

MAKE WISE DECISIONS – Matthew 7:13-27

A once popular game show on TV was called “Let’s make a Deal” hosted by Monty Hall. The show began on December 30, 1963 and continued on through until 1977. From that time on there were reruns, reruns and more reruns. In many places around the world it is still being shown, nearly 45 years after its debut. It seems that the whole world just loves to “Make a Deal”.

Not only do we like to make deals, but we are also drawn by the suspense of wondering just what our “Big Deal” might be. Though the crowds may scream and yell, and everyone has their own opinion as to which door to choose, no one really knows which way to go.

What’s behind door number 1? Is it a new car? What’s behind door number 2? It is a dream home? And I really wonder if I should pick door number 3? Perhaps that door has the thing I want most – a dream vacation, a new home, a new car and lots of cash in the bank. All of the doors had a prize behind them, or should I say a “surprise”, but only one door made you a winner in this game of choices & decisions.

Sometimes the other choices were often useless prizes like a goat, or a 1-year subscription to a seldom-read magazine, or a year’s supply of sauerkraut, or something like that.

The suspense was always great and it would continue to build into an impatient frenzy when the door was chosen, and Monty Hall would go on and on with what was behind the doors you didn’t choose. Then the time came to open the door you have chosen and reveal your prize. After all, it really didn’t matter to you what was behind the other doors, only the one you chose. Was it the right door? Did you make a wise choice? Or would you kick yourself for the rest of your life because of the choice you made when you had the chance?

Life is full of choices isn’t it? Just take a moment to think about how many different decisions that you made just to get to church this morning. What time to get up? Shower or bath or nothing? What to wear? What to eat? What is the weather like? Do we come this morning? What do the kids need to wear? Which path will I take to get here?

Each day we are confronted with choices. Some of the choices that we make on a daily basis have very little impact on our lives such as what and where to eat. Other choices can significantly change the course of our lives, such as “Do we have children?” Do we get married? What career do I chose?

“Our lives are filled with decisions—what to wear, what to eat, where to go, what to do, what to say, what to buy, whom to marry, what career to follow and on and on. Many decisions are trivial and insignificant, and some are essential and life-changing. The most critical of all is our decision about Jesus Christ and His kingdom. That is the ultimate choice that determines our eternal destiny.” (John MacArthur)

It is that decision about Christ and His Kingdom that Jesus calls us to make today.

You see, this morning, we’re coming to our 12th week of studying the Sermon on the Fat Hill, or in your Bible, the Sermon on the Mount. Today, Jesus finishes His sermon and He does it by reminding people that their choices impact their very destiny.

He wants each of us to look at our lives and ask ourselves some pretty important questions. He wants us to look at the path we are on, the fruit that we bear, and the foundations for our very lives.

He wants each of us to make a decision that says, “I will follow the way of Christ, because I know that His ways lead me to the right life and ultimately to heaven.”

Turn with me to Matthew 7:13. READ Matthew 7:13-14

To finish His sermon, Jesus wants us each to ask ourselves:

WHICH PATH ARE YOU TRAVELING ON?

Jesus gives us a picture of a wide road and a narrow road and says, “Let’s Make A Deal!” The difference is that He shows us what is behind the doors before we have to make a choice. There is no surprise to what is behind the curtain when we make a choice.

He paints a picture of a highway that has many people on it. Imagine the broad way for a moment. The broad way is just like I-72 or any other major highway:

- It’s easy to get on and you can carry with you as much as you want. It allows for wide loads and even hazardous materials!
- You can travel very fast
- You can be enticed by the many billboards along the way
- You can quickly exit the highway, partake in whatever pleasure without accountability, and get right back on again.
- “It is called the Broad Way, because it will allow anything, and anyone to travel it. You can carry all kinds of baggage with you. You can carry any sin. You don’t have to give up a thing. You can come just as you are, and not make any changes. There is no repentance on the Broad Way! No Life Changes have to be made. Anything, and anyone is allowed, no exceptions! That’s the way of the

world. We have room for everyone, except for one person. It was made plain in Bethlehem. When Jesus was born, there was no room in the inn. This world has no room for Jesus. Yet, on the broad way...everything else is allowed. The promoters of the Broad Way say: 'You can make a profession of faith in Christ and hang on to your sins. You don't have to change anything!!!' (Christ Gowen)

You see if we make the choice to follow the broad way, Jesus tells us that destruction awaits us.

Proverbs 14:12 (MSG) – *There's a way of life that looks harmless enough; look again—it leads straight to hell.*

I want you to understand a couple things about the broad way:

1. The Broad Way says that everyone gets to heaven

It doesn't make any difference if you are a Muslim and following the Koran, or follow the ways of Buddha, or Eastern mysticism, or follow the beliefs of the New Age Movement, or get mixed up in Spiritualism like Palm Readings, tarot cards, and Psychics—all roads lead to heaven. However, Jesus never taught that. He is not one of those "all paths lead to the same God" kind of people. As a matter of fact, He said that if eternal life is what you want, then there is only one way to get there. You must avoid the broad way and enter through the narrow gate.

John 10:7-9 - *Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. a He will come in and go out, and find pasture."*

There was a missionary who lost his way in an African jungle. He could find no landmarks and the trail vanished. Eventually, stumbling on a small hut, he asked the native living there if he could lead him out.

The native nodded. Rising to his feet, he walked directly into the bush. The missionary followed on his heels. For more than an hour they hacked their way through a dense wall of vines and grasses. The missionary became worried: "Are you sure this is the way? I don't see any path."

The African chuckled and said over his shoulder, "Mister, in this place there is no path. I am the path." (E. Stanley Jones)

We have to realize the truth of Acts 4:12 - *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*

2. The Broad Way says to go with the flow.

Going with the flow means that you follow what everyone else is doing. In other words, the majority rules. This sounds great for a democracy, but we have to understand how dangerous this is.

The late Senator James A. Reed, of Missouri, in one of the most forceful speeches ever delivered before the Senate, observed with great truth: "The majority crucified Jesus Christ; the majority burned the Christians at the stake; the majority established slavery; the majority jeered when Columbus said the world was round; the majority threw him into a dungeon for having discovered a new world. Christ always calls us to follow the lifestyle of the "Minority opinion." Don't be deceived by the loud voice of "majority morality."

The wide path is the one that most of the people will be on. It is the path that most of the people will encourage you to walk down. As you stand at the crossroads looking down the paths, are you going to be swayed by what "everyone else" is doing?

Jesus wants us to avoid this wide path or broad way! He wants us on the narrow path.

The narrow path is more like a winding rural road, one of the dirt roads that goes between corn fields.

A narrow path is not easy to find and therefore not easy to get on. You have to be careful how you travel because often times it is not paved or straight or fixed up. You can't go very fast, because rocks might fly up and do damage.

The narrow path can also be very restrictive. There is no room for chasing after the world and its pleasures, no room for unforgiving spirits, no room for self-righteousness, no room for materialism, no room for false beliefs, and no room for an unloving spirit.

Jesus promises, however, that this path, the small country road is the road that leads to real life.

This is why Jesus says in John 14:6 – *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Each of us have to decide which path we are willing to take. The choice is ours.

Jesus moves on from the question of which path we are on and then asks us:

WHO ARE YOU LISTENING TO? READ Matthew 7:15-22

We have to understand that Jesus considers it foolish to think that every teacher out there is good for you. Jesus wants you to be careful of who you are listening to and what kind of teaching you are following.

You see preachers and teachers even those with good intentions can be used as false prophets. Their false beliefs can rub off on you by leading you away from the Gospel or by incapacitating you. They can make you freeze in your faith. You may start to think that you shouldn't share your faith, because you don't know how to answer the false teachings that are out there.

Jesus wants us to understand that we should not judge the world. He said it earlier at the beginning of this chapter, but we are to inspect the fruit of a person's life. Do they have the fruit of the Spirit – LIST.

In Acts, it tells us that the people in the city of Berea were more noble than the citizens of Thessalonica because the Bereans checked everything the apostle Paul taught against the Scriptures. We should do the same. Every thing a person teaches you, including what I teach, should be checked with the Scriptures.

Because bad fruit is not just from preachers and teachers:

- Counselors can send wrong messages, throw truth out the windows, and say, "God just wants you to be happy."
- Educators can teach that all paths lead to heaven and it rubs off on their students.
- Musicians can also be false prophets by coming up with a jingle that you can't get out of your head.
- Even Advertisers can send false messages, distorting the truth.

1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 – *Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.*

Jesus points out, however, that there is not just false prophets, but there are also false disciples.

Let's suppose that you decide to go to work at Wal-Mart because you think that the blue smocks they wear are really cool. You just love the way Wal-Mart offers everything at a low-low price. You don't feel like going to the trouble of filling out forms or waiting to be hired, or sitting through training, so you just show up one day, jump into one of the lines and begin working. After a few days you may find that you're even pretty good.

So, you work your 40 hours and at the end of the week you go to get your paycheck, what do you think they're going to say. "Paycheck? I don't even know who you are." You protest: "But I worked hard all week. I've been here every day. I've done a good job. Now I deserve to be paid!"

There are a lot of people that do a lot of good things—some things are even done in the name of Christ. You can attend church every Sunday. You can put give money to the church and read your Bible. You can help others and you can even invite people to church. BUT, none of this matters, unless you are a true disciple of Christ.

A true disciple of Christ has a relationship with Jesus Christ. They believe in the resurrection. They have repented of their sins. They confess Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They have been baptized in the waters as a sign of their decision. They are a person who has made a personal commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. They know Jesus and Jesus knows them.

A false disciple is a person who has a lot to be worried about. On the Day of Judgment, God will say, "I'm sorry, but I never knew you."

It is vital to consider your own relationship with Christ. Are you a real disciple?

Jesus wants you to consider this question with your whole heart. Do you have a relationship with God, or are you just following religion?

You need to ask yourself: Who are you listening to? Are you listening to the Holy Spirit that will tell you to put your faith in Christ or to Satan who will tell you that you are all right?

Jesus wants you to consider:

1. What path are you on?
2. Who are you listening to? AND...

WHAT ARE YOU BUILDING ON? READ Matthew 7:24-27

Jesus turns from road ways, gates, and fruits and then paints one last picture – two men building houses for their families.

Notice the similarities between the builders:

- Both are builders – they are hard workers. They know what its like to pound away at the nails while the sun is beating down their backs.
- Both are building houses – they each have a plan that they have thought through. I can imagine that each of them has detailed blue prints for their house. They know what they are doing.
- Both are hit by a storm in their life.

AND it is the storm that proves the difference. When the storm comes, one house is left standing and the other is destroyed.

Jesus told this tale so that we would see clearly the differences between these two similar builders. Jesus wants us to see that:

1. They each had their own type of foundation – one of sand, and the other of rock.
 - a. The first hears the Word and then builds upon it.
 - b. The second hears the Word but chooses to ignore it

How do you get to be like the second builder? Jesus tells us in verse 24 – Be the one who puts the words of Jesus into practice.

James 1:22 – *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*

Jesus didn't preach this message so it would sound nice or so that we could sit around and discuss it. He preached it so that we could act on it. He wants you to be obedient?

Ask yourself, am I building my life, my house on the right foundation? We each need to be able to sing with full integrity:

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

What is your foundation? Is it the Words of Christ or the sinking sand of this world's teachings?

It's time for you to make your choice:

1. Have I chosen the right gate?
2. Am I traveling the right road?
3. Does my tree bear the right fruit?
4. Am I following those who teach the truth?
5. Is my faith being demonstrated in what I do?
6. Do I truly know God through Jesus Christ?

Do you? Do you really know Jesus Christ? I am not talking about a religion. I am talking about a relationship. Do you have a relationship with Christ where He leads you down the right path walking with you and guiding you? Do you have a relationship with Christ where you know His Word? Do you have a relationship with Christ where you have decided to build your life on His words?

If not, it is time to decide:

Will I follow Christ right now, right here?

- He was tortured and by His stripes you are healed!
- He hung on a cross for you and by His blood you are redeemed!
- He died for you and by His death you are given life!
- He rose from the dead and by His resurrection you are given power!

He did this so that when you face the storms of life, your life can withstand it.

Jesus has pulled back the curtain and said “let’s make a deal.” He doesn’t leave you guessing about what is behind the curtain. He shows you what is behind each choice. One of the choices is where you get all the rewards: grace, mercy, forgiveness, love, real life, and VICTORY. The other leads to a life of loneliness, despair, pain, wickedness, and destruction.

You can make a choice in different ways:

1. Come forward and confess Jesus as Lord.
2. Stay put and make a choice for the broad path, the false teacher, and the sandy foundation. You see inaction means you are just going with the flow. Not making a decision means that you are choosing to not follow our radical Lord and Savior Jesus.
3. If you are already a Christian, you can remain there and reclaim the victory in Jesus this morning.

Victory in Jesus