

The Big Decision, Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus Lifestyle 16, October 10th 2021
Joshua 24:1-24, Matthew 7:13-14.

Father send your Holy Spirit, to teach us. As we dive into the Bible would you awaken our hearts, expand our minds and shape my identities and lives today. We want to live a Jesus shaped life ... Amen.

Whose disciple are you? Honestly?

It is striking to think – you, me, everyone is someone’s disciple.

We learned how to live from someone.

We are someone’s disciple, in fact probably, we are the disciple of ‘somebodies’.

We are the disciples of our parents or other family members closed related to us. Often this has been good, but in some cases, tragically, it has not been a good experience. We are disciples of others – teachers, our peers, our friends. We can even become the disciples of public figures, whether musicians, writers, other celebrities. They communicate how life is, and we absorb it, their thinking or ideas.

It is important to reflect – whose disciples have we been, consciously or unconsciously?

And to ask ourselves – what was the results of all that.

Jesus said: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” The last words, Matthew wants us to hear from Jesus, as he finishes his gospel.

Jesus’ assumption. We will live our lives as his students. That we will be his disciples. We will obey everything he has commanded. And we would teach others to do the same. ‘Disciples making disciples making disciples’ as someone said.

In these final words of Jesus in his sermon, V13-27, he is basically saying : you have heard it, now just do it!

Joshua puts it yet another way “choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15).

Jesus now he says it is decision time.

The Big Decision

One of the biggest decisions many of us face in our lives, will be who we are going to marry. Perhaps you remember when you asked your spouse or they asked you to marry them... A decision which would affect the whole shape and course of the rest of your life.

When I asked Jolanda to marry me – in November 2004 – but it was a week after I had planned to do it! That is a story in itself! In very short, we had just been on a Church Youth Camp, we returned and that Sunday evening was my plan to ask her to marry me. But then, after getting back, we had a call about a member of the church in need of help, so off we went. By the time we got back, we were tired, and it didn't seem the right time! So I decided to wait to the following weekend...

fortunately I could ask her
and even more fortunately she said yes!

Jesus is asking us to make an even more important decision.

It is more important than who we will marry or what job we will do. The decision we will make will affect not only the rest of our lives – the gospel is about Christian discipleship – it will affect our whole eternity – the gospel is about eternal life.

We have two alternatives Jesus says: to follow him, or not to follow him.

1. The radical life.

Two ways to live. A broad road. A narrow road.

The Greek word for 'broad' means 'spacious, roomy'. So no boundaries.

Live as you like without having to keep to the standards Jesus has been setting out. So you can be proud, dishonest, manipulative, lustful, have sex with whoever you want, you can hate your enemies. You can keep all your money, you can criticize all you want.

The other road, Jesus said is 'narrow'. In the original language it means 'restricted, confined, compressed.' There are boundaries here. This is the Jesus shaped life.

A road of life where no unrighteous anger is allowed, no sex outside of marriage, no hatred.

You give, pray, fast without wanting people's approval.

You put your security into seek first the kingdom, and not in wealth.

It is a road, where we are to "in everything to do to others what you would have them do to you."

To live a life of forgiveness, non retaliation, praying for your enemies, this is counter-cultural.

To live in this way, is the beautiful life, liberating, adventurous, attractive and radical.

But it is not easy. We can be mocked as a Christian. We know listening to his words, that to live this Jesus shaped life, is virtually impossible – in our own strength.

But the One who teaches knows our human weakness and he knows the resources of the kingdom, available to us. He knows the power of the Holy Spirit.

On this road, we do not go alone – he is with us to the end of the age. As the Liverpool Football club anthem goes, ‘You will never walk alone.’

2. The long view

Jesus talks of two destinations. The broad road, “leads to destruction.” The narrow road, “leads to life.”

Years ago, there was a tragic accident on the Italian Riviera. A young man was driving his sports car along a road near the sea. All along that road there were warning signs that the road was not yet completed and no one should be on that road. But he continued along it, at great speed, and tragically he went over the cliff and killed himself. Gumbel, p.217.

Jesus did not threaten his listeners. He warned them. There is a big difference isn’t there? A threat we give to people we do not like. We warn people we love. Jesus is warning us.

He warns us that life on the broad road, which might seem harmless, doesn’t hurt anyone, will hurt us, it actually leads to destruction. A life full of pride, deep rooted vengeful anger, greed, unforgiveness, a self centred life, and all the other things Jesus has been speaking about will destroy us and quite possibly others.

Often it has been said that Jesus is always loving, and it is the church which has created all these words about judgement or the need to make choices.

Yet here Jesus says it – he warns us about our choices. Again, in John 3. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in Him shall not *perish* but have *eternal life*. He warns – there are choices, and not all choices are right.

Jesus tells us that there is a narrow road which leads to life. There are two Greek words for life’ One means ‘earthly biological life.’ The other – which is used here – is about ‘life in the physical sense’ but also ‘the supernatural life belonging to God and Christ which the believers will receive in the future but which they also enjoy here and now.’ It is a word used which our bibles often translate ‘eternal life’ .

This eternal life is only made possible because Jesus died on the cross for us, so that we might know God. Jesus defined eternal life as this: “Now this eternal life, that they may know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” John 17:3.

Jesus in John 10:7-10 declares 'I am the gate' and he goes on to say: 'whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out and find pasture. I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.' Eternal Life, salvation, but also life now, as disciples, as we follow.

When Mother Teresa was interviewed, before she died. The final question was 'you've recently celebrated your eighty fourth birthday? Are you at all afraid of dying?'

She replied: 'How can I be ... Dying is going home to God. ... I have never been afraid. No, on the contrary I look forward to it.'

She set out on that narrow road, and the religious order she started, grew to have houses throughout the world in over 137 countries. They helped give homes to children, they helped people with TB, the mentally ill, the sick, and the dying. She and her fellow sisters, took the narrow road and it brought life to many in this world, and it was a road which led her and the others to eternal life.

3. The Few

Jesus says there are two groups on the road. Many on the broad road. On the narrow road, there are a few.

We could think – such a large crowd on the broad road – if everyone thinks it, it must be okay. GK Chesterton said: 'Right is right – even if nobody does it. Wrong is wrong – even if everybody is wrong about it.' Gumbel, p.219.

Jesus contrasts the 'many', with the 'few' on the narrow.

But the 'few' are not as few as that world makes us think.

Today, if the world was a village of 100 people, 33 would claim to be Christians.

In Europe, Christianity is on retreat in many places, but for example in China it is growing incredibly.

The Cultural Revolution in China from 1966 to 76 - was a deadly attack on all religions. Fifty years later, around 100 million Chinese have joined the Church, the greatest turning to the Christian faith in history (so far).

Ron Boyd-MacMillan, of Open Doors, shared in January this year - that the reason the Chinese Communist Party, under President Xi leadership, persecutes Christians is because they fear that the church will grow stronger in numbers.

"We think the evidence as to why the Chinese Church is so targeted, is that the leaders are scared of the size of the Church, and the growth of the Church," he noted.

"And if it grows at the rate that it has done since 1980, and that's about between 7 [percent] and 8 percent a year, then you're looking at a group of people that will be 300 million strong, nearly by 2030."

“And, you know, the Chinese leadership, they really do long term planning. I mean, their economic plan goes to 2049, so this bothers them. Because I think if the Church continues to grow like that, then they'll have to share power.”

Yet we know in Europe, we – Christians are in the minority. We can feel alone. We may be the only Christian in our workplace, the only Christian among our family, or in our street. That can be difficult – it is hard to feel alone especially with peer pressure. That is where church community, life groups, worship all become so important. To encourage us, to build us up, to strengthen us, to comfort us, as we walk that narrow road as one of the Few.

4. The life of adventure.

GK Chesterton called the Christian life the ‘whirling adventure.’ Jesus shares two entrances. One entrance is wide. One entrance is small. How do I get in?

On the broad road, there is an easy access through a wide gate.

On the other hand, the entrance to the narrow road, is a narrow one. There is only one way in and that is by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. To repent, believe, follow.

We have to turn our back on everything we know to be wrong. That is not all that easy. The longer you have been on the wrong road, the harder it is to admit and to change, although it is never too late to do so.

AN Wilson an author and journalist in the UK – he was known for many years for being anti-religious. But he wrote, in a popular newspaper in 2009.

“For much of my life, I, too, have been one of those who did not believe. It was in my young manhood that I began to wonder how much of the Easter story I accepted, and in my 30s I lost any religious belief whatsoever.

I began to rail against Christianity, and wrote a book, entitled Jesus, which endeavoured to establish that he had been no more than a messianic prophet who had well and truly failed, and died.

Like most educated people in Britain and Northern Europe (I was born in 1950), I have grown up in a culture that is overwhelmingly secular and anti-religious. The universities, broadcasters and media generally are not merely non-religious, they are positively anti.

To my shame, I believe it was this that made me lose faith and heart in my youth. It felt so uncool to be religious. With the mentality of a child in the playground, I felt at some visceral level that being religious was unsexy, like having spots or wearing glasses.

The vast majority of media pundits and intelligentsia in Britain are unbelievers, many of them quite fervent in their hatred of religion itself.

For ten or 15 of my middle years, I, too, was one of the mockers. But, as time passed, I found myself going back to church, although at first only as a fellow traveller with the believers, not as one who shared the faith that Jesus had truly risen from the grave. Some time over the past five or six years – I could not tell you exactly when – I found that I had changed.

But there is more to it than that. My belief has come about in large measure because of the lives and examples of people I have known – not the famous, not saints, but friends and relations who have lived, and faced death, in the light of the Resurrection story, or in the quiet acceptance that they have a future after they die. The Easter story answers their questions about the spiritual aspects of humanity. It changes people's lives ...

That, too, is why I now believe in it.

Easter confronts us with a historical event set in time.

The Resurrection ... is the ultimate key to who we are. But an even stronger argument is the way that Christian faith transforms individual lives..."

Full interview - <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1169145/Religion-hatred-Why-longer-cowed-secular-zealots.html>

On the narrow road, access is hard, because the gate is small. We can only enter by faith in Jesus Christ.

This is not about doctrinally being correct. It is about obedience. We know this is true, for many people may not know or understand the correct doctrines, yet they place their full faith in him. We know others who may be doctrinally correct, yet their hearts have never submitted to Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Jesus is saying that everyone is on one of two roads. We cannot have a foot on each road. There is no middle road, no third gate, no neutral group. If we are on the broad road, there is nothing we need to do to stay on it. But if we want to get off it, we need to enter the narrow gate through repenting and putting our faith in Jesus Christ, and then choosing to live as his disciple . We need his forgiveness and we need his Spirit to help us.

Conclusion.

As we enter through the narrow gate,
we find that although there may not be huge numbers on the road of life,
we are not alone, we are part of a Christian family,
a worldwide body represented in every country
of the world.

And most importantly of all, we find Jesus Christ Himself goes along with us,
as we make the big decision to be his disciple.

“Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness” said Joshua.
But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you
will serve. But as for me and my household we will serve the Lord.”

Lord Jesus, I fix my eyes on you,
I am sorry for the things I have done in my life. Please forgive me.
I now turn from everything that I know is wrong.
Thank you that you died on the cross for me, so that I could be forgiven, set free and have life.
Thank you that you offer me forgiveness and the gift of your Spirit. I now receive that gift.
Please come into my life by your Holy Spirit to be with me forever.
Today I choose whom I will serve – I choose you Jesus.
Help me to walk the narrow road to life.
Thank you Lord Jesus.
Amen.