

This week we'll finish the Sermon on the Mount. Our Lord has taught us many things about our faith in this sermon, all of which he brings together with his illustrations of Gates, Fruit, and Houses. We're going to talk about these things and about what it all has to do with our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

MATTHEW 7:13-29

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. ¹⁴ For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

¹⁵ "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they? ¹⁷ So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ So then, you will know them by their fruits.

²¹ "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. ²² Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

²⁴ "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and *yet* it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."

²⁸When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; ²⁹for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as their scribes.

The Gospel this morning with all of its images and illustrations is about our walk with Jesus. We could spend hours talking about this Scripture. But I'll keep it simple, focusing on three of the metaphors our Lord uses: Gates, Fruit, and Houses.

About the Gates, Jesus said, **Matthew 7:13-14, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. ¹⁴For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."**

I'm thinking about airport security: Remember the good old days when you could barrel through security carrying oversize bags, praying they would fit into the overhead compartments, slinging purses, backpacks, and briefcases over our shoulders, and carrying all kinds of food and drink? The gates were wide and easy; insecure, yes, but wide and easy.

But the way has become "**narrow.**" TSA is a household word which immediately provokes feelings of contempt and frustration. But this "**narrow gate**" has provided a sense of security and confidence too.

With his illustration Jesus wants us to understand that the way of the world is indeed easy; and who doesn't like easy? But that easy way will lead us to a nasty end. But his way, the narrow way, the Jesus way, is the way that leads to a fullness of life.

The second metaphor is Fruit. Jesus said, **Matthew 7:15-20, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they? ¹⁷So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰So then, you will know them by their fruits."**

Jesus warned us about false prophets, false teachers, pointing us to the outcomes – the fruit – of their teachings. This is good, for it means you don't have to be a theologian trained in the intricacies of doctrine to spot a phony. For example, 15-years ago I met Pastor Homero Cano, whom you met a couple of weeks ago. I knew he was the real deal almost immediately, for everything he did and talked about was centered on bringing people to Christ and making disciples, and he had a track record.

Jesus got the attention of his listeners when he said, **Matthew 7:21-23**, “**Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.**”²² **Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’**²³ **And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’”**

Jesus was saying there will even be exorcists and miracle workers who claim to be Christian's who will go to hell! But why? I'm sure they themselves could tell you why, for they know in the hearts whom they serve. But the key for you and me is that they did not bear fruit in their lives and ministries.

So when you listen to a preacher or Bible teacher on the radio or watch a program on TV, ask yourself, what's their fruit? Has anything good come from this ministry? That's the test the Lord wants us to use to measure Christian teachings. Last week we studied Jesus' command, “**love others as you love yourself.**” Let's call this the “fruit barometer.” How does the preacher measure up? What fruit does his ministry bear?

Finally, Jesus finished his teaching with this metaphor: Houses. He said, **Matthew 7:24-27**, “**Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.**”²⁵ **And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.**²⁶ **Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.**²⁷ **The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”**

The usual way to build a house is to first choose a property and then to build the structure. There are exceptions, such as trailers. You purchase a double-wide, and then you find a suitable place to plant it. That works for physical housing, but it's unsuitable for how we should build our spiritual abode.

To be spiritual but not religious is the buzzword today, which means a person cobbles together a grab bag of spiritual things and creates a spirituality which suits him. Maybe he has a crystal, and he likes a little Buddha too. A crucifix is a nice addition, and how about some horse feathers!

This is American spiritism. But to whom do you turn when you lose a loved one? Jesus! To whom do you pray when you're lonely and sad? Jesus! When you're tired and frustrated, who beckons you with the words, **"Come to me all ye who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest?" (Matthew 11:28)** Jesus!

Jesus is our rock. Jesus is the foundation on which we build our lives. He said, **"everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock."** This is the end of the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus was pointing back to everything he had been saying when he said, **"These words of mine."**

Jesus told us to love our enemies, to not commit adultery in our hearts, and to give to everyone who asks. He told us to pray for humility and to love others as we love ourselves. Jesus told us to do so many things he made our ears ring. And now he's telling us to build our lives accordingly.

Gates, Fruit, and Houses: This week let us strive to follow Jesus through the **"narrow gate,"** to bear **"good fruit"** in our lives, and to build our spiritual **"houses"** on the foundation of his teachings.

This week let us pray to the Lord that he would reveal our weaknesses, and that he would give us the power to overcome them.

And this week let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.