

Jesus' Call to Response

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, well, great to see everybody. If you don't know me, my name is Kevin, one of the leaders here, and we're going to spend some time praying together. One of the things Jeremy just mentioned is as a church, we love to pray, and prayer is such an important part of everything that we do.

And when you come to church on Sunday, we don't just come to run through a program. We come to encounter the living God, and one of the ways we do that is through prayer. And so will you join me as we pray together? And I know I say this often, but I want to encourage you to really listen and to agree and to join in in this time of prayer.

This isn't just me praying, this is us as a church coming before our Father. And so let's pray together. Gracious Father, it really is such a joy and a privilege to gather together to praise you and to adore you, to hear from you and to encounter you again this morning.

Gracious Father, you are liberating truth. You who are sovereign and all-powerful, you who are forgiving and welcoming, we love you and we need you.

Father, we pray that we will continue to grow in our knowledge and our understanding of who you are and your truth. Lord, may we never rest on a system of doctrine or just have head knowledge, a system of religion that does not bring us closer to you and your ways, that does not help us to turn from our self-centeredness and sin, and God rejoice all the more in your goodness and grace.

[1 : 3 1] Father, we confess how easy it is to come to you when we are in need or in trouble or distress or when we are worried about things. We find it very easy to run to you, but Father, we pray that you will help us to not only come to you in those times and then go our own way, but to walk in your way day in and day out when life is good and when it's tough.

Father, forgive us this sin, we pray, and help us to never fail to come to you who are full of grace, you who are the friend of sinners, you who love at all times, you who are so familiar with each and every temptation and weakness, and yet God without sin.

Father, help us to never limit our devotions to particular seasons or days of the week, but to love you each and every day. Help us to never simply look the part or act Christianly on Sundays or certain occasions, but to follow you and walk with you in each and every season of life.

I really pray for your grace and to help us in this regard, Lord. Father, this morning we confess that our hearts are heavy when we consider the state of the world, whether it's political fighting across nations that has real consequences for so many ordinary citizens, whether it's civil wars that are raging, often forgotten, unreported, God, whether it's immigrants fleeing to countries looking for a safe place to call home and yet seldom welcomed anywhere.

Father, we think of many homes even here in Hong Kong and around the world in which there is so little joy, little love, there is pain, there is bitterness, there is unforgiveness, there is hurt.

[3 : 1 6] Father, we're brokenhearted when we think and hear of attacks that bring terror and fear, when we hear of floods and monsoons and storms that ravage homes and take lives.

Father, this morning we mourn with a heavy heart the presence of sin in our lives and in our world, and we long for heaven. Jesus, you were so right when you said that the life apart from you, while it looks appealing and self-fulfilling, it really does end in heartache and destruction.

And so God, while we are grateful for progress in society, for increased freedoms, and the acknowledgement of people's liberties and rights, Father, we acknowledge that we are not more happier or content society.

We acknowledge our need for you. Humble our proud. Help us, God, not to walk our own path, but to follow you. Jesus, come and have your way, we pray. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Come soon, we pray, God. Come and bring your kingdom to our city and to our hearts, Lord. Lord, we need you, Jesus. Come and have your way in our lives, we pray. In your patient and long-suffering name, amen.

[4 : 24] Amen. Let's listen to the reading of God's word. Thanks, Victoria. The scripture reading comes from Matthew chapter 7.

Please follow along in your bulletins or on the screen. 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 farm bushes or fixed from thistles? So every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the deceased tree bears bad fruit.

A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a deceased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

[5 : 36] 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, do 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 thus they 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.

[6 : 51] And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority and not as the scribes.

This is the word of God. Thank you, Victoria. Okay. Well, if you have been coming to Watermark for a while, you will recognize this picture.

Not that one. The next one. The Upside Down Kingdom. And we have been doing this preaching series for the last six months. We started on the 9th of December last year when we looked at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, and we looked at how the arrival of Jesus led up to Christmas, and then after Christmas, we just kept on going, and we met John the Baptist in chapter 3, and then Jesus eventually in chapter 4.

And Jesus comes on the scene, and he says, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is here, therefore follow me. And he calls these people to follow him, and then we went into the Sermon on the Mount, and we just kept on going.

And so for six months, we've been looking at Matthew's Gospel, and today is the final episode. Today it comes to a conclusion. Now, just so you know, sidebar, next week, Tobin Miller, who is the founding pastor of Watermark, is going to be preaching here, and so we're looking forward to having him.

[8 : 14] Yes. And I have never met Tobin. I'm looking forward to meeting him this week. And then after that, we are going to preach through the book of Habakkuk for three weeks, and then Haggai for four weeks, and then after the summer, we're going to do Revelation from September to December.

So that's our preaching schedule for the rest of the year. Okay. Now, before we dive into our passage today, I want us to step back and just to consider the structure and the flow of thought through Matthew's Gospel, because it's going to help us feel the force of the passage that we're looking at today.

And so, Matthew's Gospel is structured very deliberately. In fact, all the biblical writers wrote their books or their literature very deliberately. And the way that Matthew has written it is in order to convey something or to let us know something about Jesus.

If you're new to the Bible, you may sometimes read the Gospels and think, why does it in the one Gospel it seems like Jesus says this and then does that? But if you read another Gospel like Luke or John or Mark, it seems like he first does that and then afterwards he says this.

In other words, sometimes the order seems the wrong way around, and that can be confusing. And the reason is because the biblical writers weren't writing a purely chronological history, A, then B, then C.

[9 : 39] They've structured their writing in such a way as to communicate a message and to tell us something about Jesus, not just what happened, but why it happened as well. So in English, we've got this phrase where we say the medium is the message.

In other words, if you're communicating something, the way that you communicated actually communicates the message as much as the words themselves. I'll give you a silly example. Let's say I write a love letter to my wife and I find some tissue on the floor and I unravel it and I scribble on there I love you and I give that to her.

Or if I take the time to make a beautiful card and then write the same words, one of those is going to communicate something a whole lot differently than the other.

Because the medium is the message. The way that something is communicated communicates as much as the actual words themselves. Now this is what's happening in the Gospels. And so Matthew, the way that he structured his Gospels, there's seven parts to it, kind of like seven episodes in a series.

There's an introduction, chapters one to three, in which he tells us that Jesus is the true and better Abraham, Moses and David. When you read the opening chapters of Matthew, it's all about Abraham, Moses and David.

[10 : 54] And he's communicating, he's telling us something, that all three of these constantly point to Jesus. Jesus is the fulfillment of all of that. And then there's a concluding kind of section or paragraph at the bottom, and that's how Jesus is the true and better Passover.

He's the lamb that died for the sins of the world, but he didn't stay dead, he came alive again. And in between, these opening and closing paragraphs or sections are five unique sections.

And they resemble the five books of Moses in the Old Testament. And each one of these sections has a similar structure and feel to it. It starts off with some narrative.

Jesus went here, he did this miracle, he encountered these people, et cetera. And then it ends off with the body of teaching. And the last sentence in each one of these five sections is the same sentence.

It's kind of like Matthew's, he's carefully constructing something. In other words, he's saying, let's think about this section for a moment. And he does a whole thing there. And then he moves on, says, now I want you to consider this part about Jesus' life.

[11 : 55] And now I want you to consider this part. The reason I'm telling you this is for the last six months we've focused on the introduction and the first section. And so, for six months we've been going through Matthew's Gospel and we've seen, we've met Jesus in the wilderness, we've met him being tempted by the devil, his baptism, et cetera, et cetera.

He arrives in Galilee, he says, follow me, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. That's all the narrative. Then he goes into this body of teaching which is called the Sermon on the Mount. That's right.

And we've been there for about four or five months and we've paused in a couple of places and we've looked at how Jesus speaks about a mission and evangelism. He talks about the Beatitudes.

He talks about prayer. He talks about money. He talks about all these things. And in the Sermon on the Mount, he's now unpacking and explaining what he said in the wilderness which is, follow me for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

He's showing what life in the kingdom looks like. He's showing what does it mean when you follow him and say, yes, okay, I'll follow you. And the Sermon on the Mount is his unpacking of what this kingdom, this new kingdom, looks like.

[13 : 07] And it turns out it's an upside down kind of kingdom. It's a kingdom in which blessed are the poor in spirit for they inherit the earth. Blessed are those that mourn more so than those that don't.

And so from chapter 4 onwards, we've been following Jesus and he's been following his narrative, following his teaching. And now, we get to the end. And we get to the very final passage.

And the passage of Scripture we're looking at today is kind of the conclusion to this first section. And Matthew has deliberately structured his gospel to come to this passage today and like a great trial lawyer before the jury is saying, okay, you've heard all the evidence.

You've met Jesus in the wilderness. You heard what he had to say. You've listened to his teaching about prayer. You've listened to his teaching about money. You've listened to everything he has to say. And like a trial lawyer, he's coming with this closing argument.

And this is what he's saying. Now, how are you going to respond? You've heard about everything I've seen, I've said. You've seen how I handle temptation.

[14 : 12] You've seen how I'm the fulfillment of the Old Testament. You see how all the law and the prophets come to me. Now, how are you going to respond? What are you going to do with everything you've heard and seen for the last six months?

And so, let's see how Jesus says this. Okay? Let's see Jesus closing argument to the jury, which is you and I. Look at verse 13. He says, 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. But the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life. And those who find it are few. You see what Jesus is saying?

In light of everything you've heard, in light of all that you've seen, how I fulfilled all of the law and the prophets, you've seen my baptism, you've heard my invitation to come and follow me, you've heard my explaining what life in the kingdom is like, what are you going to do?

He says, there's two options before you. You can receive my invitation, you can follow me, and by the way, it's hard and we'll talk about that, or you can reject my invitation and go your own way.

[15 : 21] And Jesus' challenge, his summons for a response is as relevant today as it was 2,000 years ago. Now in some ways, Jesus' invitation here to respond is his black and white invitation is challenging for us in this day and age.

And it rubs against our modern sentiment. And the reason is because we live in a world that today really values choices, don't we? You go to the supermarket and there are 17 varieties of bottled water and you can choose anyone you want in any flavor or color.

We live in a world that we value choice. But in addition to that, we also like to keep our options open, don't we? We do this with relationships. We get into a relationship but we don't want to commit too much in case there's somebody else that's waiting up there.

We do this with jobs. We do this with careers. We do this with our calendars. How many of us get invited to something and we wait until the very last minute before we decide whether we're going to go in case something else comes up?

We live in an age in which we value choice and we like to keep our options open. But in this way, Jesus really challenges us and he makes life a lot easier because his invitation to come and follow him is a binary choice.

[16 : 38] He says, you've got two options here. You can either join me in my upside down kingdom or you can choose to reject me and go your own way. But Jesus doesn't allow us to sit on the fence.

And one of the reasons is because Jesus is never meant to be admired. He's meant to be obeyed. And so his invitation is not just come and admire my teachings. It's come and obey me.

Come and follow me. Jesus is calling for a response. Later on in Matthew's gospel, he says in chapter 12, he says, whoever is not for me is against me.

Again, he gives us these two binary choices. And one author, Matthew Green, said it like this. He says, there is no comfortable middle ground here embracing most of us, kind of like the bell curve, right?

Leaving on either side either the very good or the very bad. How comfortable it would be if that were the case. No, Christianity is not about being very good or very bad or very comfortable.

[17 : 38] It's about being in God's kingdom or staying out. It is about allegiance to God or it is about rebellion. It is an awesome choice that we face. And paradoxically, the Sermon on the Mount, this is probably the one section that often gets most neglected.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is very well admired by both Christians and non-Christians alike with his gracious words and his teachings about turning the other cheek. But all that teaching, Jesus then comes to us and says, okay, you've heard my teaching.

What are you going to do with it? How are you going to respond? And yet we tend to neglect this part of the Sermon on the Mount. Now, look at how he frames these two choices here.

He says his way, the way of following Jesus, he's got three words to describe it. What does he say it is? It is, it's hard, it's narrow, and it's unpopular.

He says the way of choosing him is the hardest thing you'll ever do. It's the most life-consuming choice that you can ever make. It's not something that you can just do casually. It'll demand all of you.

[18 : 42] But then conversely, he says, the way of rejecting him, he describes as wide and open, it's easy, and he says, there are many that find themselves on that path.

Now, the question is, why? Why is it that the way of rejecting Jesus is an easy way to do it? Why is that so much easier? Well, I want to give us a couple of things to think about, and my friend, Andrew Haslam in London, helped me think about this.

First reason, maybe, why the way of rejecting Jesus is so much easier is because the chances are we are possibly already on it. We're already on that path. In other words, if you haven't already chosen Jesus, there's a good chance that you're already on the path which is wide and easy and in which everyone else finds themselves on that path.

Jesus doesn't hide the fact that he is the dividing line in all of history. He says, either you are on my side or you're not on my side. And if you haven't deliberately chosen to live for him, he says that actually the way you find yourself is that you're against him.

And this applies if you are a strong atheist against Jesus, whether you are a devoted Buddhist, whether you are just an average agnostic, or maybe even if you are a nominal or a cultural Christian, someone who maybe just grew up in a Christian culture or family and you think that by birth that makes you a Christian.

[20 : 08] But friends, Christianity is not something that you just fall into by way of your race or your culture or where you were born or what family you come into. It's a deliberate choice to follow Jesus. And so Jesus says, if you haven't made that deliberate choice, chances are you're on the path that is wide and easy and doesn't know him.

Conversely, Jesus says, his way is hard because it requires a deliberate decision, a choice to follow him. And it's a weighing up of the options and it's a choice to walk away from a whole lot of other things that might be attractive.

But Jesus says, he calls us to choose him. Here's another reason why it's easy. Because the way that is wide and easy, it's easy because it simply feels good.

And what I mean by that is that it's compatible and confirms our natural desires, which are generally self-seeking. I don't know how many of you have read that commencement address by David Foster Wallace that he gave in 2004 at Kenyon College.

Anyone familiar with David Foster Wallace's commencement address? So David Foster Wallace was a very famous American author and academic and he gave this very famous speech at Kenyon College in 2004, which kind of went viral across the internet.

[21 : 28] And he was a humanist, he wasn't a believer, he didn't believe in God at all, but he gave a very honest assessment of humanity and he actually took his own life four years later in 2008.

But listen to what he says here and I agree with his assessment. I don't agree with his solution, but listen to his assessment. He says, everything in my own immediate experience supports my deep belief that I'm the absolute center of the universe.

I'm the realist, the most vivid, the most important person in existence. We really think about this sort of natural, basic self-centeredness because it's so socially repulsive.

But it's pretty much the same for all of us. It's our default setting. It's hardwired into our boards at birth. You see what he's saying? He's saying the natural orientation of the human heart, no matter what culture you come from, is that we are self-centered.

I am the most real, most vivid, most important person in existence. And that's why Jesus says that the root which rejects his call to be the absolute center of all that you are is so much easier because it's compatible with our natural desires, the way we find ourselves, the way that we are brought up.

[22 : 40] It feels so naturally. It completely fits with the default position of our hearts. But Jesus says that conversely, the way you're following him is demanding. It asks us to day by day to lay down our lives.

It asks us to every day to surrender our self-centeredness and say, Christ, you be number one in my heart. You take the stage. You be center in my life. Here's another reason why the way of rejecting Jesus is so easy.

Because everybody else seems to be on it. As human beings, we are naturally social beings, right? We love community and to be around people, loneliness and isolation and independence is not good for us.

We are naturally social beings. And the Bible says that the reason why we are social beings is actually because we are made in the image of the God that is himself communal. He is Trinitarian. He is triune.

And therefore, because we're made in his image, something of God's nature is reflected in us and we are by nature social beings. And what that means is that we love to be part of some kind of crowd, some group of people.

[23 : 46] Even if it's not the crowd, we must be part of some crowd, right? Is that not right? I was chatting to somebody recently who, a high school student, who was saying that her friends will go shopping and buy clothes based on, and choose an item of clothing based on what response they'll think they'll get on their Instagram account.

And so as they're looking through the shops, they'll think, how will this look on me on Instagram? And how many likes or dislikes or responses will I get? We love to be part of the group.

We are social beings. I don't know if you've ever tried to swim upstream of a fast-flowing river or maybe you've been in the sea and the current has pulled you in one direction.

You've tried to swim against the current. And it's an exhausting and a scary experience. When I was a little boy, I think I was six years old, it was on Christmas Day and our family went to the beach and there was no one else on the beach because it was raining and miserable and there was this strong current pulling out and I was swimming in the sea on my own and before I knew it, the current was taking me out to sea and luckily, there were lifeguards that my dad ran and called them and the only time in my life, a lifeguard had to save me and pull me out of the water.

But if you've ever had to try and swim against the current or swim upstream of a river that's fast-flowing, it's exhausting. Even the strongest swimmers find it a tiring exercise and that's what it's like when Jesus says it's so much easier just to go with the culture, go with the crowd, go with what's popular and conversely, he says, following me is difficult because it's a call to go against what may be popular.

[25 : 31] Today, more than ever, it's socially awkward to talk about Jesus or to claim to follow him or to adhere to what he says about life and sexuality and money and community. Maybe you're a Christian here this morning and you've come to know Christ but your family doesn't want you to get baptized.

It's hard to make the decision that is hard that is not popular with either your family or culture. Here's another reason why it may be so much easier. There are spiritual forces involved keeping you on the way that is easy.

I know this may be a little bit esoteric for some of us in a very intellectual city, in a modern city like Hong Kong, but Jesus says that there are spiritual forces at work that are trying to do everything in their power to keep you on the path that is easy and wired and divorced from him.

C.S. Lewis in his brilliant book *Screwtape Letters*, he makes this point that there are evil forces involved but one of their key strategies is to keep you blinded to the reality that they are actually there dedicated to your destruction and your downfall.

And he says that they are at work trying to destroy our lives but they are helping us to not realize they are active dedicated to our downfall. And so there is a real spiritual battle that is involved and Jesus says for all these reasons this is easy.

[26 : 51] And so for these and many other reasons Jesus cuts against the grain of populism and soft appeal and he summons he even commands us he says you have got this choice before you which way are you going to live your life?

There is a way that is easy and it is wide and it is popular and it is not going to demand much from you. But I am warning you it is a dead end it leads to a way that is destructive. He says follow me follow my kingdom.

It is narrow it is hard it is demanding but it is the way that leads to life. And this is something that we sometimes struggle with because today more than in Jesus' day we struggle with the idea that there are two binary choices.

One of the supreme values of our age is tolerance and open mindedness. And so we struggle with the idea that Jesus says I am truth my way is right all other ways are not true.

And sometimes when Jesus says this is truth follow me I am truth it feels like a punch to the stomach right? But Jesus doesn't hold any punches he doesn't hold back he says to follow him is to walk in truth to reject him is to reject the truth.

[28 : 01] Jesus says that he gives us these two choices. Now for some of us we think that feels way too binary. It doesn't feel open minded enough.

How can Jesus say there is only one truth? Don't all religions end up pointing to the same God anyway? I was having a conversation with a friend of mine a few weeks ago and we were talking and this was his exact argument.

He was saying all religions look different on the surface right? Jesus says this and Muhammad says this and Guatama Buddha said that. They all look different on the surface but underlining they're all the same thing.

They all lead to the same God anyway. And so the idea is shouldn't we be more open minded? Some people say I don't believe any one religion is true to the exclusion of others.

They're all just different paths that lead to the same destination. But friends if we think about that that belief statement is as much a belief statement as much a statement of what's true in the world and what's not true as Jesus' exclusive claim to say I am the way the truth and the life.

[29 : 07] To say all religions are just different paths that end up in the same way is an equally strong statement of belief of what's true as anything else. To say it doesn't matter what you believe all beliefs just end up the same is as strong a statement as Jesus' statement to the exclusivity of Christ and the gospel.

There's a scientist Neil deGrasse Tyson he famously said recently said the great thing about science is that it's true whether you believe in it or not. But the thing is that's not only true for science that's true for anything that's truth.

Right? That's the case for all truth. Whether you believe in it or not it's simply true. And so Jesus is as honest as you can get he says follow me enter by the narrow gate follow the way that is hard the path that few have trodden because it's true.

And because what does he say here? Because it ends in life. It ends in life. Jesus says I've got the I've put these two choices before you.

Now at the end of the chapter Jesus changes analogies but he actually says the same thing. He's calling for a response except this time he calls us to consider not so much the ease or the difficulty of the choice but the outcome.

[30 : 24] What is the result of the choice that you're going to make? And so look at what he says here in verse 24. He says you've got two choices. Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rocks.

Now admittedly this wisdom looks like foolishness. Okay that's why it's an upside down kind of wisdom. It's a wisdom that doesn't look like wisdom on first appearances.

It's a wisdom that says it's more blessed to give away than to hoard. It's a wisdom that says it's more blessed to mourn than to just be jovial. It's a wisdom that says it's more blessed to be poor in spirit than not so.

So it's an upside down kind of wisdom but it's a wisdom in which Jesus says it's harder it's more difficult but it leads to life. Conversely he says though the storms come and the rains fall the typhoons ravage it those who have heard and not just heard but accepted and received my words they will stand.

their lives will be like a rock solid house on a rock solid foundation that will not that will withstand the storms of life. And contrary to this Jesus says there's another option and that's to dismiss my words and to dismiss it as a version of truth as what's true for those people but mainly not true for me.

[31 : 44] And he says that when we do that look at what happens it's both foolish and it's dangerous because in the end a life which is built on that kind of reasoning that kind of approach that kind of decision leads to great heartache great pain great agony and in the end it leads to destruction.

Now friends the obvious question is this why on earth would anybody that is engaging on a building project why on earth would you build on a shallow foundation?

Why on earth would you build on sand when you could build on rock? Why would you make the decision especially if you're building a house that you're going to live in or your children are going to live in or imagine someone's building a school and your children are going to go to the school right?

Why would anybody choose on a shallow superficial foundation? I mean that's just ridiculous. Well the reason is obvious because it's cheaper because it's easier and because at the time you think that it's good enough.

You think the foundation is going to stand. Nobody builds a house and says listen I know this is probably going to fall in the first storm that comes but let me just do it anyway. At the time it feels like the safe thing to do but one change of season one freak storm one accident comes and everything is in ruins and the consequences is not just a loss of money it's loss of life and that's Jesus' point here.

[33 : 14] He says the choices that we make in life whether consciously or not the choice that you make and especially your response to who Jesus is and his claim to be the way and the truth and the life has radical implications for our lives.

And so Jesus says I give you this choice you can't sit on the fence you can't try and have one foot in each camp which way are you going to go? the way that is wide and easy and popular or the way that is narrow and hard and demanding but it's the way that leads to life.

Now as we come towards a close maybe I shouldn't say that too soon if you look at your Bible you'll see that we skipped over two paragraphs okay look at your bulletin in verse 13 Jesus talks about this narrow gate and this narrow way and then in verse 24 he talks about these houses these two houses and in between that Jesus gives two warnings for those of us that are Christ followers or consider ourselves Christ followers to test the sincerity of our faith and to see whether in fact we are walking with Jesus whether in fact we are part of this upside down kingdom remember Jesus is constantly challenging the religious people in this day and he's constantly calling them to a sincere faith to see whether they are really walking with him or whether they are just being religious and so Jesus here calls us to examine our faith and to test the genuineness of it and he gives us two warnings of imitation faith look at the first one in verse 15 he warns against false teaching and false teachers he says in verse 15 beware of false prophets those who come to you in chief clothing but inwardly are ravenous wills they may look the part they may say the right things they may bleat like sheep but actually they are sinister and Jesus warns against false teachings and in the new testament there are two indicators of false teachings the first one is that a false teacher generally likes to tell you exactly what you want to hear so in the book of 2 Timothy the apostle Paul writes this young leader and he says

Timothy beware of the false teachers and he says these false teachers will come and they will tell people what their itching ears want to hear in other words these teachers will go to people and they will very cleverly work out what is it that you want to hear what is a message that will appeal to your ears and that will draw a crowd and then they will tailor that message to exactly what you want to hear and Timothy Paul says to Timothy the problem with this is that it will lead to a shipwrecked faith that's an amazing image isn't it imagine a ship and it smashes against the rocks or drives into an iceberg and it still looks all fine on top but underneath there is a gauging hole and it is taking in water and it is just a few hours before the ship lifts up and sinks to the bottom of the ocean and Paul writes and he says that's what happens when we listen to false teaching to teachers that will just tell us whatever our ears want to hear now friends when we think of false teaching what do we generally think of we think of prosperity gospel right people who say okay you give a thousand dollars and God will give you ten thousand dollars back right that's true but these days there is a far softer and more subtle version of the same kind of teaching it's a teaching that says

God exists to make you happy and comfortable God exists to cater to your felt needs God's existence in the world is around how to make you happy and comfortable and your convenience and the result of this kind of invitation to walk the wide and the easy path to tell us exactly what we want to hear to build our lives on a faulty foundation is that when things don't pan out the way that we expect the end is destruction and a shipwrecked faith and that's why friends at Watermark I know it may not be the most sexy thing in the world but we are committed to preaching week in and week out the Bible because we want to be a church that is not grounded on my opinions or Chris's opinions or anyone else's opinions or on what anyone wants to hear we want to know who is God and what has he said so that when the storms of life come and the challenges come our faith doesn't get shipwrecked it stands firm in the midst of the storms of life and so can I just ask you there will no doubt be a time when many of us move away out of Hong Kong to another city or maybe even in Hong Kong you move to another church when you move to another church will you ask yourself this question not just is the parking lot comfortable and convenient is the kids ministry entertaining how good looking is the worship leader will you ask yourself this question are they teaching

[38 : 20] God's word is this church rooted and founded in God's word or are they just telling me what I want to hear okay that's the first indication of false teaching the second indication is this false teaching focuses on the Christian lifestyle or Christian behavior or Christian conduct but it's disconnected from who Jesus is and his death on the cross what he did on the cross and so there may be a whole bunch of teaching which is practical wisdom how to get by in life how to make your life really work and count and how to be a successful businessman or whatever whatever else but the problem is it's not connected to who Jesus is the problem of sin why Jesus died on the cross what's wrong with the world and how Christ has come to heal and save it by his death on the cross and so all it is that teaching is practical secular humanism in a Christian religious coat of paint and friends is that ever going to call you down the difficult path is that ever going to tell you to deny yourself and to follow Jesus of course not it's going to invite you down a wide and an easy path but it's a path that leads to destruction and so Jesus says beware of false prophets those who come to you in sheep's clothing the second warning is this and we're not going to spend much time in it verse 21 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's in heaven and Jesus warns us against not just false teaching but against false assurance in other words a superstitious kind of faith that just says if I say the right things if I do the right actions if I prophesy or go to CG or say the right things that makes me a Christian and Jesus says it all comes down to do you know him do you have relationship with him do you love him now as we come to close both the sermon and the series I want us to come back to the beginning and to ask ourselves this one final question what is the purpose of the sermon on the mount what is Jesus actually trying to do in all this kind of stuff is it just practical idealism is it as Leo Tolstoy once said it's a blueprint for utopia it's kind of this practical pragmatism of how to really make life most comfortable and convenient is it as others have suggested a temporary moral system until we get to heaven friends

Jesus in the sermon on the mount shows us what life in the kingdom looks like he shows us what life is like when he is king and we've come to know him and follow him remember right in the beginning Jesus says follow me for I bring you the kingdom of heaven and he's showing us what life in the kingdom looks like what it looks like to follow him but the problem is none of us can even begin to live out this kingdom ethic unless we've entered the kingdom and the problem is that none of us can enter the kingdom on our own right here at the beginning Jesus gives us a clue how to find our way into the kingdom and to live his kingdom and the clue is this the way into the kingdom is the exact same way as the way of the kingdom and what I mean by that is this the way of the kingdom of God the way of Jesus kingdom is narrow and it's exclusive he says it's my way and it's my way only but that is the same as the way into the kingdom is equally narrow and it's equally exclusive

Jesus is me and me alone I am alone the way to truth I alone am the way to life I am alone and the way to the father Jesus is radically exclusive in his invitation to follow him but also his invitation into the kingdom Jesus didn't come to bring a religion or to conduct a system of morality and ethics he didn't come to bring a religion he came to bring a revelation he came to say this is what the kingdom of heaven is like this is what God is like this is what my way is like this is what it looks like to follow me Jesus came to bring a revelation to show us what the kingdom of God is like to show us what God is like and to show us what it looks like as we turn from ourselves and turn to him Christianity at its heart is a revelation of who God is and how we can know him it's not a religion Jesus came to bring a revelation but he also came to bring relationship he came to say follow me on this narrow path but he didn't just say walk the narrow path and I'll see you at the end he said

I'll walk this path with you in the book of Isaiah at the end in Isaiah chapter 43 there's this amazing invitation where God says to his people he says if you follow me and if you walk in my ways it'll be hard it'll be difficult it'll be demanding and then he says this he says fear not I've called you by name I'll walk this road with you he says when you pass through the waters I will be with you when the rivers rise up and they seem to overwhelm you and it feels like this way is too hard they will not overwhelm you I will be with you he says there'll be times when it feels like you're walking through the fire you'll feel all alone you'll feel like it's too demanding God I can't do this anymore he says when you walk through the fire you will not be burnt the flames will not consume you for I am the Lord your God the Holy One of Israel I am with you friends Jesus asks us to walk this narrow path it's demanding it's difficult he'll demand all of you but he says

[43 : 57] I'll walk this path with you you will not walk it alone and the ironic thing is that the other path that is wide and inviting it's popular and it feels like we won't walk it alone but in the end we find it's the most lonely place to be because we get to the end of the road and all we've got at us is ourselves and the God who made us for himself and the God who made us for relationship with him is not there Jesus says I came to bring a revelation of who God is but I came to bring a relationship I came that you may do it with me but finally he says that all this starts it starts with a rescue Christianity at its heart is about a rescue it's about God doing for us what we could not do for ourselves how so you ask by Jesus walking the narrow and the difficult path which no one else in the history of the world ever walked and no one will ever walk again Jesus walked this narrow road to Calvary not just with a cross on his back there were many that did that he walked this narrow road to Calvary with all the sins of the world on his shoulders he walked this road that nobody else will ever walk again friends

Jesus walked the narrow road his whole life never one step to one side or the other and in the end he went to the cross as if all he had ever done is walk the road to destruction in the end he died as if he had chosen the other path and he did it to open up the way for us that you and I don't have to Jesus walked the narrow road to Calvary so that you and I don't have to end up there friends Jesus walked the narrow road to destruction so that you and I can walk the narrow road that leads to life and friends Jesus didn't just endure the winds and the storms and the hail of life he endured the full wrath of God's judgment of sin poured out on his shoulders so that you and I can take refuge in him and find our home in him and in many ways it's true Jesus' invitation and his command to follow him is radically exclusive it's true he says I'm the only way the only truth the only life there is no other way to the father there's no other way to everlasting life except through me it's true that it's radically exclusive in some ways but in the other ways

Jesus' invitation is radically inclusive because he says there's nothing you need to do there's nothing you need to bring to the table except simple trust in me Jesus says whoever comes to me I will never ever ever reject Jesus' invitation is radically inclusive because it's open to anyone you can be the richest person in the world you can be the poorest person in the world you can have multiple degrees you can have no education you can be up high esteemed by society you can be on the bottom rungs of society you can be loved and esteemed by many you can be despised and rejected by all Jesus says his invitation is open to everyone whoever comes to me he says I will never ever cast out friends if the Sermon on the Mount was just another ethical teaching like every other religion then the irreligious the weak those with doubts those who don't have all their stuff together and can't behave morally are excluded but Jesus says this invitation is open to everyone it's anyone who will simply ask me to lead them anyone who will simply come and say have your way in my life

Jesus throws open the invitation and he says come and follow me I am the way to life let's come to him now let's pray I want to invite the prayer stewards to come up to the front and we are going to sing one or two songs in response and if you would like prayer for anything there will be prayer stewards at the front and I would love to invite you to come and get some prayer you can pray for anything in the world you can pray because you are having a rough week you can pray because you want to freshly surrender your life to Jesus you can come and pray because maybe for the very first time you want Jesus to be Lord maybe you want to pray because for weeks or months or years or maybe your entire life you have chosen a wide and easy path apart from Christ and today Jesus is summoning you and he is saying enter by the narrow gate choose life this day I present before you two choices life and death this day I am asking you says Jesus choose life friends if you want to choose life come and pray to Jesus come there will be prayer stewards that would love to lead you in prayer

I would love to lead you in prayer this day don't leave this place on the same way you came in come and leave this place a different road today come and let's ask Jesus to do that let's pray together heavenly father God thank you for your upside down kingdom thank you Jesus for your amazing invitation to come and find life Jesus thank you that you invite us in Isaiah 55 to come and buy living waters and to come and eat bread that gives life and to come and feast our souls on true food God where our souls and our hearts are hungry for living bread and living water you invite us you say come and buy in one sense it will cost you everything in the other sense Jesus you say it will cost us nothing Jesus this morning we want to come to you this morning Jesus we want to take up your invitation we want to we want to respond to you and say yes Lord count us in Father this morning give us faith God it's so hard to walk away from that which is popular and easy and comfortable and to make the choice to follow you God that way which will demand our all that way which will which will be difficult at times oh God give us faith where we doubt

[49 : 52] God help us God where we where we don't want to make that choice God Father where we are facing decisions that even this week we know God leads to life or away from life God help us we pray help us to choose you Father pray for some of us God that are we feel like we're straddling the fence we feel like we've got one foot on either side we try to on one sense follow you but in another sense there's this pull we want to follow ourselves oh Jesus come and help us I pray help us God to be decisive to make a decision and to choose life God open our eyes help us to see that the foundation that our life is built upon help us to see that all other choices are sinking sand that you alone Christ are the rock upon which we can stand oh God help us I pray come and call us to yourself come and have your way we pray in your powerful in your gracious in your inviting in your majestic name help us goodbye