

Pray for Joy

Psalm 30:1-12

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Introduction:

- This morning, we come to our last sermon, in this series looking through the Sermon on the Mount.
 - For past few weeks, we've seen how Jesus challenges us to look carefully into our hearts, and into our lives.
 - To see if we're truly his disciples.
 - And as we come to the conclusion of this sermon, Jesus asks us to choose today, how we'll respond to his teaching.
 - If we'll listen to him or not.
- Now, if you're a Christian believer, there will be times when you wonder, if your obedience is all in vain.
 - When the wicked seem to prosper.
 - When evil seems to win.
 - You may cry out like the Psalmist in Psalm 73:
 - **"All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence."**
 - Have you ever felt your obedience is all in vain?
 - "Why am I obeying God?"
 - "Nothing seems to be going right."
- But through this passage, you'll see that Jesus Christ is your firm foundation.
 - I know that it's difficult to wait on God's timing.
 - When the answers aren't clear, you may question if your obedience is all in vain.
 - But following Christ, is what leads to true spiritual blessing.

- And through this passage, you'll find resolve and encouragement, to continue to trust and obey Jesus Christ.
- And if you're not a follower of Christ, Jesus invites you today, to trust in him, and to build your life on his truth.
 - The Bible is clear, there is no middle way.
 - You can't serve two masters.
 - And today is the day, you need to choose who you're going to serve.
 - Some of you are here, and you know that you need to put your faith in Christ.
 - You've enjoyed listening to God's word, you've enjoyed the community at our church, but still, you haven't made a decision to follow Christ.
 - Well, Jesus is speaking to you today.
 - It's time to decide.
 - And I pray by the end of this sermon, you'll have made up your mind to trust Jesus Christ, and follow him.
- So, how can we find resolve to follow Christ?
 - How can we decide, for the first time in our lives, to build our lives on his truth?

Point 1:

- First, we see in our passage, the path we need to choose.
 - Jesus says:
 - **“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”** Matthew 7:13-14

- There are only two paths to take.
 - There's the wide gate, and the narrow gate.
 - And you have to choose which gate you'll enter through.

- Some people believe that many ways lead to God.
 - That all religions are the same.
 - These are people who enter through the wide gate.
 - It welcomes many different ideas.
 - It has room for many paths to God.
 - And at first, this sounds acceptable, even loving.
 - But the problem is that the wide gate doesn't speak the truth.
 - And you'll discover, that instead of being loving, it's deceptive.
 - The wide gate never confronts what is false.
 - For some 2 plus 2 equals 5, for others 2 plus 2 equals 7, but it doesn't matter.
 - The gate is wide, and no one is wrong.
 - But Jesus makes it clear, that the wide gate leads to destruction.
 - There's only one way to the Father.
 - Jesus says, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** John 14:6
 - There's only one way to salvation, and it's through Jesus Christ.

- The wide gate also allows you to hold on to worldly treasure.
 - You can bring all your luggage.
 - The way is wide, so there's room sin, and possessions.
 - You don't have to face your sin, or fight your sin.
 - You don't have to grow in character.

- You don't have to extend yourself to caring for others.
- You don't have to give up your comfort.
- The wide gate allows you to build your security apart from Christ.
- It's the easy road.
- But Jesus says that it's a road that leads to destruction.
- But in contrast, the narrow gate is hard.
 - Instead of thinking of yourself better than others, you must see that you're poor in spirit.
 - Instead of boasting of your achievements, you must grow in meekness.
 - You have to see, that there's nothing you contribute to your salvation.
 - You have to see, that you're a sinner, just like everyone else, needing God's grace.
 - It's a humbling way of life, which isn't always easy.
- The narrow way is also hard because, the obedience Jesus requires is difficult.
 - Jesus commands you to rejoice when others persecute you.
 - To give up your comfort, for the comfort of others.
 - To bring peace, and not revenge.
 - To not worry, but to trust.
 - To forgive, and not be bitter.
 - To give sacrificially, even when it hurts.
- Remember Abraham?
 - When God commanded Abraham to leave his home and go to a new land.
 - Abraham obeyed.
 - But was it all smooth sailing, and sunny days?

- Not at all!
 - The way was hard.
 - He had to leave the comfort of his home and his family.
 - He had to go to a land, he couldn't see.
 - He had to face enemies, and dangerous situations.
 - And there were many promises of God, that took years to fulfill.
 - But even so, he made a choice, and his faith led to obedience.
 - He made a decision, and went down the narrow way, trusting in the promises of God.
 - And you know what?
 - He was able to find life, and rest, and peace, and salvation.
- We're saved by grace, and grace alone, and not by works.
 - Amen to this wonderful truth!
 - But Jesus makes it clear that following him, will be difficult.
 - Following Jesus will be costly in this life.
 - He says:
 - **"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."** Luke 14:26
 - To a rich young ruler, who had great possessions, Jesus says:
 - **"Go, sell what you possess and give to the poor...and come, follow me."** Matthew 19:21
 - In Luke 14:27, Jesus says:
 - **"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."**
 - If following Christ, doesn't cost you anything.

- If there's no cross to bear.
 - No sacrifice to give.
 - No dying to yourself.
 - It may mean, you're not a disciple of Christ.
 - **"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."**
- This past week, I was speaking to our staff, about my flight overseas, and they were advising me how I might fly first class, next time I fly.
 - They gave me all the tricks to getting points, and upgrading my seat.
 - And I was thinking, how nice it would've been to have a bed on a 14-hour flight, and extra space for my luggage, and all the comforts of first class.
 - But Jesus is teaching us, that the Christian life isn't a first-class journey.
 - In a sense, it's more like basic economy.
 - It's a life of self-denial, and taking up our cross.
 - Now, I'm not saying you can't fly first class.
 - The point is that the way of Christ is hard.
 - But here's the wonderful truth, it's a way that leads to life.
 - The wide gate might look appealing, with all the bells and whistles, but it's a flight that leads to destruction.
 - It won't matter how much luggage space you have, it'll all be destroyed.
 - But the narrow gate is a flight that leads to eternal life.
 - And it won't matter that you brought nothing from this world.
 - Because Jesus will give to you, true blessings, more than you could ever imagine in the life to come.

- The gate is narrow, and the way is hard, but it leads to eternal life, eternal blessing.
- Here we see, the path we need to choose.

Point 2:

- Second, we see in our passage, the dangers we need to avoid.
 - Here, Jesus gives a warning against false teachers.
 - He says in verse 15:
 - **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”**
- Matthew 7:15
- Every single one of us will face people, who will try to lead us down the wrong path.
 - If we weren't in danger of facing false prophets, or false teaching, Jesus wouldn't have given this warning.
 - In a book or blog we read, in a worship song we hear, in a sermon we listen to, on a social media clips, or from famous leaders who proclaim Christ, or from people we meet in person, even in the church, we will encounter false teaching.
- That's why even the Apostle Paul warned the leaders in Ephesus against fierce wolves or false teachers.
 - Paul was preparing to leave Ephesus, and he tells the Ephesian leaders:
 - **“I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert...”** Acts 20:29-31

- Paul doesn't say, "It's possible you'll encounter false teachers."
- He says, **"After my departure fierce wolves will come in..."**
- The problem is that, it's hard to recognize false teachers.
 - Paul says false wolves will come, not from the outside, but from among you.
 - I'm sure all the disciples were surprised that Judas betrayed Jesus.
 - That's why Jesus says how false teachers come in sheep's clothing.
 - That is, on the outside, they look good.
 - They have a form of godliness.
 - Their teaching may even appear sound.
 - Their emotions may even look genuine.
- Look at how Jesus describes them in verse 22.
 - They say to Jesus:
 - **"Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?"** Matthew 7:22
 - To call Jesus, **"Lord,"** meant they recognized his divinity.
 - This is correct doctrine.
 - To call Jesus **"Lord, Lord,"** and say it twice, meant they spoke with strong emotion.
 - To cast out demons meant they exercised spiritual power over others.
 - They truly helped others.
 - To do mighty works, meant these were hard workers.
 - And to speak to Jesus and expect Jesus' approval, meant they genuinely believed they were doing the right thing.

- But Jesus says to them, **“I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.”** Matthew 7:23
- As you think back on your Christian journey, perhaps you can think of a book, or teaching, or person, who came in sheep’s clothing, to lead you astray.
 - When April and I got married, we were young, and didn’t know much about finances.
 - And so, we spoke with someone about our finances.
 - Sadly, this person led us to make some poor decisions.
 - But we listened, because this person had the form of godliness.
 - As all this was happening, I remember a friend of mine, saying to me, “Tom, you’re making a horrible decision. This person isn’t looking out for your benefit.”
 - And I started arguing with my friend.
 - “You’re wrong. This person is very godly. You don’t know what you’re talking about. Many people respect this person. This person has done many great things.”
 - After maybe 6 months, I realized how my friend was right.
 - By God’s grace, we didn’t lose that much money, but I was genuinely deceived.
- And so, what can we do, to guard against misleading social media posts, and unhelpful sermons and books, and bad influences that lead us away from Christ?
 - Jesus says it right here, he says, **“You will recognize them by their fruits.”** Matthew 7:16
 - **“A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.”** Matthew 7:18
 - In other words, Jesus is saying that even though some have the form of godliness, or the form of sound teaching,

or the form of genuine emotion, you can recognize false teachers by the fruit, their work produces.

- The Bible gives several examples, but let me name just a few.
- Bad influences will upset your faith, instead of strengthening your faith.
 - Paul speaks about Hymenaeus and Philetus and how, **“They were upsetting the faith of some.”** 2 Timothy 2:18
 - If there’s teaching that’s upsetting your faith in Christ, causing you to fall away from Christ, it may be you’re listening to a false teacher.
- Bad influences will also promote more ungodliness in people, instead of more Christlikeness.
 - Again, Paul writes, **“Avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness.”** 2 Timothy 2:16
 - False teaching won’t help you grow in godly character.
- Bad influences will cause bitter divisions, instead of God honoring community.
 - Romans 16:17 states, **“Brothers...watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles.”** Romans 16:17
 - False teaching brings more division, than unity.
- Bad influences cause controversy instead of peace.
 - Speaking about false teachers, again Paul writes, **“He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy,**

dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people...” 1 Timothy 6:4-5

- False teaching causes friction and not forgiveness.
- There's so much you can listen to in our word today.
 - But if you're listening to words, or reading words, that upsets your faith, that causes more ungodliness, that causes division, that causes constant friction, it may be you're not hearing good teaching.
- But in contrast, you'll see how sound and godly teaching produces good and healthy fruit.
 - Instead of upsetting your faith, it'll encourage your faith in Christ.
 - Instead of ungodliness, it'll produce more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness...
 - Instead of bitter division, it'll produce Christ honoring unity.
 - Instead of a spirit of controversy, good teaching will produce, a spirit of forgiveness.
- On this journey of faith, all of us will face wolves in sheep's clothing.
 - And so, we need to be alert.
 - And we need to look at the fruit, of what and who we listen to.
 - It may take some time to see, but a bad tree, can't bear good fruit.
- At the same time, let's also remember the blessing of good teaching.
 - Because it will bear good fruit in your life.

- It will give you more confidence in Christ.
- More joy in believing.
- More hope in the promises of God.
- **“Every healthy tree bears good fruit...a healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit...”** Matthew 7:17-18
- Here we see the dangers we need to avoid.

Point 3:

- In order to make a decision and follow Christ, we need to choose the right path.
 - We need to guard against the danger of false teaching.
 - And third, we need to put our foundation on the solid rock of God’s word.
 - Here, we see, the foundation we need to stand on.
- Jesus talks about two builders.
 - One digs deep, until he reaches rock.
 - And he builds on the rock, but the other builds on the sand.
 - On the outside, both of their houses look the same.
 - Both of their houses look sturdy.
 - It’s only when the rains, and floods, and winds come, that you can see the truth.
 - One house stands firm, while the other house falls to the ground.
- So, what does it mean to build your house on the rock?
 - In verse 24, Jesus gives the answer:
 - **“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”** Matthew 7:24

- Building your life on Christ doesn't just mean you confess that he's Lord.
- We just saw that in verse 21.
- Many say **"Lord, Lord..."** but Jesus tells them, **"I never knew you."**
- Building your life on Christ means you confess, and also obey his word.
- It's not just about confessing your faith, but living out your faith.
- John writes in 1 John 2:3:
- **"And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments."** 1 John 2:3
- This doesn't mean we can never make mistakes or fail.
- But it does mean, that a true believer is someone who strives to obey Jesus.
- James writes:
 - **What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.** James 2:14-17
 - There's no point in saying you have faith, if you don't strive to help others, or to love others, or to fight against worry, or to fight against lust, or to sacrifice for God, or to stop judging others.
 - Let me be crystal clear, we're saved by grace and not by works.
 - But faith without obedience, is like a person who builds their life on sandy ground.

- It's faith that is dead.
- And when the rain, and floods, and winds come, your house will crumble.
- And so today, let's decide to build our lives, not on sand, but on the solid rock of God's word.
 - Let's confess with our mouth, and obey with your lives.
 - And so, as an application, I want to encourage everyone here, tomorrow morning when you wake up.
 - Would you please, take some time to read through Matthew 5 to 7.
 - And consider how you might obey God.
 - Perhaps you've been pushing aside, something God is leading you to do.
 - Whether it's seeking to be salt and light by sharing your faith.
 - Or letting go of your anger.
 - Or fighting against lust.
 - Or forgiving your enemy.
 - Or stop trying to win the approval of others.
 - Or seeking God in prayer.
 - Or letting go of your worry.
 - Or looking at your own log, instead of judging others.
 - Let's strive to obey the word of Christ.
- Not only that, let's also remember that even though the Christian life is a hard life, it's the most joyful life, because Jesus is the rock we can trust.
- Ajith Fernando is a pastor in Sri Lanka.
 - And he tells the story of how his closest friend was dying of cancer many years ago.

- And before his friend died, Ajith Fernando says the last thing his friend said to him was:
 - “I have hit rock bottom, and I find that the rock is solid!” (The Call to Joy and Pain, 23, Fernando)
 - It may be that some of you are there right now, and you’ve hit rock bottom.
 - But when your life is built on Christ and his word, you’ll discover that the rock is solid.
 - *How firm a foundation, O saints of the Lord.
Is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!*
- Again, Ajith Fernando writes:
 - *What a relief it (is) to know that God (is) right there when we (are) going through the crisis. That banishes fear and enables us to hope...We may be weeping inside, we may be hurting from the bruises we have received, but deep down we know that God is with us and that he is our source of joy. The happiest people in the world are not those who don't have problems, they are those who are not afraid of problems.* (The Call to Joy and Pain, 24, Fernando)
 - In this world, you will face troubles, and problems, and storms, but when you build your foundation on the solid rock, when you build your life on Christ, instead of fear, you can have eternal life, and rest, and confidence, and joy.
 - And you’ll be able to say with the Psalmist:
 - **“The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” Psalm 18:2**

- I asked at the beginning of this sermon, for you to make a decision.
 - And so, I want to ask, will you resolve to obeying Jesus Christ?
 - Will you decide today, to follow Christ?
 - It's only through the death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we can find life and salvation.
 - And so I want to plead with you:
 - Choose the path of Christ.
 - Don't listen to false teachers, but listen to the words of Christ.
 - And decide today, to obey him, to take up your cross, and follow him.