

Matthew 7:13-29 sermon Tregear 9.5.2021 - "Choose Your Road"

I heard a great story this week. About eight years ago, Geoff from Caloundra was in the **sin bin** when he threw out \$50,000 dollars worth of his **wife's jewellery** by accident. Geoff was all over the news bulletins, but he was so embarrassed he didn't want to give his **full name**. As well you'd understand. Because the story was unusually... well... dumb.

See, Geoff and his wife had decided to **hide their uninsured treasure** of bracelets and bangles and pure gold bars in **garbage bags** to fool **potential robbers**. Trouble is, when they were cleaning up the house they **fooled themselves**. Straight in the wheelie bin. And off to the Nambour tip. Geoff said, **we were moving house**. I said to the kids, give me any garbage bags lying around and I'll throw them out.

My wife rang me at work later, and said, **where are the bags?** Geoff says, "You know that **sick feeling you get?** Wow!" He rang the council. They said there was **no hope**. They get 1400 tonnes of waste a week. Which they said **nobody was going to dig through** for the sake of Geoff and Carol's **treasure**.

Now you might feel sorry **for Geoff**, and you can sympathise with his **sick feeling**. But in the end you just want to say **wake up Geoff**. That's the **dumbest thing you could ever do**. Treat something **valuable** as if it's rubbish **long enough** and things are **bound to go wrong**.

Which is exactly what you can see Jesus saying to the Pharisees and Teachers of **Israel** here in Matthew chapter 7 as he brings in the **sermon on the mount** to a close. We already said last week that quite likely Jesus is aiming much of this sermon at the Pharisees, the teachers of the law and anyone else who thought that they had this religious thing all sewn up.

Pharisee

The Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law think they've got it all together. But they haven't realised... they risk throwing away what's **truly valuable**. And if they don't have a **change of heart**, the thing they risk losing, the thing they're throwing away, is their place in the **kingdom of God**.

Which is why, as Jesus is bringing the sermon on the mount to a close, that he says to them, **be careful what you're throwing away**. Be careful that what you're treating as rubbish doesn't turn out to be **incredibly valuable**. It helps us to maybe make more sense of that difficult verse last week. Be careful... that you're not throwing your **pearl necklace...** in front of pigs.

Remember last week how Jesus puts it. Verse 6 in chapter 7. Don't give dogs what is sacred; **don't throw your pearls to pigs**. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces. If you **squander** what's really valuable, if you **throw away your treasure...** he says the time will come when you'll regret it. It's not particularly polite, but the **pigs** I think he's talking about are the **Gentiles...** and **especially the Romans**; who he warns later are always ready to **tread Jerusalem down** as soon as **God says the word**. And later the Romans were to nail Jesus to a cross.

The **treasure** is the **kingdom** and they're **throwing it away**. Chapter 13, there's a similar story but the other way around. He says "The **kingdom of heaven** is like a merchant **looking** for fine pearls." When he **finds one...** he'll sell **anything to get it**.

Don't they **know** that a place in the Kingdom is a **treasure beyond price**? And what the Pharisees are doing, what the people of **Israel** are doing... is they've put their pearls in garbage bags; and they're about to throw the **kingdom... away** to be handed over to **gentiles** like us instead.

So Jesus says to them, if you **want to hold on to it...** things need to change. If they **want to hold on to it...** you'll need to start **living like God's people are meant to**. If you **want to hold on to it...** you'll need a **change of heart**.

He's talking to these same Pharisees, **the ones called hypocrites that** we saw last week and in chapter 6, with their **hypocritical prayers**, and **everything for a show**.

Trumpeting their **giving**, **moaning** through their **fasting**. Playing to **men**. Ignoring God. So keen to **measure everyone else up, to judge them**; they forget to ever ask whether they can measure up to their own standards themselves.

You remember; the Pharisees were like the hypocrites that saw the speck of sawdust in someone else's eye and ignored the 4x2 plank in their own eye. And Jesus said to them, "First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the

speck from your brother's eye." They'll be judged; for their arrogance, for their judgmentalism, for their **lack of mercy**... they'll be judged. If they don't **repent**... they're throwing away a bigger treasure than they imagine. Their place in the Kingdom of Heaven. And they'll find themselves on the road Jesus talks about in verse 13. The wide gate and the broad road that leads right to destruction.

Now I want to suggest here in these last few verses of chapter 7 the same point's being made over and over again.

Don't be so Sure

And notice the big picture. I mean, for an Israel that's so complacent, for leaders who are so **sure of themselves** and so **unforgiving of everyone else**, Jesus goes on to say the same thing in three different ways. He says to them, Don't be so **sure** of yourselves. Don't be so **sure** you're on the right track.

Because he says there are **two types of gate**. Verses 13 and 14.

There are two types of tree. Verses 15 to 23.

There are two types of builder. Verse 24 to 27.

Which is it going to be? Which gate? Which tree? Which **builder** are you? Now remember, Jesus here is talking to **his own people Israel**. Who think they've got the **kingdom thing sewn up**. And you'll see it over and over again in his parables later on he's telling them **no you haven't**. You Jewish guys **think** the banquet's **all yours**. But **all kinds of other people** will come in. And **you guys won't!** You **self righteous judgemental Pharisee types** who judge and measure everyone else... you've been judged and measured. And **guess what?** So **double check**, he says, that you're on the right road. **double check** you're going through the **narrow gate**. Because, verse 14, it's **small**. Small is the gate... and **narrow** is the road that leads to life. And only a few find it. Or the tree with its fruit. They might **dress** to impress. They might **pray on the street corners**. But they're **wolves** in sheep's clothing. And just like a tree, you can tell that by the **fruit** they are bearing. See, you might be able to dress up the outside. But in the end you can't dress up the **inside**. And Jesus says, **by their fruit**... you'll know them. Because you don't pick **grapes** from a thornbush. If you see the prickles and thorns, don't kid

yourself there's a good **crop coming**. Listen to it twice. Verse 19. Every tree that **does not bear good fruit...** is cut down and thrown into the fire. You'll recognise them, says Jesus, you'll recognise the wolves, you'll recognise the misleading leaders of Israel by their fruit. You'll recognise them by the bitter fruit of judgemental self righteousness. Hardened hearts without a glimmer of **mercy and love**.

And he says in v.21-23 they might call on my name and they might even perform miracles... but if they're not interested in **reflecting God's nature...** I'll tell them plainly, **I never knew you**. Get away from me, you evil-doers. You're **not really Israel at all**.

And finally, the two builders. Jesus says, What are you going to do with what I'm saying? Because there's a choice to be made. You can **do something about it**. Or you can keep going the way you're going and face the consequences. Jesus says, there's the wise man, who builds his house on solid rock; and the rains can come and the streams can rise and the winds can blow. And yet it won't fall, because its foundations are on the rock. And then there's the fool who builds on sand.

Remember the recent floods? The video of that house up near Taree floating down the river, its foundations undercut, and the whole house sweeps away in the torrent. Everything gone. Jesus says in verse 26, everyone who hears these words of mine and **does not put them into practice**, who hears what I'm saying and does **nothing about it...** is like that. Like the foolish builder who builds his house on the sand. And the rain comes down and the streams rise, and the winds blow, and beat against the house... and it falls, he says, with a great crash.

Humble Hungry Hearts...

Now as Jesus says those words, I wonder how it leaves you feeling? Especially if you've got a bit of a **Pharisee mind** of your own. That same sort of idea about how to please God. You know, you work so hard on the **outward things** and I look so **very presentable**. You raise your hands in horror at the **ways of the world** and you're quick to tell everyone what everyone else is doing **wrong**.

When the answer's **not that at all**. The answer's on the **other end of the scale**. The answer's all about **humility** and **grace**. **our** humility. **God's** grace. It's about a **hunger and thirst** for righteousness that goes **right to the heart**. Do you remember when Jesus

first broke on to the scene he said, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." He didn't say, 'Be a good bloke. Be nice to people. Obey all my laws. Read your Bible. Do the sacrifices.'" No he said "Repent". To repent takes a humble heart, a heart that recognises that it needs God. But the beauty is that if you're sitting here this morning and you're thinking I just don't measure up to God's standards. That's exactly where God wants you to be. None of us measure up. But Jesus says Come, here is the narrow gate, this is the right way. And if repent, and listen to Jesus and follow him, we too can enter into the Kingdom of God.

Right back at the very start of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says the ones who are going to be blessed are the **humble and hungry**. The ones who are going to be part of the kingdom, they're the **merciful**. The **hungry and thirsty for righteousness**, who are saying, I **need a saviour**; I need a **change of heart**.

Ask

So it makes sense now if we go back to verse 7 and notice what they **should be doing** back then. And what **we should still be doing today**. He says, **ask**. That's all you've got to do. Just **ask**. Because God is a God of **mercy** and **forgiveness**. Ask... and it will be given to you. Seek... and you **will find**. Back a few verses in 6:33, here's what to **seek...** Seek first **his kingdom and his righteousness... seek it** and you'll find it. And to him who knocks, verse 8, the door **will be opened**. Your son asks for bread, you don't give him a stone. Why do you think **God will be any less** loving than that? What God delights in is your humility, in your mercy. He wants you to come humbly to him, to ask, to seek. Is that you this morning?

Friends, if you're here this morning and you just **haven't got a clue**. And if you're here this morning thinking, I'm **not very impressive**. How can God accept me? Or if you're here this morning thinking, I don't know **anything** about this **church stuff**, but I just want things to be **right with God...** guess what. You're **exactly...** you're **exactly** what Jesus is looking for. You're **exactly** who he's talking about. It that's you, **sign up for *Christianity Explored*** on Thursday nights. It'll be the best thing you've ever done.

See, what Jesus is doing here in the Sermon on the Mount, he's dropping a **bomb** on the religious attitudes of the Pharisees. And they don't like it. And things get hostile. And for anyone who wants to step up and follow Jesus, for anyone who wants to be what

a **real Israelite** is meant to be, it's a **dangerous time**. The point is, Pharisees, with all their religion, they don't get it.

So I wonder why we keep making the same mistakes? It's so easy for us to think that I've got to do more things to impress God and others. I can so easily think that I'm better than others. But Jesus is calling out for humble people who will come through the narrow gate; people who know they need a Saviour and so cry out to Jesus.

Here's the bottom line. The narrow gate to the Kingdom, it's actually not that demanding to walk through. You just have to knock and it's thrown wide open. And the welcome is warm. But it's only really open to the **hungry heart** and not the proud one. Are you coming to Jesus this morning with a heart that hungers for Jesus, for knowing him, for coming into his kingdom.

The Pharisees, in the end, they didn't want to come in. Not interested.

But by the time Jesus finishes the sermon on the mount in verse 28, Matthew tells us there are plenty of others listening who **get it**. And can **hear the difference**. The crowds are **amazed at his teaching**, verse 28 says because he taught with such authority, unlike their teachers of the law. But there's no point hearing... or even being impressed, or even a little bit challenged... if you're not going to ask for that **change of heart**. If you're not going to hear the words of Jesus... and put them into practice.

Don't Throw it Away

If you just hear Jesus' words and walk away and do nothing... you're in danger of throwing away something incredibly precious. This treasure, the kingdom of God is a heritage worth more than you could ever imagine. The Pharisees had their hands on a **treasure**: the kingdom of God they'd inherited from their forefathers. But they've packed it up in **garbage bags** and they're **throwing it away**. Don't let us... be the same!

Thank you Father that you sent Jesus into the world to display to us who you are. Thank you Jesus that you tell us clearly about the Kingdom and how we might enter your Kingdom. Thank you Holy Spirit that you work in us to convict us of our sin and to help us know the way to life through Jesus. Amen