

# Are you Wise?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, as a culture, we don't like binary very much. Talk of anything being binary is very unfashionable these days.! A binary choice is seen as something that is traditional, old-fashioned, and narrow-minded, whereas non-binary is progressive and it is contemporary.

People don't like being forced to choose between one thing or another. We much prefer nuance and subtlety. We can cope with a spectrum, but we struggle so much with opposite extremes. We like to keep our options open as opposed to committing ourselves to one course of action or one way of being or doing one thing.

But you'll have noticed when we come to Jesus' words at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, everything is binary. You'd have picked that up from our Bible reading in Matthew 7, verse 13 to 29. Notice, look down, two gates, wide and small, two roads, broad and narrow, two destinies, destruction and life, two kinds of profit, false and true, two animals, wolves and sheep, two trees, bad and good, two kinds of fruit, bad and good, two claims, false and true, two builders, foolish and wise, two houses, shoddy and secure, two foundations, sand and rock, two outcomes, devastation and safety.

[ 1 : 35 ] Everything, everything is binary. It is one thing or it is another. And so Jesus wants us, as he presents these binary options, he wants us to choose wisely.

And so Jesus gives four main binary contrasts, which are divided up in our Bibles, to drive home the choice that we each must make.

And we're going to take these four binary options and contrasts as our outline today. So first of all, there are two gates and only one leads to life. There are two trees and only one bears good fruit. There are two claims. Only one is true. And there are two houses and only one stands secure. And then at the end, we see there is one choice to be made.

So first of all, two gates and only one leads to life. Let's look at those verses again. Verse 13 and 14. Enter through the narrow gate for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it.

[ 2 : 40 ] But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it. Okay. So Jesus says there are two gates that take you on two roads that lead you to two destinies.

And you have to choose from the choice of the entrance. Will you go through the wide gate or the small gate? To the choice of the way. Will you travel the broad road?

Or will you take the narrow road to the choice of companions? Will you go along with the crowd or will you go with a few to the choice of destinies? Will you choose destruction or will you choose life? Jesus doesn't beat about the bush here. We must choose something in this life. And it decides our eternal destiny. Or as Maximus in the film Gladiator said that Russell Crowe, that would be Maximus.

What we do in life echoes in eternity. Jesus tells us there are two ways and only one leads to life. So choose wisely.

[ 3 : 43 ] Now the majority of people in this world just get sucked into the wide gate and end up walking down the broad road. Because it is the road that most people are on because life is just much more easy on the broad road.

It is simple to go with the flow. I thought that this morning as we made our way to the Merchant City and there was a run all the way through Glasgow City Centre. And everybody seemed to be going in the opposite direction to the direction to get to Merchant City Church.

Oddly. And so we were going against the flow. And it is hard to go against the flow. But on the broad road, you just go with the flow. You are caught up in what everybody else is doing.

Because it is the culturally acceptable way to live your life. It requires little thought, little effort. No sacrifice is needed to travel the broad road.

It is so broad that you can do anything you want on this road. Everything is tolerated. Everything is permissible. You can be true to yourself because there are no restrictions.

[ 4 : 49 ] You can think your own way as long as that's how the majority think, of course. You can pursue your own desires as long as those desires meet with the approval of the majority, of course.

And so while it appears to be the road of freedom, it actually turns you into a clone, like a lemming, just following along with everyone else. Where you're deluded into thinking that you're free to be whatever you choose.

And yet you're simply forced into thinking, speaking, and behaving like everybody else. So it's an easy road to travel because it gives you a life of ease and a life of acceptance.

But the problem is that people on this road don't realize where it leads them. Because Jesus warns that this is the road that leads to destruction. So that's one road.

But there's another road that Jesus mentions, and it's the narrow one. And it's entered via a small gate. You enter that gate by committing yourself to Jesus Christ.

[ 5 : 51 ] Elsewhere, Jesus called himself the gate or the door. He said, I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. So after you enter the gate of Jesus, then you follow Jesus on this narrow road.

And it's a hard way, and it requires effort, and it requires sacrifice. When you travel this road, you realize you are continually going against the flow.

And because it's a narrow road, people think that because you're on that road, then you are narrow too. You're narrow-minded. You don't see the full picture or appreciate the diversity of life.

But because your life's not lived as a clone, but in a distinctive way, in a counter-cultural way, it means that you'll get mocked, and you'll get insulted, and you may even suffer.

You'll be unpopular at school. If you're a young person who goes the narrow way, you'll be unpopular at work with your neighbors, even amongst your family, because of the narrow way that you're going.

[ 7 : 00 ] But Jesus tells us that this is the way to go. Not in a kind of, there's this way, and there's that way, and yeah, you can kind of choose which suits you best.

No, Jesus is saying, the first word of verse 13, enter through the narrow gate. He urges us to go that way.

There is only one way we should be going. And in so many ways, that way appears to be the most unappealing way to go in life. But Jesus says it is the only way that leads to actual life.

And so if you want life, life to the full now, and life everlasting to come, then you must enter through the narrow gate, and you must walk the narrow road.

There are only two gates, and only one leads to life. That's our first point. Second, two trees, and only one bears good fruit.

[ 8 : 04 ] We see this in verse 15 to 20. What does Jesus say? Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit, you will recognize them.

Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit, you will recognize them. What is Jesus saying? There are two trees that represent two kinds of prophet, false and true.

And so, Jesus warns, watch out for false prophets. Jesus presumably had the teachers of the law in mind in his own day, but of course, his words apply to all false teachers.

And so, he gives three pictures from the natural world to describe them. Animals, trees, and fruit. Animals, there are sheep and wolves. Trees, good and bad trees.

[ 9 : 12 ] Fruit, good and bad, depending on the tree. And so, while false teachers will claim to speak for God, Jesus says they are wolves in sheep's clothing.

And so, they may appear harmless, but they're very dangerous. They may sound spiritual, but they're ungodly. They may look like a sheep, talk like a sheep, smell like a sheep, but they're actually a wolf.

They can have theological degrees, wear dog collars, robes, cassocks, oligarb. They can be moderators, bishops, archbishops, cardinals, popes.

They can write books. They can lead big churches. They can have successful ministries. And yet, they can still be wolves because they are peddling false teaching that is in opposition to the truth of God's word.

And because of that, then, they are a real danger to people, no matter how big, famous, popular, or how many followers they have. They are dangerous. That's what Jesus is saying.

[10:14] So, how do we know them? How will we recognize such people? Jesus says, by their fruit, you will recognize them. Like fruit on any tree, it takes time to appear.

In my garden, there are trees that should bear fruit, but fruit never comes. But normally, that says something about my gardening, but normally, when you plant a fruit tree, in time, the fruit will appear.

And so, Jesus says, just give it some time, and then you will eventually see the fruit of the false prophets. And it will become blatantly clear that it's bad fruit.

So, what's their fruit? Well, first of all, obviously, their fruit is teaching. It's what they say. It's the message that they speak, what they preach. It may have a ring of truth about it, but it won't match the truth of God found in God's word.

And so, it might be nice to listen to, but because it's false, it'll be bad fruit, and it will have this kind of rotting effect on people's lives.

[11:23] And so, their fruit is their teaching, first of all. But secondly, their fruit is also their character. Because it will become clear they're a wolf by their behavior, which will be revealed over time.

They may seem nice. They're not going to say, I'm a wolf, and have a big t-shirt that says, I'm a wolf, keep back. No, over time, they will devour people.

Their character, their true colors will eventually shine through. And they'll produce bad fruit that will have a rotting effect on those who listen to them. And so, they won't have a Christ-like character that bears the fruit of Christ-like followers or Christ-like people.

No, they'll have a character that is not good. There'll be no likeness of Jesus about them. And so, in teaching, in doctrine, and in character, in lifestyle, you will eventually spot whether someone is a true or a false teacher.

And this is exactly what Paul says to Timothy in 1 Timothy chapter 4. He says, watch your life and doctrine closely. You'll spot the true from the false in life and in doctrine.

[12:41] And so, there are two trees, and only one tree bears good fruit. And so, as we apply this, well, we need to be careful who we listen to and who we are influenced by.

We must listen to those who teach the truth of God so that we can continue on the narrow road. Because the life and doctrine of false teachers will sadly have a bad impact and influence on people and will encourage them to go the broad road.

And that's a road that leads to destruction. So, two gates, only one leads to life. Two trees, only one bears good fruit. Thirdly, two claims.

Only one is true. What's the claim? The claim is, verse 21, Lord, Lord. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons, and in your name perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you.

[13:55] Away from me, you evildoers. Did you get that? Not everyone who makes the claim, Lord, Lord, actually has Jesus as Lord.

And so, no matter what some people say or do, their claim to be a disciple of Jesus, to be committed to Jesus, is fake.

And so, get this, you can make a claim that's orthodox, Lord, Lord. After all, Jesus is Lord. You can make a claim that's earnest, Lord, Lord, suggests a closeness.

You can make a claim that's public, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? You can even make a claim that's powerful by driving out demons and performing many miracles.

And yet, despite this, notice the claim that Jesus makes. I never knew you, he says. That has got to be one of the most harrowing statements of Jesus that you find in the Gospels.

[ 15 : 01 ] Because somebody claims to know Jesus, they've made a confession, they've outlined all of their credentials, but Jesus says, I don't even know who you are.

And so, they have no access to the kingdom of heaven. And so, do you hear what Jesus is saying? Jesus is saying here, the number of people who'll enter the kingdom of heaven is going to be smaller than the number of people who expect they will enter the kingdom of heaven.

And so, it's possible for a person to claim to be a Christian, to be a preacher and a teacher, to possess great gifts, to exercise a miraculous ministry, and yet not be a true believer.

Wow. And so, if that's the case, then who will enter the kingdom of heaven? Jesus says, only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

According to Jesus, that is all that matters. Not your outward confession, not your religious credentials, not your spiritual experience.

[ 16 : 16 ] No, it's doing the will of the Father that matters. That's what marks someone out as a genuine Christian, a true believer, a citizen of heaven.

So, you can make all the claims you like, but if there is no inward love for the Father, or a heart's desire to obey him, then it's all just a sham.

And Jesus will not be fooled by a false claim, even if other people are. That's why Jesus says, away from me, you evildoers.

He's saying your claim is evil, your claim is wicked, your claim is a lie, so get away from me. It sounds so harsh, doesn't it?

But it shows that you are either for Jesus, or you are against Jesus. And Jesus knows. He knows.

[ 17 : 17 ] And so, on that day, and by that day, Jesus means the day of judgment, Jesus himself will say, I never knew you.

You didn't live as if I was Lord. You did not submit your life to my loving rule. You didn't listen to my Father and want his will to be done in your life.

You lived like you were Lord instead of me. You wanted your will to be done. And so, what you did, well, you, in your heart of hearts, know you did it for yourself.

You didn't do it for me. And so, it's a warning, isn't it, to be so careful that what we claim matches how we live. Because you can talk the talk without walking the walk.

And Jesus knows the true condition of our hearts. My heart, your heart, every heart. And he knows whether what we claim with our lips is, in reality, matched out in how we live our lives.

[ 18 : 27 ] So, two claims, and only one is true. Two gates, only one leads to life. Two trees, only one bears good fruit. Two claims, only one is true. And two houses, only one stands secure.

This is the final contrast that Jesus concludes his sermon with. And it's all about hearing and doing versus hearing and not doing.

See what Jesus says. Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who builds his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock.

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

What a vivid picture Jesus presents here of two houses built by two builders. Well, there's a massive difference between the two houses because they're built on different foundations.

[ 19 : 41 ] The wise man built his house upon the rock, whereas the foolish man built his house upon the sand. And both seemed the same. They probably looked the same.

Houses in those days didn't seem to have much imagination in terms of how they were built. They were very simple to construct. And yet, when the storms came in Jesus' story, it revealed the truth about each house because the foolish man's house was destroyed and the wise man's house was secure.

Now, I reckon Jesus has been building up to this parable to show us the two ways to respond to his teaching because the Sermon on the Mount is his teaching.

That's why he says there in this section, these words of mine. Because Jesus is highlighting the importance of hearing and obeying his words.

Because his words come with divine authority. They are the words of God. And so the question for us is, will we hear Jesus' words and put them into practice in our lives?

[ 20 : 56 ] Or will we hear Jesus' words and choose not to put them into practice, but to ignore them or reject them for our lives? Because what we do will either make us a wise man, like the one who built his house on the rock, which was secure when the storms came, or it will make us like the foolish man who built his house on the sand, which was destroyed when the storms came.

Interestingly, the word for foolish here is the word where we get our word moron from. So the man is a moron for building his house on the sand.

So just, for example, just say you want to build a house and you've got the plot of ground, you've got the architect's plans, and so you get two different builders to give you a price for the construction of your house, and they get back to you with a price.

And remarkably, the price that each builder gives you is exactly the same. So builder Andy comes along and he says he's going to do a bit of foundation work, so the building of the house will take just a wee bit longer.

You'll dig down into the rock, make sure the house is secure, and so it may be longer, but you'll get a nice house at the end. Builder Dave says, ah, yeah, nah, don't need to bother with that foundation stuff.

[ 22 : 23 ] Waste of time. Ground's probably fine. You know, Luke, it's fine. And he promises he'll get your house up in far less time, and you'll be in there with your family, TV up on the wall, sitting on the sofa, loving life in your new house.

Which builder do you get to choose? Which builder do you choose to get to build your house? I guess if you care about your life and you care about your family's life, then it's a no-brainer, isn't it, about which builder you get to build your house.

You're not going to risk everything by getting the moron to build your house. If you do, it will simply prove that you're a moron yourself for thinking that that is going to work.

And so why would you risk everything, including your eternal destiny, by ignoring the words of Jesus? It is impossible to exaggerate the magnitude of the choice that Jesus confronts us with.

And so we must do more than merely hear Jesus' teaching or be familiar with Jesus' teaching or even agree with Jesus' teaching because you can do all that and yet still refuse to obey Jesus' teaching.

[ 23 : 39 ] And so we must do what Jesus says if we are wise. Two gates, only one leads to life. Two trees, only one bears good fruit. Two claims, only one is true.

Two houses, only one stands secure. Which leads us to conclude with verse 28 and 29 to see that there is one choice. When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching because he taught as one who had authority and not as their teachers of the law.

Interestingly, Jesus began his sermon by teaching his disciples. You can see that in chapter 5, verse 1 and 2. And it ended by him teaching the crowds.

So the crowd is gathered as the Sermon on the Mount has gone on. I find the opposite. As my sermons go on, the crowd shrinks. But with Jesus, no.

The people are amazed. Not just amazed by Jesus' teaching, but amazed by Jesus himself. Because Jesus spoke with his own authority.

[ 24 : 45 ] Not like the other teachers of the law. They recognized there's something different. Because Jesus spoke with divine authority. He claimed the ultimate authority by calling himself Lord.

And not only that, Jesus was promising to judge people on the basis of their response to his teaching. And that's why Jesus puts everything in such binary categories.

There are two gates. Only one leads to life. There are two trees. Only one bears good fruit. There are two claims. Only one of those claims is true. There are two houses, but only one stands secure. And so here's the thing. Right now, in this world, at this time, the difference between the two may not be obvious.

You don't always recognize it. It can be hard to tell. Everything might always seem just so mixed up. But what is less obvious right now, in the here and now, will become blatantly obvious in the future.

[ 25 : 59 ] That's what Jesus is saying here. Everything and everyone will be found out in the end. It'll all come out in the wash.

And by the wash, we're talking about the judgment. Did you spot the theme of judgment running through the conclusion to Jesus' sermon? He'd been warning in each of these four binary contrasts that judgment was coming.

Just look. See verse 13. The wide gate and the broad road leads to destruction. Okay? See verse 19. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

See verse 21. Not everyone will enter the kingdom of heaven. And then verse 23. I never knew you. Away from me, you evil doers.

And then verse 27. The rain came, the streams rose, the winds blew, and the house fell with a great crash. Four images of judgment, aren't they?

[ 27 : 08 ] One time when I was preaching on judgment in Edinburgh, when I was a minister there, preaching on judgment and on heaven and on hell, a guy came up to me after the service and after my sermon and he said, are you trying to scare the hell out of us?

And at the time I said to him, no, I'm trying to scare you out of hell. Because Jesus' words here are so strong, aren't they? Because when the judgment comes, the whole human race is destined for either heaven or hell.

And so Jesus warns us of what is to come so that we will choose wisely. He says, enter through the narrow gate.

It leads to life. So we've got a choice to make. And the choice is whether we are for Jesus or against Jesus.

And so we've got to recognize Jesus as Lord and submit to his authority and obey his teaching. because we don't just need Jesus to be our teacher.

[ 28 : 17 ] He's a genius teacher. We also need Jesus to be our savior. Because Jesus came into this world to bear the judgment for our sin on the cross.

And so when we choose to turn from our sin and trust in Jesus, then he saves us from hell for heaven. But when Jesus comes again, it will not be to bear the judgment for our sin.

It will be to bring the judgment for our sin. And he will bring his judgment on all of those who have not chosen to receive him as savior and bow to him as Lord.

And so the people listening to Jesus as he preached the Sermon on the Mount had to make a choice about Jesus. Were they going to be a disciple of Jesus and put his words into practice?

Or were they just going to be part of the crowd who were all there, who probably loved it, who heard everything, but never did anything about it?

[ 29 : 24 ] And everyone here today to hear in this building in Christchurch, Glasgow, across Glasgow, Scotland, the world, everyone has got to make a choice about Jesus too.

And so have you chosen wisely? Don't go your own way, naively expecting that it will somehow just all work out well in the end.

Listen to Jesus. Obey Jesus. Follow Jesus. That is the one way to go.

The way that leads to life. Life now and life in the world to come. Don't miss that way. Let's pray. Thank you.