

# Deciding for Jesus

by Dick Woodward

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*Dick Woodward's sermon emphasizes the importance of authentic discipleship and the need to respond to Jesus' invitation to be part of the solution in a world filled with challenges.*

**Duration:** 23:40

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:13-16, Matthew 7:13, Matthew 7:21-27

**Topics:** "Decision"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of not just talking about Christianity, but actually living it out. He highlights that Jesus was not looking for people who could lecture or debate theology, but rather those who would understand, apply, and obey His teachings. The speaker also discusses the challenge of two men sitting in a pew, asking the audience to reflect on which type of person they are - one who is part of the solution or part of the problem. The sermon concludes with a poem that encourages people to continue doing good and persevering, even in the face of opposition.

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## Transcript

Have you ever received a special invitation? Well today, in our last lesson in our special series on the Sermon on the Mount here in the Mini-Bible College, we will hear the invitation that Jesus Christ gave His disciples and what He gives us. We are so glad that you have chosen to join us for this study. Our prayer is that you will accept the invitation.

Now, here is our teacher. In this study, we come to our final study session of this great teaching called the Sermon on the Mount. We have come to the end of the teaching, which will be in the form of an invitation.

We have seen that in chapter 7, Jesus is bringing things to a verdict, and beginning at verse 13, He will do that by giving an invitation. Remember when we had our first study about this great teaching, we pointed out how the teaching was going to end. The teaching began with Jesus challenging some people who at first were part of a multitude of people with all kinds of problems to whom He was ministering.

He invited some people out of that multitude to join Him on the mountaintop where He gave all this teaching. We said previously that when Jesus had that retreat and session on the mountaintop, He had divided the multitude into two groups. At the bottom of the mountain were the people who were still part of the problem and who perhaps would always be part of the problem.

But on the mountaintop with Jesus were the people who were being instructed in how to be part of the solution and part of the answer to the problems down at the bottom of the mountain. So the context and the strategy of the Sermon on the Mount teaching, which we call the first Christian retreat, presented us with this question. Are you part of the problem or part of the answer and part of the solution? Are you part of the answer of Jesus or are you what I call a question mark? Meaning that you are still searching and you still have no answers of your own.

Where are you? Are you at the bottom or on the top of the mountain? The teaching is given to people on the top of the mountain. So if you answered that first question by saying that by the grace of God you want to be on the mountaintop with Jesus, then you do not want to be part of the problem. You don't want to be another question mark.

You want to be part of the solution and part of the answer. You are a professed believer in Jesus, a follower of his, and you want to be part of his solution and part of his answer. If you answered the question that way at the beginning, then all the teaching in Matthew chapters five, six, and seven is addressed to you.

At the conclusion of the teaching, you and I who profess to be followers of Jesus, to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, who want to be part of the answer and part of his solution, are faced with an awesome invitation. The thrust of this concluding invitation is this. What kind of a solution are you? What kind of an answer are you? What kind of a disciple are you? This is an invitation given to disciples.

It's not really an invitation for salvation. It's not really given to a mixed multitude where some are believers and some are not. All of the people who heard this invitation professed to be believers, to be followers of Jesus.

The thrust of the invitation is not whether you are saved or lost or whether you are a believer or an unbeliever, although it is often used that way. The thrust of this invitation, in my opinion, is what kind of a solution are you? What kind of a disciple are you? There are two possibilities. Three times in this invitation, Jesus will say that there are two kinds of professing disciples.

He will say that there are the many and the few. The many think there's an easy way to be a solution, to be an answer, to be salt and light, but they don't ever become solutions or answers. They are not really salt and light.

They only profess to be. If you watch what happens to the many who follow the lines of least resistance, who think that there's an easy way to be part of Jesus' answer and solution, then I think you will decide that you don't want to be one of the many. But then there are the few.

There's another kind of disciple. The few know that there is no easy way. The many believe that it starts with a wide gate, which is followed by a broad level road, the road that funnels down to destruction.

Jesus is saying many are traveling that road who profess to be my disciples, but then there are the few. They know that the gate is small and that the road that follows that gate is narrow, difficult and disciplined, but it leads to life. Only a few are finding it.

The clear challenge in verses 13 and 14 is simply this. Are you one of the many or one of the few? What kind of a disciple are you? Here's the invitation. 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, because narrow is the gate and

difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

That's found in Matthew chapter 7 verses 13 through 14. The next part of the invitation is found in verses 15 through 20, and the thrust of this paragraph is whether you are false or true. Nobody needed to tell Jesus that there were going to be a lot of professing disciples who were not really true disciples.

I've always been amazed at how people think that it's their duty to tell us pastors that there's a lot of hypocrites in the church. As a pastor, I have called on people in their homes who would say, there are too many hypocrites in your church, pastor. That's why I'm not interested in the church.

And they proceed to tell me about the hypocrites in the church. I feel like saying to people like that, listen, I'm an expert on that subject. Nobody knows about the hypocrites in the church better than the pastors do.

We know that not everybody who professes to be a follower of Jesus is a follower of Christ, and Jesus knew that. In this part of the invitation, Jesus is saying, here are two possibilities. You can be a real disciple, or you can be a fake one.

Here again he is asking, what kind of a disciple are you? It is not addressed to the mixed multitude. It is addressed to professing believers, people in the church. That's the kind of invitation this is.

Listen to the way this one reads, beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Here again, we must ask questions.

Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? 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. Jesus is giving us a profile of the church, and he is not naive. He knows what the church is going to be like.

If you study church history, it can be a challenge to your faith. There are periods of church history that are so dark, they can disillusion you. When you read about things like the Inquisitions and some of the other sinful practices within the church throughout church history, you wonder as you read them, how could they have ever come to that? How could anyone have done things like that in the name of Jesus Christ and claimed to be his church? Well, this is not news to Jesus.

The Christ who was and the Christ who is is not disillusioned about that. He told us at the beginning that it was going to be just like that. He said that there is going to be false and there is going to be the true, and so the challenge is this.

Two people in a pew. Which one are you? Are you for real? By the grace of God, are you for real? Or are you a phony? The Scriptures tells us in a lot of places, like 2 Corinthians 13, verse 5. Examine yourself and see whether or not you are in the faith. Prove yourselves.

Know yourselves. After all, you could be counterfeits. All of us are exhorted in the Scripture to examine ourselves.

Are we real disciples of Jesus by the grace of God? By his grace do we have the reality of Christ within us, or do we have the form of godliness and deny the power thereof? Are we for real by the grace of God? That's the challenge that each of us faces continuously. Being the realist that he was, Jesus gives this

awesome teaching. You don't pick grapes from thorn bushes and you don't pick figs from thistles.

Here's a law. This again, the natural law in the spiritual world. Every good tree bears good fruit.

Bad trees bear bad fruit. Here's the statement even more emphatically. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit.

Isn't that an interesting statement? By the grace of God, by the Christ who lives in you, if he has converted you, if he has regenerated you, then you are a new creation because he has done the miracle of the new birth within you. In that sense, you are for real. Not because of your own efforts or your own goodness, but because of his efforts and his goodness.

Therefore, if the miracle is in you and you are a good tree as a result, you cannot bear bad fruit. Is that not a wonderful promise? In the same way a bad tree cannot bear good fruit, you cannot fake it. I have heard people actually suggest this little slogan, fake it till you make it.

That may work in some aspects of life, but I don't believe that will work in the church life of Jesus Christ. A lot of people in the church, I believe, have adopted that idea, fake it till you make it. Some of them never seem to make it.

But here is realism. This is down-to-earth realism. There are the two possibilities, the good tree and the bad tree.

Sooner or later you will know by the fruit they produce. And here is the great law. Good trees cannot bear bad fruit.

Likewise, bad trees cannot bear good fruit. So ultimately you are going to know what kind of tree you are and what kind of trees they are by the fruit. Then you have this teaching, which is consistent with the Lord's teaching in other places.

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. He said that in John chapter 15. There Jesus exhorted us to be fruitful.

One of the reasons why he said we must be fruitful is this. There is no such thing as a fruitless disciple of mine. Jesus said that he is like a vine, and we are like branches aligned with that vine, plugged into that vine.

Jesus said this. If a branch that abides in this vine, that I am, is fruitful, my Father will cut it back and prune it and make it more fruitful. But if there is such a thing as a branch in me that is not fruitful, he will cut it away, not cut it back to improve its fruit quality and quantity, but cut it away and throw it on the ground.

And then men will gather up those dead branches and throw them on the fire. Sooner or later men will realize that they were never really alive, that they were not real branches, but actually dead ones. Here you have the awesome teaching again.

Every tree that does not eventually ultimately bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Awesome teaching. And the challenge is, by the grace of God, are you one of the true disciples of Jesus, or are you a false disciple? In the last two paragraphs of chapter 7, you have this emphasis.

Are you one of those who say, or one of those who do? Nobody was ever more practical than Jesus. I believe you can sum up this third part of his great invitation this way. What you believe, you do.

All the rest is religious talk. You see all those people down there at the bottom of the hill? They don't need religious talk. Religious talk is not going to solve their problems.

Religious talk is not going to give them the answers. The answer that I want you to be, the solution that I want you to be, is not just a matter of talk. There are a lot of people who can talk Christianity.

There are a lot of people who can give you lectures on theology and who can explain verses of the Bible. Of course, there are those who can tell you what is wrong with everybody else, but Jesus on the mountaintop was not recruiting people who could lecture about these things. I heard about a conference of students, an international conference, where they were discussing the mission of the church.

There were people there from many nations. They were discussing the different strategies they had for evangelizing the world, or their part of the world, such topics as how they got out the word or how they printed literature and so forth. A girl from a very different country in Africa was asked, what do Christians do there to evangelize? She replied, what we do is this.

We live mostly in villages. So we just take two or three families who really know the Lord and we send them to a village and tell them to live in that village for two years and just work and make their living and just live everyday life in the midst of that village. Then when the people in that village see how the followers of Jesus live and what their values are, then they want to be believers.

I think that was an excellent strategy for evangelism. So much of our evangelism is nothing more than propaganda. It's just religious talk.

We think of ourselves as experts on theology, doctrine, and religious talk. But remember, Nicodemus, when he came to Jesus by night, said, we have seen the things you do, and so we know that you are a rabbi come from God. You see what Nicodemus was really saying in so many words was, we have seen, I have seen the way you live, and now I want to hear your religious talk.

In other words, explain to me why you are the way you are. As it was with Nicodemus in the third chapter of the Gospel of John, it is still that way today. We may think people are interested in our religious talk, but people are interested in the religious talk after they have seen somebody walk the walk.

You have got to walk the talk. That is what Jesus is saying. Now listen to this.

Not everybody 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 wonderful works in your name? And then I, Jesus, will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of mine and does them, I will liken unto him a wise man who built his house on the rock, and when the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. Now everyone who hears these sayings of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand, and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was its fall. In these two paragraphs, in verses 21 through 23, and then 24 through 27, Jesus is finishing out his great invitation to people in a pew.

Which one are you? Are you one of the many who think that they can be a solution and an answer, the salt of the earth and the light of the world, by passing through a big gate that is followed by a wide level way that leads nowhere? Or are you one of the many who think there's an easy way to a solution that all you have to do is follow the lines of least resistance? Or are you one of the few who know that it is a narrow gate followed by a narrow, difficult, disciplined way of discipleship? Jesus said that few are finding that is the way to a solution, but that is the first possibility in his invitation. Are you one of the many or one of the few? And then are you false or are you true? Are you really a disciple of his? Then finally, this challenge. Are you one of those who say or one of those who do? There are two awesome teachings here in connection with being a talker or a doer.

Here's one of the most awesome passages in the scripture. Many will say to me on that day, many will come to me at the judgment, and they will sum up their life on earth with these three words, many wonderful works. But then Jesus is going to tell them his evaluation and the sum total of their value and their existence on the earth.

And he's going to use these three words, worker of iniquity. That is an awesome teaching. He's going to say to them, I never knew you.

All the works you did, which included miracles and good things, all those things had nothing to do with me. That was your thing. I never knew you.

There was not a meaningful coming to me on your part. There was just a going. You did all of that in your own strength.

You did all of that in what Paul would call the works of the flesh. I had nothing to do with that. Get out of my sight.

Isn't that awesome? How could people go through life and miss it by such a wide margin? Maybe they never really got into the teaching of these three chapters and understood in depth what Jesus was really saying. The second way that is illustrated for us is the favorite illustration of many people. Suppose all of us were skilled artists and painters with canvases, paints, paintbrushes, and I told everybody that we were going to play a game called word association.

And then suppose I told everyone that I'm going to speak a word, and then I want you to paint a picture based upon that word. Suppose I spoke the word life, and then I ask you to paint what the word meant to you. What is life? For example, a young person might paint the picture of somebody, let's say, playing in the water at the ocean.

Young people tend to be idealistic and upbeat, and it may be that they would paint something like that. It may also be that one of their parents, maybe their father, would paint the picture of somebody in a boat far offshore with no help in sight. It has been said that adults would tend to paint such a picture, one that is more pessimistic.

In this closing illustration, Jesus is telling us what we would paint as a picture when somebody speaks the word life. The picture Jesus paints is neither idealistic or pessimistic, rather it is realistic. Jesus says this, this is life, two houses side by side, and storms are beating down on those homes, and floodwaters are rising.

Winds are blowing on those homes. This is realistic. What he is saying here is that you have two kinds of people in this world.

There are only two possibilities, but they both look alike until the storms come. But he is so realistic in his picture because he says everybody experiences storms. All the people represented by these two houses, and they do, these two houses represent all people.

Jesus is saying that nobody has immunity to the storms, nobody. A lot of people believe that when you become a follower of Jesus and profess him, and believe completely in him, and become one of his disciples, that somehow you receive an immunity to storms. That's just simply not the case.

Storms come to everybody. But Jesus said, as the storm beats upon and against these two houses, one house collapses while the other one stands, because one house has a foundation and the other one does not. Do you know what that foundation is? He who hears this teaching of mine and actually implements it, appropriates it, applies it, and obeys it, that is what the foundation is that keeps the house from falling.

It's so practical, you see. He's not saying that he wants people to know a lot, or people who can say a lot. He's saying, I want people who understand and apply and obey.

Those are the kinds of people I want to be my solution and my answer. And the challenge now is, two men in a pew, which one are you? To conclude all this teaching and this invitation, I would like to read a poem, one that a black bishop in Africa said turned his life around when he was struggling with the decision to enter the political arena to go against all the policies of the white people in Rhodesia. He said that somebody had given him this poem and that it had moved him to decide to risk everything.

People are unreasonable and self-centered. Love people anyway. If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.

Do good anyway. If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway. Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.

Be honest and frank anyway. The biggest people with the biggest ideas can be criticized by the smallest of minds. Think big anyway.

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway. People may really need help, but they will attack you if you help them.

Help people anyway. Give the world the best you've got and you'll get kicked in the teeth. Give the world the best you've got anyway.

Give Jesus the best you've got and the world will kick you in the teeth. Give Jesus the best you've got anyway. That is similar to the way Jesus concluded this great teaching at the first Christian retreat.

I wonder if you can make the applications to your own heart and life. Where are you? Are you part of the solution or are you part of the problem? And then what kind of a solution are you? Are you one of the many or one of the few? Are you one of those who are false or one of those who are true? Are you one of those who say or one of those who do? Are you really and truly the salt of the earth and the light of the world? We at the mini Bible College desire that these lessons help you grow in your knowledge and faith

and encourage you to discover the power of God that enables you to live as Jesus taught his disciples there on the mountain overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Until next time, we pray God's blessings upon you and your house as you strive to live as a true follower of Jesus Christ our Lord.

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