

The Road to Life

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Date: 29 September 2024

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[0 : 00] Well, we've all been on some adventure trip in our lives, I'm sure. Whether it's taking that very first and very scary bicycle ride all by yourself, and then most of us will have scars to remember those first few bicycle trips that we take without the...

Do they call them ferry wheels still? We used to call them ferry wheels, you know, the little wheels on the side. But maybe you can remember your first road trip, and the car packed with, well, we did oranges and eggs and meatballs.

And you had to stop on the side of the road with those big trees and have a lekker padkos. And of course there's an inevitable flat tire or the breakdown, but that's okay. Dad was there, he looked after it.

I remember my first time climbing a mountain with what's called trad or traditional climbing gear. It was all fine until the leaders went around this corner, and I was left alone.

It's on Table Mountain, and there's this big drop below you, and now you must do this thing by yourself. And I wasn't quite sure what to do, so he said, and I said, what am I supposed to do next? And he says, use your head!

[1 : 13] And I thought the best thing I could do was actually use my head. There was a big crack in front of me, so I stuck my head in the crack, wedged my way around, popped out on top.

And it's very exciting when you get to the top of Table Mountain, and you've got all your trad gear and your ropes, and you're walking around like John Wayne. Very exciting to go on adventure trips. Well, going on adventure trips can be fun, but they can be dangerous. The secret to an adventure or journey that is potentially dangerous is to go with someone who knows what they're doing.

Someone who knows the way. Someone who knows the dangers and can tell you what to do and what not to do to help you get through that journey safely. And today on the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that being his disciples is like being on an adventure.

A journey. The journey of life. And Jesus is the guide we all need to avoid the dangers that await us on this thing called life.

[2 : 26] And the first thing you need to do to have a successful journey is to choose the correct route. You want to choose the right route.

So if you've got your Bibles or your apps, just open up there, Matthew 7. Listen to what Jesus says in verse 13 and 14. Enter, he says, by the narrow gate.

The roads here represent the two ways of life open to all.

One way of life has a wide entrance, a wide road, an easy entrance, an easy road.

Easy road to follow. It's comfortable. And that's why many follow that particular road. There's another road. It's got a narrow entrance.

[3 : 46] Not easy to find. Uncomfortable to go through. Depending on your translation, let's say. A narrow or small gate. You've got to squeeze through it.

A bit like getting inside a... When you go... Some mountains, you go climbing, you go caving. And there's a cave. I wanted to take us on our recent trip called the Boomslang Cave.

Above Corp Bay. And it's called Boomslang Cave. Not because it's got boomslangs. But you've got to be like a boomslang. Crawl on your belly just to get into the cave. It's an uncomfortable start to a trip.

But it is exciting if you know what you're doing. There's another road with a narrow entrance. Not easy to find.

Uncomfortable to go through. And once you're through it, the road itself is difficult. It doesn't get any easier. Why would you want to go down that road?

[4 : 41] Jesus says, but you want to go down that road. You need to go down that road. Because that's a road down which adventure lies. Because only that road, the narrow road, the difficult road, the uncomfortable road, leads to life.

The easy road, because it's so easy, is filled with meaninglessness and ends in destruction. Many of you came on the High Con Tuesday. You saw some of the images up on the screen. Then we chose a much more exciting path to go on. And more narrow, more difficult route than the wide and easy route.

There was a long but very boring, easy route, but a gravel path. They call it the jeep track almost. But you go along that route, you never see any of the beautiful stuff that we saw. And all the people are following that path. We started on that path, and then we veered off into this really, not that difficult, but challenging one. But that was fun, and was full of interesting things.

[5 : 50] And we all felt much more alive afterwards. So that's the kind of thing that Jesus is talking about. There's two roads that each human has to follow in life.

There's no third option here. One is an easy road, easy to find, and many people are on that road. The other one is not easy to find. It's a difficult road, and there's not a lot of people on that road. You need to ask yourself, which road are you on? Are you on the road to destruction, or are you on the road to life? Jesus clearly wants people to make a choice here, and to follow the right path, because he wants people to have life, not death.

But how can you tell which road you're on? Maybe you think, yeah, I'm on the right road, but maybe you're not sure. Jesus says, if you're on the road to destruction, your life is going to be easy. It's not going to be difficult. You'll be essentially going along with the flow of the whole of the rest of the world. Your lifestyle will look and sound like everyone else on planet Earth.

[7 : 01] You'll believe in things like, love is love. You'll believe things like, all roads lead to God.

It doesn't matter which road you take, as long as you believe it in the sincerity of your heart. You'll believe things like, it's my body, it's my choice, when it comes to deciding whether you're going to carry a baby to term, or kill it in the womb.

There's a couple of few popular, but actually destructive slogans, destructive things that people live by. Sadly, many Christians, or people who think they're Christians, or claim to be Christians, live their lives like that.

Problem with that is, it's too easy. Walking along that road, if you walk along that road that everyone else follows, it's too easy. It's just easy to follow the mainstream.

But if you walk along that road, you won't really be living. In fact, you'll be robbing yourself and others of life, if you live the way the world wants you to live.

[8 : 22] But if you're on the road to life, the narrow road, you'll find that life is slightly more difficult. When I say slightly, it can be a lot more difficult on that road.

Jesus doesn't promise his people a walk in the park, but it is an adventure, and it's definitely worth doing, because it leads to life. Because you'll be living a life that has been changed by the one who says, I have come to give life, and give it in abundance.

You'll be following the one that says, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. So which road are you on?

How do you find your life? Is it an easy life? Do you find yourself sounding like the world, and not sticking, not having your, not sticking your head out too much?

Not wanting to take any flack? Or are you willing to take the pot shots, stand for the truth, because you're following Jesus, and your life is subsequently more difficult.

[9 : 36] One of those roads leads to life, one of those roads leads to death. But, there's a warning. If you choose the road to life, you need to be aware of the dangers that lie along that road.

Not only is it difficult, but there's more dangers down the hard road, the narrow road, than the easy road. Because the road to life has wolves on it that are hungry for your destruction.

So Jesus warns those who follow him on the narrow road to watch out for wolves. Watch out for wolves. Let's have a look at verse 15 and 16.

Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits.

The false prophets here that Jesus speaks about are religious teachers who claim to speak for God, and in some sense, later on in the New Testament, will claim to speak for Jesus, but in reality, they're only in it for themselves.

[10:47] Ready to feed on God's flock. Christians, Christian church, ready to feed on God's flock to satisfy their own appetites.

The big problem, of course, is that these wolves look like sheep. Strange thing to see a wolf that looks like a sheep.

So how do you know them? How do you know which are wolves and which are sheep? And Jesus says, check their lifestyles. Check their lifestyles. Verse 16 to 18.

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. So the ones to look out for, or really, you can tell who is who by the way they live.

[12:02] Something is going to be rotten. Something is going to be bad in the lives of people who are false teachers, false leaders, claiming to speak for God, but really ravenous wolves hidden in the shape or guise of a sheep, of a real Christian.

normally, you'll find that these people have a long line of broken relationships, broken promises, and they leave a lot of broken people in their wake.

I played for many years in a pipe band, and in the pipe band world, many children, many of the pipers come from schools run by monks called the Christian Brothers College.

I think there's one still in Cape Town, but Kimberly and Bloemfontein and Joburg and Zimbabwe. every single one that I spoke to in these pipe bands, not just the one pipe band, but many pipe bands, every single guy, they're male schools, every single guy that had been through these Christian Brothers College schools had been messed around with by one of the monks and one of the priests.

Sadly, these wolves don't come from one church only. There's all types of church traditions in which you're going to find these wolves.

[13:34] In Africa, we've got way too many pastors fleecing their congregations for as much money as they can, and not congregations and churches that can afford it. When I was at U-Turn helping the homeless, one lady that we were helping, came back from her township church one weekend, and she was bursting with happiness.

I said, why are you so happy? You come from church. Church was amazing. I'm going to get my blessing. I said, how do you know you're going to get your blessing? Her blessing is just around the corner.

I said, how do you know your blessing is just around the corner? Because that weekend, they blessed their pastor with a brand new BMW that matched his shoes that they bought for him as well.

A couple of years later, she still hadn't received her blessing. Now, I think we're lucky in our churches, we don't often see these thieves come in, although, I've been in a reach church where a minister had decided that he was going to feed on the flock almost literally, and he slept his way through almost the entire church.

does happen, but thankfully, not in our upper leadership. We've been blessed with really fantastic, godly leaders over the years.

[14:54] Probably one of the reasons why reach is such a strong and stable church. But for us, as Christians here at St. Mark's, I want to say that we need to be more on the lookout than we think for false teachers.

We need to be more on the lookout than we think for false teachers. I was recently reminded how easy it is to be taken in by false teachers when we recently attended a local church funeral and many of us were there.

And, gosh, many people were just enraptured, thoroughly enjoyed the service by a minister that sounded clever and learned and quoted about poems and philosophers but actually gave very little Bible.

Now, we mustn't be overly critical. Jesus, we've seen, has warned us about being judgmental but here, he's telling us we mustn't be overly accepting either.

You want to be watching out for wolves because they're going to destroy you if you follow them. Whether it's their lifestyle as its focus here or whether it's their teaching that takes you away from Jesus and focusing on Christ.

[16:17] Too many Christians are too easily swept off their feet by the latest so-called Christian fad, idea, or teacher, or trend, or leader.

Essentially like following the latest YouTube or TikTok Christian trend. and if you've spent any time in the Christian churches, you'll have by now, by now you might have seen quite a number of different trends that have come and gone over the years where everyone follows for a little while and you realize that's not really working out.

And so Jesus wants people with clear thinking abilities who can rightly divide the word of truth as he tells Timothy to do. We need people who can discern and warn others about the wolves that are out to get them and not go and pet the wolf like he's a like a little puppy dog thinking that he's your best new friend.

But if wolves are known by their fruit, the same can be said for anyone who professes Christ and so I need to ask what does your fruit look like? Is your life full of good fruit or full of frot fruit?

That's what bad fruit there means. It means fruit that's perishing. It doesn't do what it's meant to do. It can't give you life. Does your life match up to the way of life that Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount as we've been looking at over these last few weeks?

[17:49] If not, don't think that just changing the fruit is going to work. You can't just change the fruit here. You need to change the tree. Jesus says the fruit fits the tree.

The fruit fits the tree. 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.

You can't just change the fruit. You need to change the tree. To change the bad fruit you need a whole new you. Not just your actions but your heart needs to be changed.

Friends, the good news this is exactly why Jesus came to give us new hearts. To change us from the inside out so that our lives can be full of good fruit.

[18:54] So if you find that your life is barren and you have nothing really to offer come to Christ. He will change your life and you'll soon find yourself walking on the path of life and being an oasis where others can come and find nourishment and health and life from you.

That's a much better way of living than living the easy life and not having any fruit to offer anyone. So watch out for the wolves.

Choose the right path if you want to live this life of having life at the end of your journey. Follow the right path.

Choose the right path. Choose the right road. Watch out for the wolves that are coming but we're not out of the woods yet. Wolves in sheep's clothing is one thing.

Jesus leaves the most searching warning for last. He warns against those who think they're his followers but will find out to their great consternation they were never really following him at all.

[20:09] The last warning Jesus gives is for his followers to make sure they're actually following Jesus and not their own idea of what it means to be his followers.

So make sure you are following not leading Jesus. Look at verse 21. 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.

Friends it's one thing to talk the talk. We all know it's another thing to actually walk the walk. Jesus is much more interested in people who actually live the lives he invites them to and don't just claim to be doing it.

But there's even a further warning in this last section. Because being busy for God in some generalized sense is not at all what Jesus wants.

just doing anything for God. That's not going to cut it either. Verse 22 and 23 Jesus says 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.

[21:28] And I'm going to tell them plainly I never knew you. Away from me you evil doers. This is probably one of the most sobering warnings in the whole of the New Testament.

I want to pause there and make sure we're listening to Jesus. He's not saying this for no reason. This happens to people.

There are going to be people more than we think that will be told on judgment day get out I don't know you.

but we did all these things for you Lord. I don't know who you are. But we did amazing things. We changed the world. That's not good enough.

Did you do the will of my father? Did you seek me first? Or were you really looking out for your own interests? words? It's easy to say the right words.

[22 : 37] It's easy to go along with the Christian flow sometimes even though the road is difficult on the narrow road as a Christian. But it's sometimes easy to go along with the flow. Especially if you're growing up in a Christian environment.

It's easy to sing the songs and say the prayers. Especially in a liturgical church like St. Mark's. Like Reach. There's a danger.

Jesus won't again say don't think by coming and sitting and singing and saying the right words and going out and doing things for Jesus and doing things for God you're safely in the kingdom.

You can fool yourselves. You can fool others but you can't fool God. Jesus knows who are his. And don't think that by doing the more spectacular works the works they talk about here are quite spectacular that you're doing the work of Jesus.

Don't think that by you're only doing works you're only being productive for Jesus when you're doing amazing works. Paul the apostle Paul would later write to the Corinthian church not to focus on the charismatic gifts of tongues for example but rather to focus hope and love especially love.

[24 : 01] One commentator summarizes this section he says these people have been active in the service of God but they had done everything except the Lord's will and this is the critical thing to be active in religious affairs is no substitute for obeying God.

So you notice that Jesus what he wants is for people to do the will of his father. The key to following Jesus is to follow Jesus.

That means doing what he says. Doing the will of the father is crucial here. What does that mean? It means above else to follow Jesus.

That's the whole reason we've seen in the book of Matthew why God sent Jesus. He's come to be the savior, the changer, the life giver. So you have to listen to him.

To do the will of the father is to somehow be connected to Jesus. Not just in any vague sense, but actually to trust him. In John 6 29, Jesus says the work of God is this, to believe in the one he has sent.

[25 : 23] That means to trust him. In terms of Matthew 7 here, to follow him. So friends, you cannot be a follower of Jesus if you decided to be the leader of your own life.

When you're going on a mountain trek, you know who the leader is because he's the one in front, who's deciding where they go, what to be careful for. If you're the one doing that, then that other person is not the leader.

You've become the leader. I've taken trips up the mountain where people who don't know what they're doing have decided that they know better than others how to lead that trip and it's ended in disaster for them.

You cannot be a follower of Jesus if you've decided to be the leader of your own life. So you need to check yourself. Are there areas in your life where you are taking the lead and the problem with you taking the lead is that you make Jesus follow you.

You turn Jesus into a follower if you become the leader of your own life. That is a terrible thing to do to Jesus to make him follow you.

[26 : 37] Because he's the leader of the world he's not going to follow you. The warning here is that if you keep doing that consistently you need to watch out.

Jesus is giving you a warning. You may find yourself walking all alone on the wrong road headed for destruction thinking that you're following Jesus but actually doing your own thing.

So friends the only way to stay on the road that leads to life is to trust Jesus and to keep on trusting him no matter how rough the road and to do what he says no matter what the cost.

In the end there's only one road worth taking. Following Jesus and his way of life leads to ultimate flourishing and eternal life.

Reject him and your journey of life will end not in adventure but in disaster. Which road are you on? How will your story end?

[27 : 40] It will depend on if you travel this journey of life with Jesus and if you do that you'll find that that actually is the greatest adventure of all.

Let's pray and ask Jesus to help us do that. Lord Jesus thank you for your word. It is a heavy word you give us many warnings here but what not to do and how not to live life. But Lord you say these things because you love us you don't want us to get lost you don't want us to perish you don't want us to fool ourselves Lord will you speak to our hearts and minds encourage us that we are indeed walking along the path that leads to life help us not to take the lead Lord in our own life but to give leadership ownership totally over to you help us to follow you Lord no matter how difficult that path gets and to do what you tell us to do and not to decide to live life our own way forgive us Lord when we do that and grant us your spirit to encourage us to help us keep going to eternal life Amen