

## 35. Your CHOICE

June 26, 2016

A pastor named Wilbur Rees wrote a poem "Three Dollars Worth of God" a few decades ago. Someone revised it. It shows the mentality of many self-prescribed religious people:

"I'd like to buy \$3.00 worth of God, please. Not enough to explore my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough for me to feel good as I do my religious duty and to get some brownie points for a rainy day from whoever God is.

I'd like to buy \$3.00 worth of God, please. Not enough to change my lifestyle, but just enough to know that I have a ticket to heaven, in case I die. I'd like to live here forever, you know? I don't want God to tell me how to live, I don't want Him to tell me stop going see sleazy 'R' rated movies, stop drinking, stop smoking, stop snorting, or stop sleeping with women whose names I don't even know. I just want a pound of the eternity in a paper sack.

I'd like to buy \$3.00 worth of God, please. No, no, not that flesh and blood one, Jesus they talk about. They say He is the only way, but that is a narrow minded religion. I will have a plastic cross on my dashboard, I will even wear it around my neck as a good luck charm.

I'd like to buy \$3.00 worth of God, please."

Religions are doomed to fail, because it is impossible for a puny finite man to reach an awesome and infinite God. Religions always leave a man with a feeling of emptiness and condemnation which is from the devil.

Religions would have us reaching out to touch God, but Christianity has God reaching out to touch us. Religion demands us to do something, but Jesus says, "Done!" There is the vast difference. And our God gives a CHOICE to make to every single human – to choose the eternal life with Him by following His way or choose the eternal death in hell by following whatever we want to do.

Jesus doesn't give us some minor moral tune-up in our life and call it good enough. He says that we need a complete overhaul according to His way. He expects us to make a choice and stick with it. In His profound logic, He gives us four sets of word pictures to help us to decide – two paths, two trees, two claims, and two builders. Your CHOICE.

### A. TWO PATHS

*Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

Look at the contrasting adjectives in these two verses: narrow and wide, few and many. It seems that the broad way is so much more popular by the majority. People think that there is safety in numbers. What a false security!

The broad path and the broad gate, these are the way of the world. The broad way where nothing must be obeyed; nothing must be believed; and not accountable to anyone will lead them to self-destruction.

*Proverbs 16:25 There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.*

The narrow way, on the other hand, leads to life. Of course, that narrow way is Jesus Christ.

*John 10:9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.*

*John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*

## **B. TWO TREES**

Nothing is more unpopular than someone laying out narrow roads for other people to follow. We don't like that. We like breathing room and personal spaces. We don't want someone crowding us. If the truth be known, we humans like to do whatever we want to do. We don't like to be told what we should do in any part of our life. Am I right?

But Jesus isn't the type to hand out questionnaires to get a popular consensus on the issues. Do you know who does? False teachers. Let's hear what Jesus says:

*Matthew 7:15-20 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.*

These false teachers outwardly appear to be just one of the flock. Inwardly, though, they are wolves. They are deceptive and dangerous. Their beauty is only fleece deep, but their brutality runs much deeper.

It is in the nature of these false prophets to deceive and deny their true character. Often they deceive even themselves, believing themselves to be sheep when in fact they are vicious wolves.

In v16 Jesus changes from the analogy of 'what a wolf wears' to 'what a tree bears.' A wolf may be able to disguise itself, but a tree cannot.

We must guard ourselves against false prophets by taking heed to their fruits. This means paying attention to many aspects of their life and ministry.

### **1) We should pay attention to the manner of living a teacher shows.**

Do they show righteousness, humility, and faithfulness in the way they live?

### **2) We should pay attention to the content of their teaching in context.**

Is it true fruit from God's Word, or is it man-centered, appealing to ears that want to be tickled?

*2 Timothy 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;*

### **3) We should pay attention to the effect of their teaching.**

Are people growing in Jesus or merely being entertained, and eventually falling away? False teachers are the henchmen of the devil. Because they make people

stumble. One more thing, do not be impressed by the sheer number of their congregation and the amount of their church or ministry budgets, because practically, the majority of the world follows the devil.

*Matthew 7:17-20 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.*

This fruit is the inevitable result of who we are. Though it may take a time for the harvest to come, eventually the good or bad fruit is evident, revealing what sort of "tree" they are.

*Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.*

### **C. TWO CLAIMS**

While Matthew 7:15-20 deals with false teachers, v21-23 deal with false followers – an equally unpopular subject:

*Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'*

Did you notice that Jesus freely claims He will be the One to whom people must stand before on that final day of judgment, and He is the One who is rightly called Lord?

The people Jesus speaks of here have impressive spiritual accomplishments. They have prophesied, cast out demons, and have done many wonders. These are wonderful things, but they mean nothing without true fellowship with Christ.

Jesus does not seem to doubt their claims of doing the miracles. He doesn't say, "You didn't really prophesy, or cast out demons, or do miracles." This leads us to understand that sometimes miracles are done through pretenders, reminding us that in the final analysis, miracle happening proves nothing. Remember, we find the devil will perform miracles during the time of tribulation in the Book of Revelation.

*Titus 1:16 They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.*

Significantly, they even did these things in the name of Jesus. Yet, they never really had a relationship of love and fellowship with Jesus, nor do they want it. These are not the people who lost their salvation. Rather, they never truly had it, how do I know? See what Jesus said to them, "I never knew you."

### **D. TWO BUILDERS**

*Matthew 7:24-29 "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27 and the rain descended, the floods*

*came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.” 28 And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, 29 for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

As Jesus concluded His magnificent sermon, He did as He so often did during His ministry – He told a story. And this story, though brief, had all the elements to make it memorable: unique personalities, identifiable situations, and lingering lessons.

There are two identical elements we must notice:

- 1) The two main people are both builders.**
- 2) It is the life situation of each builder. Both face the same storm of rain and winds and floods. Again, the storm is to be taken not literally, but metaphorically. Jesus isn't telling us how to storm proof our homes from hurricanes and tornadoes. He's telling us how to storm proof our lives.**

I don't think it is necessary for me to go over what kinds of storms in our lives we have to face. We all know and have faced a few storms in our lives already and will face more later in our lives.

Although both builders do the same work and face identical storms, there are some significant differences between them. The first builder “hears and does” the words of Jesus in v24, but the second one, though he hears the same words, “does not do them” in v26.

Interestingly, if we had seen the two houses going up at the same time, we would have thought they were identical. But the test of the storm revealed their difference. What's really important in life is not what we hear. It's what we do with what we hear.

It takes no theologian to realize that the rock-like foundation of the wise man's house was Christ Himself. That builder had turned to Him in simple faith and actively built his life on Jesus' sure and eternal principles. The foolish man, however, disregarded Christ and constructed his life on the ever-shifting, quick sands of this world's passing wisdom or their own religion.

All the religions and heresies have two common denominators:

- 1) They all have some elements of true Christian doctrines to give more credibility to their deception.**
- 2) They all deny the deity of Jesus Christ and the exclusive way of salvation through Jesus Christ.**

All the religions and heresies cannot explain with the Scripture, rather they explain away the Scripture. There is no exegetical basis for their theologies, since they have rejected the authority of the Scripture. In other words, they are apostate.

Satan's tactics haven't changed since the first deception to mankind. He still comes across to the man and woman by asking, “Did God really say?” Therefore, many will continue to look for the newest and latest spiritual things to accommodate their vacuumed quest for God, except for the One True God who will forever satisfy them. When will we ever learn that we just need to keep things simple by simply loving Jesus and following His commands from the Word of God, the Bible?

## **E. APPLICATIONS**

### **1) Only one kind of Teacher, Jesus deserves to be followed.**

Anyone can claim that they receive special revelations from God that are not in the Word of God. Please remember this, our Bible is complete, it doesn't need additional comments from some heretics.

*2 Corinthians 11:13-15 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.*

### **2) Only one kind of action command we need in Christianity – following the Lord Jesus by keeping His commandments in the Bible.**

*John 14:15 "If you love Me, keep My commandments.*

### **3) Only one kind of person can have assurance of eternal life with God.**

*John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

And it forces us to ask ourselves: Have I chosen the right way? Does my tree bear good fruit? Are the faith and salvation I claim evidenced in my life?

If the answer to these questions is, "No," you're lost. That's the simple, hard truth. And not a very pleasant one to hear. But it's better you hear it now than when you stand before the Ultimate Judge Jesus, pleading, "Lord, Lord..." and He will say, "I never knew you; depart from Me."