothing, right? This cover up, this costume. And the metaphor was actually pretty famous in Jesus' day. He's not the first to use it. It shows up in Aesop's Fable. The sheep are the most common livestock in the Mediterranean world and their number one predator was wolves. The problem is wolves don't always look like wolves.

So how can you tell? How can you tell who the wolves are? Jesus says you need to develop a sort of spiritual X-ray vision. He offers us three tests. The first is the Life Test. He talks about the fruit. Now, fruit is a metaphor for what comes out of your life, i.e. your character. Think about someone who's holding a glass of water filled to the brim. When that person is bumped, when that arm is bumped, whatever is inside the glass comes out. Fruit is a metaphor for what's actually going on. This was a well-known metaphor in the first century, that living organisms produce fruit from their nature.

Now, full disclosure, I am not a gardener. Like when I first moved here, they put a real plant in my office and that died within the first 30 days. They quickly replaced it and put in something plastic. And even that's not doing very well right now. I don't live in that world. I wish that I did. But a first century agrarian society would be very familiar. They were familiar with cycles of harvest and fruit-bearing. And nowadays, we can go to the grocery store and buy bananas whenever we want, right? We do understand that bananas don't actually grow year-round. Mostly, those things are flown in, and we're so disconnected from this picture.

In fact, I remember when I was a student pastor, I brought some students to the grocery store and we were buying something for an event. And one of the students goes, "Why do we even have farms anymore?" I was like, what was that? He goes, "We don't need farms. We have grocery stores." I was like, "Hey, bud, where do you think this milk comes from?" And he like, rolled his eyes and goes, "The back." I was like, "Okay, all right, we're in trouble."

But the audience that Jesus is teaching to here understood the seasonality of the agricultural calendar and that things take time to grow. Think about that. Can we know instantly if someone is a good or ravenous teacher? Sometimes, but more often than not, we can't. When it comes to false teachers, false teachers exalt themselves rather than Jesus. They are more in love with the works of Jesus than Jesus himself. Their ministry is often centered around them.

This will be the most name-dropping thing I do in a minute, but I actually got to interview Rick Warren once, and he was so transparent about his journey, his life, the ups and downs, tragedy, grief... But he made a comment that I'll never forget. He was talking about people we look to. He says, "Your mentors should be living, but your models should be dead." You need living mentors, people to be in the trenches with you, to lock arms with and look you in the eyes. But your models, those people should be dead, because you don't know how their story is actually going to end. We're seeing that in the Church world en masse right now—you don't know how their story is going to end. Your mentors should be living. Your models should be dead.

I love the way The Message paraphrases—Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of this passage reads, it says, "Be wary of false teachers who smile a lot, dripping with practice sincerity. Chances are they are out to rip you off some way or another. Don't be impressed with charisma. Look for character. Who preachers are is the main thing, not what they say. A genuine leader will never exploit your emotions or your pocketbook. These diseased trees with their bad apples are going to be chopped down and burned."

Jesus saying to all of us, there's no amount of knowledge, willpower, or effort that changes what a tree produces. It's inherent to the tree's identity. The call of Christ is not to improve our fruit. It's not to genetically modify our fruit. It's not to inject it with water so it's bigger and shinier, but instead to seek the transformation of our identity, of our heart, of our soul. Our old selves must be uprooted and a new self planted firmly in God.

We have to remember that charisma does not equal character, that influence does not equal integrity, that giftedness does not equal Godliness, that skill does not equal sanctity, that platform does not equal purity, and that fame does not equal faithfulness. We so

often assume that if someone's got a stage or a microphone or lights or a platform or a reach, that they're in good standing. And I think we're seeing time, time and again, that's not the case.

We will recognize them by their fruit. But the sobering reality is that we'll never recognize that fruit if we're not abiding with Jesus and soaking in His Word. He says we'll recognize them, but we won't be able to if we're not first dwelling with Jesus and spending time soaking in Scripture. It makes me think a little bit of a Christmas tree, which I realize, this is not a great time for a Christmas tree example.

But think about a Christmas tree. Christmas trees are beautiful, and they draw attention to themselves in a way that a natural tree doesn't, right? Like a tree out in the forest and a Christmas tree... a Christmas tree is trying a little hard, right? It's got some pizzazz. They're decorated with tinsel and lights and covered with glittering, glass fruit. But all of the ornaments are there to hide one unappealing truth—that Christmas trees are corpses. They are dead, cut off from their roots, and sustained by a pot of water that must be refilled, maybe every Sunday. Jesus is saying that saying the right things doesn't mean you're living a right life. As your pastor, as a preacher, these are incredibly sobering words to read, and they should be for all of us.

He then gives the Teaching Test. Teaching Test, verse 21. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father, who is in heaven." The "one who does the will of my Father" is code for the teachings of Jesus. The teaching of Jesus is the will of the Father. He's saying that the Life Test is not enough. Look to the content. Again, I love The Message paraphrase; it says, "Knowing the correct password, saying 'Master, Master', for instance, isn't going to get you anywhere with me. What is required is serious obedience, doing what my Father wills."

So when it comes to any teaching, any preaching, any leader, a great diagnostic question is this: is this person's teaching moving my heart to obey Jesus' teachings? Is what this person is saying, or preaching, or tweeting, or posting, moving my heart to obey Jesus' teachings. Do they make me, by the power of the Holy Spirit, want to obey the will of the Father?

Listen, I'm sincerely trying my best up here. I love preaching more than I thought I could ever love doing anything. But on any given weekend, let's assume that 85% of what I say is true. I'd love for it to be 100. I'm aiming for 100, just so we're clear. But if we're generous, gracious, let's say 85% of what I say is true. And the other 15 isn't, like, heretical. It's not salvific. It's like, that wasn't a great reading of that word, of that harmonica story was a little weirdly placed... The problem is, I don't know which 15%.

Don't just simply take whatever I say, or anyone on the stage, for that matter, unchallenged simply because they have a microphone. Test everything I say against the litmus test of Scripture, particularly the teachings of Jesus. We as a community need to be so immersed and well versed in God's Word and the mind and imagination of Jesus and his way of life that we can spot a fraud from a mile away. For anyone who teaches or preaches or leads, by the way. Why? Because a lot of false prophets use a lot of Christian language. We know this. I had a professor in college who used to ask this question: is this biblically sound or just sound biblical? Is this biblically sound or does this sound biblical?

I remember going to a conference years ago, and the preacher's big climax—he said, "And it's like the good book says: a penny saved is a penny earned." And I was like, "I think it's in a book. I don't know if it's in *the* good book." Is it biblically sound or just sound biblical? Jesus is saying don't fall for the sales pitch, don't fall for the con.

And so why is fruit so important? Because, as Jesus explains, the kind of fruit a tree produces indicates the kind of tree it is. Everyday habits reveal the condition of our heart. The small moments, by the way. The moments with no stages or lights or microphones. This is why we talked about in the fall that our habits are acts of worship, not just singing of songs. How we actually are indicates the kind of tree that we are. But what does Jesus say? What does this tell us about the kind of prophets that these people will appear to be? Jesus unpacks this idea for us in verse 22, and I'll end with this passage.

This is the Relational Test. He says, "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 in your name perform

many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers.'"

Jesus is consistently reserving his harshest criticism not for sinners, but for the religious people, the religious elite. And I'll be blunt, if this doesn't make you uncomfortable, you're not reading your Bible well. Jesus is not teaching on salvation. He's teaching on false prophets who claim to speak on behalf of Jesus but aren't actually in relationship with him. In fact, even the fact that they say "Lord, Lord" is significant. In Semitic languages, saying something twice, doubling of words was meant to convey an excitement, an intimacy.

"Lord, Lord" is not just doctrinal—it's emotional. I would argue these people were legitimately excited about him. They had big outward signs of righteousness. They looked successful, but they themselves were deceived. They're saying, "Lord, look—we made you look awesome. We made you famous." And all throughout this sermon, Jesus is saying, "Are these the things I hold in high regard? Are these the metrics that I look to?" He's saying to those who think these flashy displays will somehow endear us to him are sorely mistaken.

And this is the part that has kept me up at night. Apparently, these people were able to have huge outward signs of righteousness and power. I mean, look at the list: prophesying, casting out demons... People are being liberated, converted. I mean, these people are in ministry. They would say, "I'm in, right? Look at all the good stuff that I'm doing." They had falsely concluded that being used by God was evidence that they belonged to God. God will use whomever he sees fit, whomever he desires. And we are not to confuse being used by God as evidence that we belong to God. In our context, we might say something like, "Lord, Lord, remember when I was baptized? Lord, Lord, remember when I taught Sunday school? Lord, Lord, remember when I served on a team? Lord, Lord, remember when I went on a mission trip where I gave 10%? Lord, Lord, remember when I served as a pastor?"

What does Jesus say to these people? What he doesn't say is, "Yeah, we used to hang out. We used to be homeboys." No, he says, "I never knew you." All along, what has Jesus been

saying that he holds in high regard? Quiet obedience, controlling our tongue, keeping our anger under wraps, secret giving, loving our enemy, praying for those who persecute us.

This word "knew" here is the word *gonosko*. It doesn't just simply mean "knowledge". It's actually first used in Genesis 4—Adam knew Eve. It's a term of intimacy. It's relational. This is what's so tricky about test three—we can't actually test for it. He's saying to judge, discern... but you ultimately don't know. And here, the deceivers themselves are deceived. And when they're called out, they don't repent. They start listing all the things they've done. I can't tell you how many times I've done that. When God convicts me about something that I'm doing or thinking or whatever it is, and I start coming with the, "Lord, look at my track record, look at my resume, look at all the great things that I'm accomplishing for you."

And Jesus doesn't say what we're supposed to do with these false prophets. He doesn't say, "Start a hashtag or launch a podcast." He says, "Beware." Jesus' strong language in this passage is meant to wake us up—to wake us up from pretending, from complacency, from just going through the motions, because the way of Jesus isn't only about behavior, it's about our heart.

Action is required. He says, "Those who love me will do the will of the Father." But it's not just about the outward displays of obedience. It's about our heart. And who are we really? What fruit is being born when the mic is off? When we're not on a stage, but it's just me and my spouse with my kids, when no one is watching.

To close I want to go back to that story from Chronicles of Narnia, the Last Battle, because there's a part of the scene that I left off. It says, "Tyrion looked around again and could hardly believe his eyes. There was blue sky overhead and grassy country spreading as far as he could see in every direction, and his new friends all around him, laughing. 'It seems, then,' said Tyrion, smiling to himself, 'that the stable seen from within and the stable seen from without are two different places.' 'Yes,' said the Lord Diggory, 'its inside is bigger than its outside.' 'Yes,' said Queen Lucy, 'in our world, too, a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world.'"

Think of the narrowness that Jesus went through so that we could be free. He was crushed to know the spaciousness of a resurrection with you and me in it. As we talked about this whole series, the genuine path of apprenticeship to Jesus is only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit. And the gift of the Holy Spirit is only possible because Jesus died and rose again. He lived the lessons he taught. He turned the other cheek. He loved his enemies.

To enter the narrow gate is to come to him as our only hope, abandoning all other paths. So let me just ask you bluntly: do you know Jesus really? And more than just do you know Him, have you surrendered to him or have you been playing the game? Have you been taping fruit to a tree that has no roots?

Friends, this is the greatest burden of my life as a pastor. Please don't let this day pass without surrendering all of who you are to Jesus. If you need prayer, we're going to have a prayer team up front. They would love to pray with you. You can indicate on your Connect Card, "I want to stop playing games. I want to stop putting on a show. I want to actually surrender my life to Jesus." Maybe for the first time, maybe for the hundredth time, we would love to walk with you in that journey. Please don't let this day pass.

Jesus is saying you're going to have to choose. You're going to have to make a decision. As the Sermon on the Mount reveals, it is entirely possible to spend one's life devoted to God's mission as a substitute for being devoted to God himself. May we never do for God without also doing with Him. Because on that day, friends, when we stand before him in glory, the question won't be, "Show me all the awesome stuff you did, all the verses you memorized, all the people you dunked on social media, all the missions trips." The question won't be any of that the question will be, "Do I know you? Do you know me?" May we not settle for substitutions but be rooted firmly in the soil of God's grace? Let's pray.

God, it is honestly difficult to stand on the stage even now knowing, God, the amount of times that things I've said haven't matched the life I was living. My guess is I'm not alone in that. God, I am so grateful for your grace, your mercy that is new every morning, again and again and again. For those of us who have maybe been standing outside the narrow gate,

worried that it looks like death, it looks like destruction, would you paint for us, God, a vision of the resurrected life that waits on the other side? God, to loosen our grip on the things, the sins, the patterns, the memories, the toxicity we've been holding onto. God, help us to let go and trust you fully, maybe for the first time today, God. Help us to choose the path that ultimately leads to life. We thank you, God, and we love you, and we pray all this in the beautiful name of Jesus, and everybody said, "Amen."