

Getting Ready to Go - Matthew 7:13-23

Introduction: When I was a kid, one summer my Uncle Duval and Aunt Francis came home for a visit. Now my Uncle Duval, to me, was someone a little kid from Georgia could really brag about. For starters, he lived in Chicago! He was about the only person I knew that didn't live close by. Chicago might as well have been in another country or another planet to a little six year old boy. Aunt Francis was neat too. I found out that she was Polish. Her maiden name was Oliskoski. Besides that, my Uncle Duval drove a Cadillac. That was the biggest car I had ever seen in my life. My brother and I could get in the back seat and we didn't have to even touch each other! Also, my Uncle Duval treated me like I was all there was. He took me to the zoo; he bought me ice cream; he brought me all kinds of toys to play with. Needless to say, he was my favorite uncle.

Well, when they got ready to go home that summer, I remember me telling him I wanted to go back with him. And I'll never forget what he said. He said, "*Well, pack up your britches and let's go.*" And I did this, (hitch up pants) and thought that was all I needed to do, so I headed for his car.

That would be great wouldn't it? If that was all we had to do to go on a trip, we'd take a lot more of them. But we all know there's a lot more to do to get ready for a journey, than hitching up our britches, isn't there? We've not only got to pack up our clothes, but we've got a million other things to do. From servicing the car to putting a stop on the mail, to arranging for the pets to be cared for - There's a lot of preparations to be made.

In today's text, we find Jesus coming to the end of *The Sermon on the Mount*. And as He does, He outlines some things that must be done in preparation for a journey of eternal proportions. He gives us three things we need to hear if we are going to be fully prepared to take the journey of all journeys – He tells us how to get ready to go to heaven. The first thing He says we need to do is:

1. Be Careful You're On the Right Road. (13-14).

Now, last week's message dealt with this subject in detail, and I'm not going to rehash it, but this is part of Jesus' instructions in preparing for eternity, so let me briefly recap what He said in vs. 13-14.

Jesus is warning those who are going to face eternity, (and that is everyone) that there is only one of two ways you can go. There is the road that leads to life – the narrow road that has a small entry way, or the road that leads to destruction. This is a very wide road that has a large entry way. He said that really, only a few people would ever find the road that leads to life because so many people are being deceived by the inviting and comfortable road. People are looking for the easy way – the way of the crowds. They don't want a life that is filled with restrictions or a life that is too uncomfortable, so they choose the easy street. But Jesus is saying

here, that what they don't realize is that this wide and easy road ultimately leads to destruction. So it would be the wrong road to take.

The right road to take would be the narrow road because it is the only one that leads to life. Now it won't be the most comfortable. It's not a toll road, but it will cost you something. You'll have to follow God down this road, because it is His way you are choosing. But this is the road that leads to *"life."* Are you sure you're headed in the right direction today? The second thing we need to know to get ready for this journey is that we'd better:

2. Beware of Wrong Directions (15-20)

Jesus talks about two things in these verses: False Prophets and Fruitful Trees.

A. False Prophets (15-16a)

Jesus goes on to say that as we're choosing which way we will follow, we will need to *"watch out"* for the *"false prophets."* When I took driver's ed., I was taught a lot of driving skills. But the best thing I was taught was to *"Watch out for the other guy."* I don't know how many times that saved me from great danger while driving. You see, we can do all the right things behind the wheel, but if we don't watch out for other drivers, who may not be so cautious or skilled, we could still wind up in a ditch or wrapped around a pole, or even worse. In fact, many drivers out there are not concerned at all about their safety, much less yours.

In the same way, as we're choosing which way to go in life, and which destiny to follow, we'd better be on guard and watch out for all the false information out there. Everybody thinks they have a corner on the market when it comes to telling you how to live your life. You'll be told that all you have to do is become enlightened, and you will find your own way to God. You'll be told that if you are just morally pure and take care of your family God will be pleased with you. You'll be told that if you follow certain rituals and follow certain rules, in the end, you'll discover the road to eternal life. Some will even tell you that you can just live any old way, and in the end, God will have to love you and let you into heaven. So there are many, many roads you can take, but beware! Not all lead to the place you want to go.

When we travel, there are many road signs that are there to point us in the right direction. Usually, if you follow the signs, you will get to where you're going. But sometimes, we come across road signs that are confusing, or even wrong. Sometimes we can't clearly see the signs, or we misinterpret them.

I have a friend in the ministry who says he was trained to always obey the road signs. They were the law, and as a driver, he'd better always do what the sign says. Well, his first experience driving on the interstate was

a trip to South Georgia to see some relatives. Well, he was supposed to be there by 12 noon, but it was about 9 p.m. when he got there. His folks were terribly upset, and worried thinking the worst had happened. They asked him why he was so late. He said, “*Well, I was just following the signs. Every few miles, I’d see an exit sign that said, ‘Exit Now!’ so I’d pull off.*” So, signs can be confusing at times, or we can get confused with all the things that are happening while we drive.

In the same way, Jesus warns us to watch out for false teachers. They may look like, sound like, and act like Christians, but are really fakes. He says to beware of them, for they’ll lead you down the wrong way. How do we recognize them? Jesus describes two ways. The first way can be misleading because it has to do with:

a. Their Appearance: Jesus said, “*They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly, they are ferocious wolves.*” Have you ever seen counterfeit money? It can be hard to spot. And counterfeiters are getting better and better at their craft. That’s why the appearance of our money changes so much.

Sometimes it can be hard to spot a counterfeit Christian. Many people look like Christians, act like Christians, and even speak like Christians. But if they are using Christ and the church for the wrong reasons, Jesus calls them “*ferocious wolves*” who “*come to you in sheep's clothing.*” Now do you think that a wolf that approaches a flock of sheep is there to lead those sheep to food and water? No, no! That wolf only has one thing in mind -- dinner! He’s hungry for food, and helpless sheep are the easiest target. Jesus said beware of these predators because they can be hard to spot. The best way to recognize false prophets is by:

b. Their Actions: Jesus also said, “*By their fruit you will recognize them. (16&20).* A fruit tree can have nice blooms and leaves, but it's not worth much without good fruit. It’s nice to look at, but that’s all.

Jesus goes on to say that faking Christianity is like trying to gather grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles, but the only way you’ll ever find them there is if somebody stuck them on there! They don’t grow that way naturally.

Have you ever seen a jackalope? That’s when antlers are mounted on a jackrabbit but that doesn't mean they grow there! Sometimes, you have to look close and observe people for awhile to tell if they are real Christians or not.

B. Fruitful Trees (17-20)

Jesus says “*Likewise every good tree bears good fruit*” and “*a good tree cannot bear bad fruit.*” Or a true Christian’s life will be characterized by good fruit. On the other hand, Jesus says that “*a bad tree bears bad fruit*” and “*a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.*”

Barbara Walters used to end her interviews with the question, *"If you could be a tree, what kind of tree would you be?"* And the person goes on to describe who they think they are. Sometimes it's accurate, and sometimes it's just wishful thinking. I know people who hope to be good, who act good, and even think they are a good, but their fruit always gives them away.

But Jesus says that someone who *"does not bear good fruit"* is useless, and is *"cut down and thrown into the fire."* This is a reference to hell. Now Jesus is not talking about a lazy Christian here. It's talking about someone unbelievers who act like Christians. He says that their ultimate destination is hell.

There are a lot of people who pretend they are Christians. They come to church, give money, serve on committees, but in reality, they are wolves in sheep's clothing. They are bad trees with bad fruit. They are on the broad way that *"leads to destruction."* They will someday be *"thrown into the fire"* unless they heed the warnings. Jesus says to beware of being led in the wrong direction.

Finally, Jesus sums up His point about our eternal destiny. He says in vs. 21-23:

3. Be Sure of Your Final Destination (21-23).

I heard of a man a few years ago who was supposed to be flying on a commuter flight from San Francisco to Oakland California, but wound up on an international flight to Auckland New Zealand. Fortunately, he realized his mistake, and he was able to get a flight back to Oakland

It is so important that we are absolutely sure of our final destination. This is not something to guess at, or hope for or take a wait-and-see attitude about. We'd better know for sure about where we're going.

Basically, Jesus says that in life there are two kinds of people: Professors and Possessors.

A. Professors: Jesus says, *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven."* A lot of people read this, and it makes them nervous because they know they are just professing Christians. They know they are just putting on a show. They know they are fakes, and that their actions contradict their words. Listen, Jesus is not interested in words. It's not enough to say, *"Lord, Lord."* He must **BE** our Lord. And for Him to **BE** our Lord there must be evidence that He is in control of our lives. Our relationship with God is not based on what we profess but what we possess. That is the other kind of person Jesus refers to in this passage.

B. Possessors: Jesus says he who *"will enter the kingdom"* is he *"who does the will of My Father who in heaven."* Does He mean we have to work to earn our place in heaven? No! He's talking about people who have genuine faith in Christ alone which will always be expressed in doing the *"will of the Father."*

How do you think God feels when He hears us sing, *"I Surrender All"* but we hold back on our time, our talents, and our tithes? How does God react when He hears us singing, *"I Have Decided to Follow Jesus"* but then we decide to pursue our own pleasures? How does God feel when He hears us sing *"I Know Whom I Have Believed"* but then we question the Word of God. Love my neighbor? Not old so-and-so. Bring the tithe into the storehouse? You gotta be kidding! Turn the other cheek? Not me! I'm getting revenge!

Folks, I can tell you how He feels. He feels like you feel when people lie to you! He feels betrayed all over again. He feels sorrow and is heartbroken, because so many people merely profess Christ, but have never possessed Christ.

And like the *Rich Man in Hell*, they will offer futile arguments. They'll say, *"Lord, didn't my good works count for something? I belonged to the church. I was a good momma or a good daddy. I was a good kid. Doesn't that count?"* But Jesus will say to them *"Sorry, I never knew you."*

G. Campbell Morgan wrote: *"I never knew you"... does not mean, I did not know about you, I do not know your name, I did not watch your life; but "I never knew you;" there was no intimacy, no relationship between us. You took My name to make your name; you took My name to work your miracles; you took My name for certain self-centered purposes; but you did not know Me, and I did not know you."*

Conclusion: If you don't KNOW Jesus in this life, and if Jesus doesn't KNOW you, you will spend eternity forever separated from God. Be sure you know Jesus today. Be sure of your eternal destiny today. Quit playing around. Stop listening to the wrong advice. Stop lying to yourself and lying to God. Get on the right road. Start traveling in the right direction. Be sure you reach the right destination.