

THE NARROW WAY

- A. Introduction: Jesus warned that the years preceding His second coming will be marked false christs, false prophets, and false gospels. We're looking to God's Word as our protection against these deceptions because the Bible reveals the genuine Christ and the true gospel. Matt 24:4-5; 11; 23-24
1. In previous lessons we've said that a universal antichrist religion is currently under development. And, even though it is fundamentally opposed to orthodox Christianity, it can seem to be Christian because it cites some Bible verses. However those verses are taken out of context, misinterpreted, and misapplied.
 - a. Recently, we've been discussing the importance of learning to read in context. We're focusing on how the historical and cultural context of the Bible helps us properly interpret individual passages.
 - b. Everything in the Bible was written by someone to someone about something. Real people wrote to other real people about real issues. These three factors set the context. Bible verses can't mean something to us that they would never have meant to the original hearers and readers.
 1. We must understand that the Bible is 50% history. As 21st century western world people, we are for the most part unfamiliar with the history and culture of the land and times in which the Bible was written. (That's one reason why good Bible teaching, as opposed to preaching, is necessary for accurate interpretation of Scripture.)
 2. Many of us approach the Bible from a 21st century western mind set. We think in terms of what does it mean to me rather than what does it say? We need to learn to think in terms of what message was the person who wrote (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) trying to communicate to his readers? II Tim 3:16-17
 2. Jesus was born into 1st century Judaism, in the land of Palestine (modern-day Israel) to people who, based on the writings of their prophets (the Old Testament), were looking for God's promised Redeemer.
 - a. Jesus came into this world to die on the Cross as a sacrifice for sin (Heb 9:26; I John 4:9-10; etc.). His three and a half year ministry leading up to the crucifixion served several purposes, one of which was to serve as interim (or in between) ministry.
 1. Jesus came to Old Covenant men and women whose lives were governed by the Law of Moses. But He was soon going to establish a New Covenant or a new relationship between God and man. Through His sacrifice of Himself on the Cross Jesus would make it possible for men and women to become sons of God through faith in Him.
 2. Much of Jesus' preaching and teaching was aimed at preparing His audiences to receive what was coming—without tipping His hand to the devil about His sacrificial death (I Cor 2:7-8) and without giving them more information than they could take in at that point.
 - b. Although there is a sense in which Jesus' words are timeless and universal, we must remember that He was speaking to real people and aiming to help them right then.
 1. Jesus interacted with real people who had issues, concerns, hopes, dreams—just like each of us. The Lord died for them just as truly as He died for us. None of them have ceased to exist. All are somewhere right now based on how they responded to Jesus and His gospel.
 2. Jesus walked and talked with these people, laughed and cried with them, loved them, and cared for them—just as He would if He were here with us today. His words were meant to communicate something to them—and that historical, cultural reality sets the context.
 3. Prior to the Cross and His sacrifice for sin, Jesus was not interacting with, speaking to, or speaking about Christians because none existed yet. Before proceeding, I need to make one point very clear.
 - a. The fact that Jesus wasn't speaking to or about Christians doesn't mean that His words don't apply to us or that we as Christians can't learn from His words.
 1. You may recall that earlier in the year we did several lessons about the relationship between law, works, and grace. We talked about the fact that there is an out of balance grace message

that has affected parts of the church.

2. It teaches that none of Jesus' commands apply to us because He was speaking to Old Covenant men. Therefore, any demands He made on people in terms of behavior was "law" and we're not under "law", we're under grace. Therefore we don't have to obey or do what Jesus said.
 - b. A full discussion of this requires an entire lesson, but simply put—the idea that Jesus' words don't apply to us today is incorrect. Yes, some of the particulars in His statements were aimed at specific circumstances and issues in that day and may not apply to us. But the spirit behind His words does.
 - c. In these recent lessons, I am in no way saying that we should disregard Jesus' words. I'm saying we need to consider the cultural and historical context so that we can rightly interpret the Scriptures.
4. For several weeks we've been examining the Sermon on the Mount because it is the source of a number of verses that are taken out of their historical and cultural context, misinterpreted, and misapplied—not just by unbelievers but also by sincere Christians. Let's briefly review.
- a. Jesus came to men and women who were expecting Him to establish the kingdom of God on earth. That's why He had people's attention with His message: Repent because the kingdom of Heaven (God) is at hand. Matt 4:17; Mark 1:14-15
 - b. Based on the writings of their prophets Jesus' audience was aware that they needed righteousness to enter God's kingdom. But everything they knew about it came from their religious leaders, the Pharisees and scribes, who preached and practiced a false concept of righteousness.
 1. The Pharisees and scribes had an external righteousness. They looked holy and virtuous. But, according to Jesus, inwardly they were full of hypocrisy and sin. Matt 23:28
 2. They added their traditions to the Law of God—rules and regulations which they meticulously kept. In doing so, they missed the spirit behind the Law—love God and love your fellow man.
 - c. Most of the Sermon on the Mount is an elaboration of one key statement—unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees and scribes, you will not enter the kingdom of Heaven. Matt 5:20
 1. Jesus challenged the Pharisees' misinterpretation of the Law of Moses (God's expression of His Law under the Old Covenant) and presented the true interpretation—His. Matt 5:21-48
 2. Jesus contrasted the false righteousness of the Pharisees with true righteous living. Matt 6:1-34
 - A. The Pharisees lived their lives to be seen of and impress men. But, according to Jesus, true righteousness lives for the glory of God, in submission to and dependence on Him.
 - B. Jesus said that true righteousness is not external performance. True righteousness comes from the heart. The Law of God written on a man's heart expresses itself through loving God and loving your fellow man.
 - C. Jesus exhorted His audiences to live with the awareness that they have a Father in Heaven who loves and cares for them.
 3. Jesus also addressed how to treat others in the light of how God treats His sons. God the Father has dealt with you in mercy and grace—how can you do any less? Matt 7:1-12
 4. Through His teaching Jesus made it clear that sons of God express their Father by the way they treat people, revealing that God is the standard of righteousness needed for the kingdom.
- B. Matt 7:13-27—We are ready to examine the last major section of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has finished His teaching about the righteousness needed for the kingdom, and He now challenges His listeners to enter at the strait gate and the narrow way to life—or the true way into the kingdom.
1. v13-14—Remember the context. Jesus was talking to Old Covenant men and women who want to know how to get into the kingdom of God. He tells them to enter at the strait gate or narrow way, and warns them that the gate and way to destruction is broad.
 - a. The Greek word translated strait means narrow. Narrow means hemmed in like a mountain gorge. In His example Jesus was probably alluding to the distinction between public or broad ways (streets)

- and narrow private ways. Public ways were 24 feet wide and private ways were 6 feet wide.
- b. According to Jesus the way into the kingdom is narrow. His audience will soon find out that the way is narrow because there's only one way in—through Him. Few find the way because few seek it (Him). Remember that Jesus had the Pharisees in mind as He taught.
 - c. Remember also that Jesus wasn't teaching them "how to get saved" as we would understand the phrase. Jesus was preparing them to receive that and other teachings in the future (post-Cross).
2. v15-20—Jesus warned His listeners to beware of false prophets. When Jesus referred to false prophets (or false spokesmen for God), He wasn't talking about wild-eyed heretics. He was talking about hypocrites. (Hypocrite was His main charge against the Pharisees.)
 - a. In sheep's clothing means that they look right, their doctrine sounds right and their conduct is not outrageously wrong. If they looked like wolves you wouldn't need a warning about them.
 - b. At one point in His ministry Jesus actually said: Because the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat, do what they teach in regard to the Law, but don't do what they do. Matt 23:1-3
 1. But Jesus knew that the Pharisees were just outside the gate, so to speak, and would try to steer the multitudes away from Him and keep them out of the kingdom.
 - A. Remember, the Pharisees threatened to and did excommunicate anyone who professed that Jesus was the Messiah. John 9:22; 34; John 12:42
 - B. Remember that the first persecutions against Christians after the resurrection will come from the religious authorities. Acts 4:17-18; Acts 5:17-18; Acts 7:54-60; Acts 8:1; etc.
 2. Jesus will later say to the Pharisees, "Hypocrites! For you won't let others enter the Kingdom of Heaven, and you won't go in yourselves...For you cross land and sea to make one convert and then you turn him into twice the son of hell as you yourselves are" (Matt 23:13-15, NLT).
 - c. Jesus next told His audience that they will recognize these false prophets who look but aren't right by their fruit. Fruits in Scripture and in Jewish phraseology meant works of any kind.
 1. It was said by the Jews that "a man's works are the tongue of his heart and tell honestly whether he is inwardly corrupt or pure."
 2. The Word of God is very clear that a profession of godliness without a life of godliness or fruit is hypocrisy. That was the Pharisees.
 - d. Jesus repeatedly said to the Pharisees that trees which doesn't bring forth fruit will be cut down. This theme began in the Old Testament and John the Baptist continued it. Isa 5:1-7; Matt 3:10
 1. Trees with the appearance of fruit but no actual fruit occurred occasionally in Israel and were known as hypocrite trees. Matt 21:19
 2. Trees without fruit referred to the Pharisees and all in the nation of Israel who did not respond to the message of the kingdom. Luke 13:6-9; Matt 21:33-46; John 15:1-6
 3. v21-23—Based on this next section of the sermon, I've had more than one sincere Christian express to me their fear when they see Jesus face to face, He will tell them to depart from Him—I don't know you. This is a prime example of the importance of reading verses in their historical and cultural context.
 - a. Jesus was not doing a teaching on who is saved and who isn't, who is born again and who isn't. He is still contrasting false righteousness and true righteousness—with the Pharisees in mind.
 1. The Pharisees called on God. The Pharisees did works in the name of the Lord. They cast out devils in the name of the Lord. Yet they didn't know the Lord.
 2. A quick side note: How is it possible that Old Covenant men were able to cast out devils without the name of Jesus? They couldn't. However, we know from the historical record that 1st century Jews had an interest in exorcisms.
 - A. Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote about Jews who claimed to cast out devils. They believed that King Solomon had the wisdom to do it so they did it in his name.
 - B. Their practices seem to have been mostly incantation and magic tricks. The apostle Luke

wrote about the seven sons of Sceva who were wandering exorcists. Acts 19:13-14

- b. As we said earlier in this lesson, Jesus interacted with real people, including the Pharisees. All of them are somewhere right now based on their response to Jesus before they drew their last breath.
 1. There will come a day when all the Pharisees and scribes who rejected Jesus and refused to did acknowledge His resurrection will stand before Him again in that day, the day of judgment (a topic for another time).
 - A. For those who died without Jesus, the purpose of that day will be to show clearly why it is right and just that they be forever separated from Him (Rev 20:11-15). At that time Jesus will say to them, Depart from Me, I never knew you, you workers of iniquity.
 - B. Never knew you means “I never approved of you, being in a particular relationship to you.” Remember, one of Jesus’ charges against the Pharisees was that outwardly they appeared righteous, but inwardly, they were full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Matt 23:28
 2. Jesus did not have Joe Christian (who’s doing his best to live for God but fails from time to time) in mind. Jesus was exposing the false righteousness of the Pharisees—for their good and for the good of the people. They professed to know the will of God (the Law) but did not do it. Matt 21:28-31
 4. v24-27—Jesus concluded His sermon with another therefore statement. Based on what I’ve said, what I am about to say is so. Then, using the example of two houses that encounter a storm, Jesus told His audience that the one who hears and does His sayings is like a man who builds his house on a rock.
 - a. This would have been a familiar analogy to His audience. The rabbis had several parables about a man who studies the Law, maintains good works, and builds an immovable house. Jesus may have had those in mind as He spoke but He also had the Pharisees in mind. They heard but didn’t do the Law (will) of God, and their house will be destroyed.
 - b. Jesus has just said the one who does the will of His Father will enter the kingdom. Now, He tells them the one who hears and does My word builds on a firm foundation. Notice that Jesus put His sayings on the same level as doing the will of the Father.
 1. Notice also the position that Jesus gave Himself as He spoke: He called Himself Lord (v21-22). The will of God is His will because He is God. His interpretation of the Law and true righteousness is accurate because He is God.
 2. Jesus ended His teaching by telling His audience that if you hear and do my sayings you won’t be moved from the narrow way by false prophets with bad fruit. You will enter the kingdom.
- C. Conclusion: In v28-29 we see the reaction of the people to Jesus’ words. He has delivered an astonishing teaching, teaching them, not as the scribes (Pharisees is found in many manuscripts), but with authority.
1. Scribes never said anything original. They constantly quoted ancient rabbis and authorities. Jesus did not say: So and so has said, but rather—I say. It was original thought and manner. He spoke with certainty and confidence. He claimed authority for Himself and His teaching.
 2. Through His teaching Jesus has shaken the religious foundation of every person in His audience. And He has laid a new foundation in preparation for the changes ahead in the next few years.
 - a. He introduced them to the concept of an inward righteousness as He spoke of motives, mercy, humility, love for God and your fellow man, in preparation for the coming kingdom within.
 - b. He introduced the concept of God as their Father and them as children of God, in preparation for the true righteousness based on relationship with the God Father through the new birth.
 - c. He presented Himself as the Lord whose will must be followed to enter the kingdom, in preparation for the fact that He is the one and only way into the kingdom.
 3. Jesus’ sermon shows the importance of historical and cultural context when we interpret Scripture. Lots more next week!!