

Christmas 2018 – Responding to Jesus

Matthew 7:13-27 | Sunday, December 2, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

CHRISTMAS 2018

RESPONDING TO JESUS

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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.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

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."

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

This passage concludes the greatest sermon ever preached. Jesus is preaching the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7. Throughout this time we have been seeing what it looks like to live in the Kingdom of God, to be a follower of Jesus Christ, and how we are actually to live as his followers.

Jesus comes now to the end of the sermon and he gives an invitation. It's a series of "twos:" two gates, two roads, two trees, two houses. Obviously, Jesus is calling us to make a choice, to answer this very important question: What will you do with Jesus Christ? Who is Jesus to you? What is your response to his claims, to his word, to who he is?

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He is saying to you vividly, in powerful language, that it's not enough to be inspired. It's not enough to admire him. It's not enough to appreciate him. It's not enough to esteem him as a great teacher. But you must answer the question: Who is Jesus Christ to you? And how will you personally respond to his claims?

I will not mince words; this is a difficult passage. This is a hard-hitting passage. Truthfully, when you read parts of this passage you want to run from it. You want to run from it because it's troubling. If you take Jesus seriously, it's troubling. I think one message here is that Jesus has held up this ethic, this amazing picture of virtue. We are impressed with the purity and the beauty of it, and the impossibility of it. There is something in us that wants to be authentic. We want the real thing. We want to experience Christ. We want to know God. We want to experience personal change and transformation and renewal.

Who wants to just play religious games and go through ceremony after ceremony that's void of heart and passion and life in Christ? **We don't want to run *from* this passage, but run *to* it because this is an invitation to authenticity. Sometimes the things that trap us in the superficial and the fake are really the avoidance of things that we really don't want to confront. Entrance into real experience in God requires us to look at the things that we may not want to look at otherwise.**

Jesus is calling us to respond. If you look at the text there are four paragraphs, and that's how we are going to go through it – four points, four keys, four aspects to how we respond to Jesus. So, let's get started. Let's look at the first one:

I. Enter by the narrow gate, verses 13 and 14.

There is a narrow gate and there is a narrow way or a narrow path, a narrow road. Jesus tells us that the narrow gate, the narrow path leads to life. Few enter by it. Many go through the broad gate and the wide path, the easier road. Jesus tells us that the pathway to life is narrow. It's difficult. It's hard.

What's interesting at the outset -- Jesus grabs our attention because he makes a pretty fantastic claim here. **He is telling you that your eternal destiny is tied directly to how you respond to Jesus Christ and his claims.** He is saying one path leads to life eternal and one path leads to destruction. Honestly, that's very unpopular in our culture. It's distasteful. It's troubling.

Jesus says, "No, no, no, listen. If you want real experience in me, if you want relationship and wholeness, you need to understand that God is eternal. When he created your soul, he created your soul to last for all of eternity, and there are two paths. One leads to life, and that eternal life is experienced then and now. That's the invitation to authenticity.

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This is so helpful, because what Jesus is describing here is discipleship. This is how you start with Jesus and this is how you follow Jesus. He is telling you right from the outset: Do not expect step one to be a piece of cake. It's difficult. When we witnessed the baptisms today, what did we hear? We heard this question asked: **Is Jesus Christ the Lord of your life? Is he the Master of your life?** To come to Jesus, you are saying, "All that I've sought to build my own identity in -- now I leave that for an identity in Jesus Christ. And though that entrance is initially difficult, it opens up into this spacious place of life. Then following Jesus is just that, over and over and over again.

You may find yourself trapped in a cycle of bad relationships. You come to a point in a new relationship and know the Lord is saying to you that you just know this is not right. I'm compromising. This is not God's path. But there is something in you that so longs for companionship and not to be alone. The prize of this security and the emotion and just the weight of feeling of what life will be like without it...in that moment, the thought of walking away from that can feel crushing.

What would life be if I can't drink? What would life be if I can't _____? You fill in the blank. God wants me to do what? I can't have sex until I'm married? Are you crazy? Here's the interesting thing. Jesus is not saying to you: "You do all these things and you'll earn eternal life." He says, "No, no, no. It's a gift to you. You can't do all these things. I offer to you salvation. Then, you know what? I'm going to renew your heart and you're going to see the beauty of it. You are going to allow yourself to be crushed in that moment and you're going to come and say, 'Wow! Relationships are so much better! Thank you, God! Thank you, God that I'm not with that jerk.'"

That's truth. If that little picture doesn't apply to you, but you see other people and say, "Why do they do that?" Just ask the Lord right now: "What's my cycle of brokenness? What's that thing I do over and over and over and over again, because it feels crushing to say no to it. Because I just so believe that life is found in this one thing, and it's not. It's all based on a lie."

When my children were little, 75 years ago, I remember coming home from being at the office and thinking, "I just want to go in and have my space and my time, but I'm pretty sure no one on the other side of that door shares that conviction. I remember praying, "Lord, narrow is the gate." I tell you this story, and it sounds like I did this every night I came home. You're thinking, "What a spiritual giant! Every night..." In reality it probably happened two or three times. I don't know. Maybe once. But in my mind, as I've revised history, I think I did it all the time. Because it was just so difficult the few times I did it, to say, "Okay, it's not about me."

If this make you think, "Wow, Brian, you're just selfish," you have no idea how selfish I am. It takes revival for me to get up and do the dishes. Here is a gift to sanctify my wife. I'm just glad I'm living with her in heaven, because she has a big mansion in heaven, I'm sure.

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Friends, it's all grace. Grace? "Brian, it doesn't sound like it." Yes, it is. There's this moment where you just say, "I'm going to build my life on Jesus. My relationships, my career, my money, everything. Everything, Lord, it's built on you." It's a death, and there are little bitty deaths all day long, but they lead to life! For some of you, it's a death to be here! You want to be home in bed! Some of you (I'm looking at the camera) you're home in bed! And we love you! But die the death and come and watch how you experience life. And you know what? It's multiplied when you get here before 10:00. That's probably a lie, but I just thought I would manipulate you a little bit before I left this first point. I'm talking fast.

If you're a Christian, and you share Christ with other people, stop closing the sale. You're not selling Jesus. You're not doing a person any favors by saying, "All you have to do is pray this prayer." Yeah, it's a gift. It may begin with a prayer where you confess your sin, but in that prayer you are saying, "All of my hope is in you, Jesus. You are saving me. You died to pay for the wreck of my life, to restore it, and now I am following Jesus Christ as the Lord of my life."

I've said this before. I was always amazed whenever I would share the gospel with people. They would come up with the craziest questions, like, "Brian, if I say yes to Jesus, does that mean I have to give up motorcycles? Does that mean I have to give up my stereo?" I was like, "Man, these are crazy questions. What are you talking about? No, God's not against motorcycles or stereos." Then one day I felt like the Lord said, "Stop speaking for me in this regard. How do you know? How do you know? Maybe I want him to give up his motorcycle. Maybe that's a god in his life." Wow. Narrow is the way that leads to life. Bring your Harleys next week. We will sell them. Please, do not get legalistic. I hope you hear the spirit of what I am saying. Life is found in Jesus Christ. Let's go to #2 please.

II. Beware of false prophets, verses 15-20.

I'm just retaining the language here, the first phrase, because if you capture this and it gets in you, it will keep you from failing to respond to Jesus. Many people don't follow Jesus because of bad Christian leaders, because of false leaders. They had a pastor or they had a friend, and that person was so inspirational and so gifted and so wonderful. Then that person hurt them or that person committed terrible immorality and through those mishaps, you were tempted to really be angry at God and say, "How can this be?" Jesus tells you right here that this is going to happen and why it's going to happen.

How do you know a false prophet, according to this text? By their fruit. What is fruit? Fruit is the character of their lives. Fruit is something you may not see. Fruit is what happens when I go home and I live with this woman. Fruit is the way we treat one another. Fruit is the integrity or the lack of integrity of my heart. The Apostle Paul said that fruit is

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sometimes clear right from the beginning, but sometimes sin doesn't show itself for a long time. But eventually, the fruit of your life will be visible.

Jesus said, and this is so helpful: You do not know a prophet by his gift, by her gift, the ability to preach, the ability to teach, the ability to "save people," the ability to heal people, the ability to cast out demons, prophesy, do extraordinary things, lead large churches. None of that means authenticity. None of it. **Stop being impressed with gifted people and look for people with Christ-like character.**

Church, we need this. Enough of the celebrity culture. Right now, if I were you, I would just give thanks. "Thank you, Lord, that my pastor is not a celebrity. He is such a nobody." Isn't it wonderful? Sometimes it's good to be a nobody. I don't want the devil to know my name, right?

Here's the deceitful thing about this point. I can feel good about being a nobody. I can make you feel good about me being a nobody, so that I convince you I'm just so humble, so real. Aren't we lucky? **Don't look at me. Don't look at any individual. Look at Jesus Christ. That's the message.** And if you've been hurt by false leaders, I'm sorry. I apologize on their behalf, on my behalf. We repent. Look at Jesus.

Let me just say before we leave #2: Resist the temptation to make your gift, your accomplishment, your achievement a substitute for godly character. It isn't the way God thinks at all. God is not impressed. He's God. Right? I'm always amazed at people who give large financial gifts and then they make a big deal out of it. I want to say, "You know, if God wants it, he'll just take it. He's God!" Don't worry. Don't get nervous. Okay, let's go to the third point. I'm sorry. We're flying here.

III. Beware of self-deception, verses 21-23.

In the second point, people are deceiving me. They appear to be something that they are not. And if I don't get my eyes off their gift and if I just wait for God to reveal the character of their lives, I will see where that deception was. But here the problem is much more sinister. It's self-deception. He says, "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...'" That's such a troubling statement, that there are false professors.

You look at many people – they've been baptized, they go to church, they are church members, they give, they do all the things that Christians do, and on the Day of Judgment Jesus will say, "Depart from me; I never knew you. You had no

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relationship with me.” This is where the call to authenticity is powerful, because there are really two false responses here.

One is the false response of self-deception. I’m being good. I’m doing all the things that Christians are supposed to do. I’m a very moral person. Maybe in your world it’s not even Christian, but you are just being good. You are keeping the rules, and the foundation under that is your goodness. Jesus says that person is deceived. I’ll tell you why in a second.

Then the second response is not an acceptance of the rules, an acceptance of the morality, but a rejection. “You know, I’m not like those religious people over there. I have more integrity. I’m very real and authentic.” In boasting about not being good, there is a boasting in your so-called integrity.

Jesus says both responses will fail in the end and both are inauthentic because...now, what I am about to say is a powerful, powerful biblical truth. If you will embrace it biblically, it will be foundational forever to your worldview. If you reject what I’m about to say, you will never think correctly about this world. Never. You are going to be tempted to say, “Brian that just can’t be true.” Are you ready? **People are not good. No one is good. That’s the message of scripture. People are loved, they are treasured, they are precious, they are made in the image of God. They are valued. Jesus gave his life for them. Not good. They are not good.**

There are two places in scripture where that jumps out for me, two places where the impact is so stark, you are just getting it right between the eyes. One is when the rich young ruler came to Jesus and he said, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said something back to him that really troubles me. He said, “Why do you call me good? There is no one good except God.” This is so stark.

Here is what Jesus is saying. I’m going to interpret. He is saying, “You don’t know it, but when you call me good, you are calling me God. And I don’t think you know who I am and I don’t think you know that I am God. So why are you calling me good? I’m telling you right now as you are coming to receive eternal life, you are not good.” It’s so combative, it’s not very user-friendly, if I might say it that way.

The second picture we saw in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus teaches us to pray. He says, “You know what? You are going to be worried when you pray that if you really ask God for something that he’s going to use that occasion to give you something bad. But if you say, ‘God, I’m going to surrender all of my life to you – everything is yours,’ you’re going to think, ‘Oh no, what will God do with that? He’ll send me somewhere I don’t want to go and make me do stuff I don’t want to do.’” Then Jesus makes this statement: “Which of you as an earthy father, though you are evil, won’t give good gifts to your children?”

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I understand that there is a language of hyperbole throughout the Sermon on the Mount, a language of stark exaggeration, for lack of a better word, to bring the point home. **But God really is saying to us: If the foundation of your life is your own goodness, either by keeping the rules or not keeping the rules, you lack authenticity because no one is good except God alone.**

I made a claim to you that this will right your worldview. You won't be so undone when people do bad things. You know why? They need Jesus. When your mate disappoints you, say, "He needs Jesus. I knew it. She needs Jesus." "But he said he'd never do it again!" Yeah, well he still needs Jesus. I'm not making excuses for abuse or any kind of nonsense. Please don't take this to places I'm not going. We like to judge people where we think we would never do that, then give ourselves a pass to all the mess that we do. Just go home, have a meal and say, "Hey, you're not good. I bless you in the name of Jesus. You need Jesus."

Obviously we love people, but the ability to really love people, to put them first, to love them with the same energy with which we love ourselves will only come from Jesus Christ. That is the standard by which we'll be judged. Okay, are you feeling good? We are almost there.

IV. Build your life on Jesus, verses 24-27.

Jesus ends with a parable. It's very graphic. A storm comes and the foundation of your home will be revealed. The foundation of your life will be revealed. If you take Jesus to heart, and you receive from him, and he is the foundation of your life...please understand. He is talking about a true faith and confession that brings a transformation of your whole life. He's not talking about: "I prayed a prayer one time." Most of us start our journey with the Lord that way, and I don't object at all to that. But you do understand, right? That only is significant if belief is in the heart and a transformation is happening. **We don't fully get it, but my only hope is in Jesus and he is sufficient to save me.**

I just had a beautiful meeting with a young woman in our church – a brand new believer. I asked her two questions: "Is your sin forgiven?" She said, "Yes it is." I said, "Tell me why." She said, "Because Jesus Christ died for me." That's it. What she is telling me in those two answers is the foundation of her life. Many times I ask that and I get good answers: "God is good. God is merciful. God is kind. God loves me." All those things are true, but that's not why we are forgiven. **We are forgiven because Jesus Christ has paid the penalty for our sin and the foundation of our lives is Jesus and Jesus alone.**

Normally, we would quit right here. It's 11:15. Today is bonus Sunday. I want to end by calling you to respond to Jesus. The word of God is so powerful. If you will allow the Lord Jesus himself to speak this parable into your heart, it will so grip

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you to see that what your life is really about will be revealed. **A storm is coming. You don't have to live in fear of that storm. You may not have any significant trial until the day you go see Jesus, but your life will be tested on that day and exactly who you are will be revealed. There is hope in Jesus. There is life in Jesus.**

The beauty of that is if that is your story, you can experience that right now. I don't know the future. I don't know what tests are in front of me, but I know I can only pass those tests if I am standing on the foundation of the Rock. If my hope is in anything other than Jesus...

Now here's where we end. I want to ask you a question and I want you to honestly think about this for a moment. I don't want you just to pass by it. Here's a question I want to ask when I hear the Sermon on the Mount: **Who is that can make these claims? Who is it that can stand before us and say, "Only if you build your life on me will you live and stand for eternity. Your eternal destiny depends on your relationship with me and really knowing me." Who is it that can say, "No matter who you are, you will stand before me as the final judge?" It's the one that cleanses the leper, that heals the blind, that opens deaf ears, that restores limp limbs, that speaks to waves and winds. He's the one who rose from the grave. He is God. The beauty of who Christ is is not just his power and authority, but he's the one who loves prostitutes, tax collectors, hypocritical preachers. He loves you and he gave his life for you.**

Think about how narrow the gate of the incarnation is -- leaving the glory of heaven to become a baby in human flesh. The Son of God became a man, entering by the narrow gate, taking the narrow way, taking the hard path so that you can be saved. It's amazing, the love of God!