

My dad used to work on the railways – he was a signaller – one of the most important men on the rail network, he'd say. But it meant that the family could get privileged tickets, free or half-price, throughout Britain and in Europe right down to south Italy.

So one summer in my late teens I went travelling with a friend into Europe. Everything was organised – I had my passport, I changed some money, I had my ticket to south Germany, we'd researched train times and connections, I packed my rucksack and we were off. We were travelling overnight, so we didn't waste any daytime on the journey.

Everything went according to plan, we got on a train in Paris for the final leg of the journey, which would see us at our destination mid-morning the next day. We settled in our seats to sleep for some of the journey.

At about 5 in the morning I woke with a start as we arrived at a station. I looked out of the window, I saw the sign of the station. I was still half asleep, but I thought, 'We shouldn't be going through **this** town, should we?' I woke my friend up and put it to him. He said 'Certainly **not**, we're going the wrong way, we're on the wrong **train!**' So we jumped up, grabbed our things and ran off the train. Fortunately we could catch a train from there to where we wanted to be, so we were OK.

But what a **shock!** What if I hadn't woken up? What if we'd carried on to a completely different place? We'd not have ended up where we thought we were going, and we'd have had to pay for it – the rail officials wouldn't have accepted that it was an honest mistake. We made all the right **arrangements**, we got on the train we thought was the **right** one, and we expected to get where we wanted to go to.

This morning, I want us to look at something Jesus said, which should shock everyone that reads these words. All of us – young and old, Christian and non-Christian, every nationality – all of us need to hear these words loud and clear, and be ready to do something **about** it. We all think we're on the right track, don't we? But **are** we?

Jesus said, '*Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, ... I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers!*' What a shocking statement.

What are **you** thinking right now? Are you thinking ‘This doesn’t refer to **me**. How **could** it? **I’m** OK.’ Friends, **all** of us need to hear the words of Jesus here. Let’s read the passage which surrounds these words, in Matthew 7, from verse 13. [Read]

These are the last words of what is called the Sermon on the Mount, which begins in chapter 5. Large crowds from all over the area, we’re told, were following Jesus because of what he was **preaching**, but probably they were attracted more by his healing of the **sick** wherever he went. In these three chapters (5-7) he’s talking primarily to his disciples, teaching them about the life God **requires** of them, that they’re to lead radically **different** lives from those around them, different **values**, different **standards**.

They’re sitting on the side of a mountain, like Moses went up a mountain to receive the law of God in the Old Testament; **here** the disciples are receiving teaching about the ways of the **new** kingdom of God, to be brought in by **Jesus**. A new age has come with the arrival of Jesus, new **life** in Jesus. Although he’s talking to his **disciples**, it’s clear from verse 28 that the crowds have tagged along. They’d have been too curious to hear what he was saying, to have left him alone for a **moment**.

Are **you** curious to hear what Jesus is saying? Are **you** hungry to hear his voice, even this morning? Are you **expecting** to hear what he has to say to you? Do you want to know about the life Jesus calls you to? Can you **focus** on Jesus’ words? Or are you **complacent**? Have you heard it all before? Do Jesus’ words make a **difference** to you, or do they just go in one ear and out the **other**? I’m asking you to **block** one ear so these words don’t go straight through this morning!

This was a message the disciples needed to hear. It’s a message we **all** need to hear. It’s a **challenging** message, a **shocking** message. A message that’ll require some **heart-searching**. Are you ready for this?

[Re-read vv.21-3]

What a shock! Jesus is saying here that there are **many** who will not enter the kingdom of heaven, although they think they **should**. There are lots of people who think they should enter the kingdom of heaven because they’re good **people**, because they’ve not done anything **wrong**, well not too much. They feel they’re going to heaven because they’re **good** enough. They **aren’t!** 2

But those aren't the people that Jesus is talking about here. These people are totally convinced they're going to heaven because they've **prophesied** in Jesus' name; they've driven out **demons** in his name; they've performed many **miracles** in his name. **Jesus** says, 'I never **knew** you.' 'I **never** knew you.' 'But what do you **mean**, Jesus, we've done all these great religious things, we've done all these wonderful things, we've spoken words as if they were from God, we've done things in power we thought was from **God**.' Jesus says, 'I never knew you.'

They were convinced they were on the right **track**, doing the right **things**, but they were **wrong**. What a shock! Jesus never **knew** them. And this has to make **all** of us sit up and take note. Are we doing the **right** things, or are we being fooled, is our faith true or **false**?

I want us to look at four things we're told about in this passage that we have to get right, or Jesus will say to us 'I never knew you. Away from me.'

Firstly in verses 13-14 we're told we have to **enter the right gate**. [Re-read 13-14].

We're told there's a gate that leads to **life**. There **is** a gate that leads to life. Thank **God**. **Praise** God that there **is** a gate that leads to life. There is a gate that leads to heaven. There is a gate that leads to eternal life. Because after the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis, they and all humanity after them were **banished**. The gate was **closed**. There was no return. God closed the gate.

Thank **God** that there is a gate to life. Because God in his grace and mercy has **given** us a gate through which we can enter the kingdom of heaven. He didn't **have** to provide a gate. We **deserved** to be banished. '*We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.*' God loved us so much that he provided a gate to restored life with him. Thank God. Praise God that there **is** a gate. The atheists are wrong – there **is** a gate.

This gate leads to life – the others **don't**. This gate is the dividing line between those that will experience **life**, and those that will experience **destruction**; between those in the **light** and those in **darkness**; between those who enter **heaven** and those who enter **hell**; between those in the family of God and those who be eternally **away** from God; between those enjoying **blessing** and those suffering **judgement**.

There **is** a gate, but it's a **small** one. There is only **one** gate that leads to life – only one. To **say** this, isn't a popular message today, and we'll be called **intolerant** as we say it. But we're being no less tolerant than **Jesus** was. **He** said, '*small is the gate,*' '*Enter through the narrow gate.*' There is only **one** gate.

There's only one gate to the kingdom of heaven, and Jesus tells us what he means in John's gospel, chapter 10 verse 9: Jesus says there, '*I am the gate; whoever enters through **me** will be saved.*' **Jesus** is the gate given by God which leads to his kingdom. **Jesus** is the only gate that is given by God to his kingdom. Paul says, '*there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*' Acts 4:12.

There's only one gate. Jesus is that gate. We enter heaven through him alone. In Christ alone our hope is found. The pluralists – those who believe there are many **different** gates, **many** ways to heaven – they've got it **wrong**. There's only **one** gate. There's many false ones which **promise** to lead you there – but none will get you there. Only one gate.

We have an **exclusive** message when we say that there is only one gate; but we have an **inclusive** message because it's a message for **everyone, everyone's** invited to enter in through that gate.

But it's a **narrow** gate. And to enter in we can't come through with a load of **baggage**. We can't be **carried** through by our friends or our family – it's too **narrow** for that. We can't expect to get through on the faith of our friends or our family. We have to come in **single** file, one by one, individually, not on the shoulders of anyone else.

And we have to leave **all** our baggage behind. We can only pass through the one narrow gate by losing the baggage of our sins at the threshold. We can't **enter** with any unforgiven sin. We have to come to Jesus and ask his forgiveness for our sins. Ask him to forgive our sin of waywardness, going our own way, neglecting the lordship of God in our lives. This is why Jesus died on the cross and rose again, so that our sins could be **forgiven**. We can't enter through the gate into heaven unless we know forgiveness for our sins, and know Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Leave your baggage behind.

The evildoers of verse 23 are those who don't know Jesus. The evil being spoken of is that they've lived **apart** from God. Without accepting that Jesus is the only way to know we're put right with God through the forgiveness of sins, you can't enter the narrow gate that leads to eternal life with God. The universalists – those who believe **everyone** will get to heaven somehow – they've got it **wrong**. Only those who come through the saving work of Jesus, without the baggage of unforgiven sin, only **they** can enter in.

We **all** have to ask ourselves, have we entered in through **that** gate? Have we entered in through the **one** gate that is Jesus? Or are we hoping that **another** gate will get us to the same place? Have we asked Jesus to **forgive** our sin of neglecting God? Do we know Jesus as Lord and Saviour? Have **we** entered in?

Once we've entered in, what **then**? Well, we need the right food. We need the right things that are going to build us up. We need to be people that – second part of verse 21 – that do *'the will of my Father who is in heaven,'* Jesus says. We need, secondly, **the right teaching**.

We must beware false teachers, verse 15 tells us they're wolves in sheep's clothing. On the **outside** they're cute and cuddly, but inside they're ferocious wolves. They'll eat you **alive**, even **worse** they'll stop you from enjoying the only life that really matters, the only life that's important; not **this** short life on earth, but **eternal** life in heaven. Can you afford to take that risk? Don't listen to false teachers.

But how do you know who they **are**? How do you know who the false teachers are? How do you know **I'm** not one of them? How do you know I'm not leading you **astray**? Just because I'm standing in a pulpit. leading a meeting, how do you know **I'm** not a false prophet?

All of us who listen to the word being proclaimed or explained, **all** of us, **each** of us has a responsibility, a **job** to do, to test the teaching. John, the disciple Jesus loved, one of the 12 who were with Jesus **most** when he walked the earth, he has something to say about this in his first letter: 1 John 4:1 says, *'Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from **God**, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.'*

Test the spirits. Test the teaching.

When I was studying German at university we had to read a book every week and then discuss it with the professor. One week he started talking about this particular book, and he went on for half an hour, and we busily made notes trying to keep up. After half an hour he asked, ‘This **is** what the book’s about, isn’t it?’ Silence. ‘Of **course** it isn’t!’ We screwed up our notes. But it taught us a lesson that we had to think for **ourselves** – we couldn’t just accept what was said. We had to **check**.

We can’t just accept what people **say** about the word of God. We have to **test**. We have to **discern** what is the truth and what is coming from the mouths of false teachers.

Here on a **Sunday** is fine, but what about the **rest** of the week? What are you listening to? Good sound teaching? What are you reading? Good sound books? What are you watching on telly? Good sound proclamation of the gospel? **Test** the teaching. But how?

John goes on to say, 1 John 4:2, *‘This is how you recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is **not** from God.’*

If what they say and the way they live doesn’t bring glory and honour to God, if it doesn’t centre on the saving work of Jesus and give him all the praise and glory, if their motivation in any way elevates **them** rather than Jesus, be suspicious, be **very** suspicious. They will show in some way that they never really knew Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

And beware: we must beware ‘**liking**’ what we hear just because it’s what we **want** to hear. Sometimes speakers are popular because they say things which please **man** and not God. Some churches are guilty of this – they don’t stick to the word of God, they **change** it, or they **stretch** it, so that they can please their listeners. Beware falling into the trap – popularity of a speaker does **not** guarantee the truth of what they’re saying. Test the spirits, John says.

What are the consequences of not receiving the right teaching? **Dire** consequences - Jesus saying to you on that day when he comes to judge us all for what we’ve done with our lives, *‘I never **knew** you. **Away** from me, you **evildoer**.’*

What a dreadful thought. We have to be people that test and discern truth and disregard the **false**. Right teaching.

Only when we receive right teaching, teaching that comes from the mouth of **God**, the words he's inspired men to write down and record and has preserved for us in the Bible, only **then** can we do the will of God the Father who is in heaven. Only **then** can we believe and obey – produce right fruit – fruit that shows we've entered the narrow gate.

Verse 18: *'A good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.'* *'By their **fruit** you will recognise them'*. What will **you** be recognised for? Good fruit from a life rooted in kingdom of heaven life in Jesus? Or bad fruit from a life rooted very securely in **this** world? What about **you**? What about **me**? Are you bearing the fruit of through-the-gate-life? Or the rotting fruit of the only-looking-at-the-gate-life?

You see, only those who bear the good fruit will show that they **know** Jesus. True disciples are **changed** people. There must be fruit which shows God the gardener is at work. Only those who show that God has changed their lives, only they will be welcomed into heaven with open arms by Jesus. They don't just know **about** Jesus – the **devil** knows about Jesus - they know **him**; they have a **relationship** with him; they **listen** to him; and they **follow** him; and they put Jesus' words into **practice**.

Verses 24-28 tell us that in order to know Jesus and bear the right fruit we have to build on the right **foundations**. Thirdly, then **the right foundations**.

Verse 24 says, *'Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the **rock**..'* And we know what happens to the foolish man who built his house on sand, his house **collapsed** with a great crash.

Build on the right foundations and you will see the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace built on the rock of Jesus; patience, kindness, goodness, built on the foundation of Jesus; faithfulness, gentleness and self-control built on firmly built on the solid rock of Jesus.

But here we have the vital thing about knowing Jesus – which is what our passage is all **about**. Building our life on the solid foundations so that Jesus will **not** to say to us *'I never knew you.'*

Knowing Jesus and being **known** by Jesus is all about getting the authority and identity of Jesus right. Verse 28 tells us *'that the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had **authority**.'* Jesus speaks with authority, the crowds recognised that. But why has Jesus authority?

In verse 21, he calls God *'my Father'*; Jesus says he is the **gate** that leads to life; the false prophets claim to prophecy in **his** name (verse 22); they call him **'Lord'** (verse 21); people will be rejected if they don't know and aren't known by **him** (verse 23); and he applies the description of the Rock – used many times of God in the Old Testament – he applies it to **himself**. Jesus has authority because he is none other than **God**, God the Son, co-equal with God. And the crowds and false prophets **saw** that he had that authority. He had a **new** authority, his **own**. Jesus has authority because he's God.

He's **God**. So what he says is extremely important if we're to know that we've gone through the right **gate**; that we know and are known by Jesus; that we're bearing the right **fruit**; and that we're building on the right foundations. We **have** to listen to Jesus' words – he's **God**. Who will **you** listen to? God? Or the world? **Jesus** has the words of eternal life. No other can claim that.

But of course hearing isn't enough – we have to put God's words into practice. Hearing has to be followed by obedience; not just professing faith, but putting faith into action. Don't just **look** at the gate, go **through** it, enter into the life in relationship with Jesus. Be changed. Don't just **hear** the will of God, **do** the will of God. **Know** Jesus. Be known **by** Jesus. Let Jesus have his rightful place in your life – he has ultimate authority. He has the power over life or **death** – he rose from the dead. He's the **gate**, he decides who's in or out.

All of us, **all** of us need to hear these words loud and clear, and be willing to do something about it. We all think we're on the right track, don't we? But **are** we? Let's examine our lives – we must **keep** examining our lives. We must **never** be complacent. We must **never** just assume we're OK, and relax in our comfortable existence. Measure your life against the life Jesus calls you to. Doing **nothing** isn't an option.

Let's not be lukewarm. Let's make sure individually that we've entered through the one narrow gate that is Jesus. Let's be fed on the right teaching which proclaims Jesus as God, Lord and Saviour. Let's build our lives on the Rock that is Jesus. It's all about Jesus. Let's all of make sure that when we leave this life, Jesus says to us, *'Well done, good and faithful servant.'* 8