

UNIT 5
MATTHEW 7:12–7:29

I/ The Golden Rule (v.12)

II/ Enter By the Narrow Gate (v.13-14)

III/ A Tree and Its Fruit (v.15-20)

IV/ I Never Knew You (v.21-23)

V/ Build Your House on the Rock (v.24-27)

VI/ The Authority of Jesus (v.28-29)

Thus the Sermon ends on the same note of radical choice of which we have been aware throughout. Jesus does not set before his followers a string of easy ethical rules, so much as a set of values and ideals which is entirely distinctive from the way of the world. He summons us to renounce the prevailing secular culture in favor of the Christian counter-culture. Repeatedly during our study we have heard his call to his people to be different from everybody else. The first time this became clear was in his commission to us to be both 'the salt of the earth' and 'the light of the world'. For these metaphors set the Christian and non-Christian communities over against each other as recognizably, indeed fundamentally, distinct. The world is like rotting food, full of the bacteria which cause its disintegration; Jesus' followers are to be its salt, arresting its decay. The world is a dark and dismal place, lacking sunshine, living in shadow; Jesus' followers are to be its light, dispelling its darkness and its gloom.

From then on the opposing standards are graphically described, and the way of Jesus commended. Our righteousness is to be deeper because it reaches even our hearts, and our love broader because it embraces even our enemies. In piety we are to avoid the ostentation of hypocrites and in prayer the verbosity of pagans. Instead our giving, praying and fasting are to be real, with no compromise of our Christian integrity. For our treasure we are to choose what endures through eternity, not what disintegrates on earth, and for our master God, not money or possessions. As for our ambition (what preoccupies our mind) this must not be our own material security, but the spread of God's rule and righteousness in the world.

Instead of conforming to this world – whether in the form of religious Pharisees or of irreligious pagans – we are called by Jesus to imitate our heavenly Father. He is a peacemaker. And he loves even the ungrateful and selfish. So we must copy him, not men. Only then shall we show that we are truly his sons and daughters (5:9, 44-48). Here then is the alternative, either to follow the crowd or to follow our Father in heaven, either to be a reed swayed by the winds of public opinion or to be ruled by God's word, the revelation of his character and will. And the overriding purpose of the Sermon on the Mount is to present us with this alternative, and so to face us with the indispensable necessity of choice.

That is why the Sermon's conclusion is so appropriate, as Jesus sketches the two ways (narrow and broad) and the two buildings (on rock and sand). It would be impossible to exaggerate the importance of the choice between them, since one way leads to life while the other ends in destruction, and one building is secure while the other is overwhelmed with disaster. Far more momentous than the choice even of a life-work or of a life-partner is the choice about life itself. Which road are we going to travel? On which foundation are we going to build?

–John Stott