

THE WISE MAN

Matthew 7:1-29

Key verses: 7:13-14

"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."

Today we are studying Matthew chapter 7. It is the last chapter in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Especially Jesus teaches that the wise man walks the narrow path and builds his life on the firm rock of Christ. Let's listen to Jesus' teachings and put them into practice.

Look at verses 1-2. "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." Jesus begins by saying that we should not judge other people. Judging means to form an opinion about someone as though we are in the place of God. We are all fallen sinners. The Bible says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" and "there is no one righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:23, 3:10) Therefore, when one judges another, he judges himself as everyone is equally guilty of sin. Only God has the right to judge because only God is all knowing and perfect. When we judge others, we not only break the relationship with others; in our pride we also break our relationship with God.

Look at verses 3-4. ""Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?" Here, Jesus uses an example from his carpentry experience. Sawdust in the eye is very annoying but it is not fatal. In contrast, if we had a plank of wood in our eye I think we should be rushed to the hospital immediately as it is very serious. Logically, it makes sense that we should focus more on the plank first. However, sinful human beings tend to be biased and focus more on the minor sins of others before even the major sins in ourselves. Jesus says that we must first repent of our sins and remove the large planks from our eyes. Then we will see clearly spiritually and be able to help others repent with grace and patience, knowing that we also received forgiveness.

Look at verse 6. "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces." Here dogs and pigs refer to those who despise what is sacred and holy. Pearls refer to Christ and God's words in the Bible. As Christians, we should not judge others, but we should maintain spiritual discernment. We should share the gospel message with everyone, but when people outright reject it, we should move on and share it with others who may be more prepared to receive it. We offer Bible studies free of charge, but the value of the gift we offer is worth more than all the gold in the world. We should

struggle hard not to judge others, but at the same time we need to remember the value of the gospel and share it with those who have spiritual desire.

Look at verses 7-8. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." Here Jesus teaches the different components of prayer: asking, seeking, and knocking. Let's think about each one.

Prayer begins with asking. This means that when we have a prayer request, we must first ask God. It sounds simple, but actually it requires humility to accept the fact that our prayer request involves something which we can't handle by ourselves. We need God's help so we ask him.

Next we must seek. Sometimes it is not clear exactly how God will answer our prayer requests, so we must seek to find how God is working. Sometimes God wants to work in somebody using a way which we don't expect. So we must seek sincerely with all our hearts until we find God's wisdom and creativity to serve others.

There is a good example in the gospels of some friends who wanted to bring a paralytic man to Jesus for healing. However, so many people had gathered that the doorway was full of people and there was no way to bring the paralytic to Jesus. Instead of giving up, the friends sought another way by making an opening in the roof and lowering the man down through it. Through their persistent seeking and creativity, the man's sins were forgiven in Christ.

After seeking, comes knocking which requires the use of the feet and hands and the use of our energy to knock until the door is opened. There is a funny story in the UBF ministry in Korea. Moses Kim wanted to establish a family of God but it meant going to the bride candidate's house and asking her father for her hand in marriage. The problem was that there was a big dog with big teeth and a loud bark that sat in front of the house. Upon meeting that dog, Moses turned back shaking his head. Dr. Lee encouraged him with a story about picking an apple from a tree. If one only sits down under the tree waiting for the apple to fall into his mouth, he may wait several years to eat an apple. But if he goes to the tree, climbs up, and picks an apple, he can eat it. Then Moses got the point. He went back to the house, this time with a sausage. When the dog started to bark, he threw the sausage to the dog. While the dog was distracted, he entered the house and eventually got married. Now we pray for the raising of disciples and establishing Jesus-centered families in Oita. I believe it is also on God's heart. When we ask, seek, and knock by going to campus and sharing God's message by faith through English classes, surely the door to a historical changing work of God will be opened widely.

Look at verses 13-14. "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." Jesus warned the disciples from the beginning that the road to God's kingdom isn't an easy or popular one. At many points during our lives, we have decisions to make. It is like we are at an intersection with different roads and directions we can take. Some roads are popular and are taken by many people because they seem smooth and easy to drive on. Other roads seem to look much more bumpy with greater risk and aren't so popular. Culture and media may tell us which roads seem best. But Jesus warns that most roads lead to destruction. The road of God's way is narrow. If we drive too quickly or are busy thinking about other things, probably we'll miss the intersection altogether. But the destination of the narrow road is everlasting life with God.

Which one will we choose? This is the biggest decision anybody can make in their life as it is related to eternal destiny. Jesus challenges us to make a decision with the final goal in mind.

When I think about our ministry in Japan over the past year and a half, I see there were many challenging things. For over one year, we had no stable job. Some students came and went, taking much of our time and energies in serving. Even though we had little money, still we struggled to use what we had to support God's work in various ways. Even though Saturday and Sunday are my only days off, I use them to prepare messages and serve English classes and can't see our kids so much. When I think about Hikaru and Nobuto who don't have a father around to play with them much and teach them English my heart breaks inside. I want to be with them, but God calls me to pick up the cross of a ministry director in serving His words and work. When I think about this situation from a human point of view, it seems the broad road which is focussed on family and easy-going life is much better. However, that road won't lead to salvation. That road won't lead our children to heaven or happiness in their souls. At the end of this passage, it says that everyone was amazed at Jesus' teachings because he taught with authority. Jesus taught the wisdom of our Creator. Jesus taught the truth about life and God's kingdom. When I think about heaven, it seems too wonderful to imagine. Recently, I was happy to buy an iPhone but surely heaven will be infinitely better. Also, even though the broad road seems easier, in truth it is much harder. On the narrow path, there is forgiveness of sin, healing, meaningful work, and great hope and vision. On the narrow path, the kingdom of God is born in our hearts so we can live free from the fear of death and have genuine peace. Although the narrow path is often tough, it is the only path where God walks with us.

Jesus set the perfect example for us. Though he is the Son of God, he was born in a smelly manger. Instead of being served like a king with lots of money, he had no house, was poor, and gave everything he had to serve others and teach the word of God. His whole life was spent in exact obedience to God without any regard for the self. Jesus never took any vacation or time off because he recognized the urgency of his task. Jesus loved God before anything else so he obeyed God fully. Finally, Jesus allowed himself to be crucified on a cross for the sin of the world. Jesus bore all the humiliation and pain so

we could be saved. Jesus could have wanted to do some things for himself before the cross, but he marched the narrow path of Golgotha like a lamb headed for slaughter. In the world's eyes, Jesus seemed very weak and pitiful. But his eyes were focussed on our salvation and God's smile. Jesus was looking forward to his return to heaven to be with God and crowned as the King of kings and Lord of lords. With the hope of the glorious future kingdom burning in his heart, Jesus could walk the narrow road to the very end.

Look at verse 15. "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." While we are walking on the path toward God's kingdom, Satan tries everything he can to lead us astray. One way is through false prophets. These might be people we know or influential people in the world who seem to have great wisdom. But Jesus says that we must watch out. We must be on our guard at all times with spiritual alertness to discern between true and false prophets. Maybe you're wondering, well how can I recognize what is true and what is false in this world? Look at verse 16a. Jesus said, "By their fruit you will recognize them." People don't pick delicious grapes and figs from thornbushes and thistles. They pick them from good and healthy trees. Likewise, false prophets won't bear good fruit. They'll be like church leaders who try to attract many people and glorify themselves, sometimes even stealing the offering money. True prophets are real sheep for Jesus. They follow Jesus, listen to Jesus, and help lead others to obey and follow Jesus. They don't expect anything in return; they only hope that others will form an intimate and personal relationship with Jesus and serve God in the way that God calls them personally. A true prophet may not perform great signs. They may seem weak and unimpressive in the world's eyes. But through their life of piety and obedience to God, they will encourage others to obey God's calling for their own lives and bear beautiful, everlasting fruit for God.

Let's read verses 24-27 together. "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." Under the hot sun in Galilee, the sand becomes quite hard. So it is tempting for people to build a house on top of the sand. However, as soon as the rain or a squall comes, the sand moves and the house is shaken from its foundation. In contrast, the wise builder works hard to dig up the hard sand and lay the house's foundation down on the bedrock. That way, even though a storm comes, the house is secure on the hard rock beneath. Jesus said that we should build our lives on the rock of obedience to Jesus' words. Although the created earth will fade, Jesus' words will remain true forever. It is not enough to only hear Jesus' words. We must put them into practice. That is, we must struggle to obey even one word of God every day in our life. When we obey, we will build our lives firmly on Jesus. Then even though the storms of life hit us and we are faced with decisions and tests, we will be strong because we have deep roots.

People in Japan are familiar with the ground shaking beneath us because of earthquakes. So we don't trust the ground so much. Others try to put their trust in money and job, but in a bad economy suddenly their security is broken. Others trust in youth and good health, but everyone gets old. The only solution is to build our lives on the firm rock of Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life, now and forever.