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**Matthew 7:13-23**

*Meeting Jesus in Matthew: The Road Less Traveled*

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Introduction: **(Slide #1)**

1. My great-grandmother Edna Davis Romig was good friends with Robert Frost.
2. He came out to CU where she was a professor for a literature conference, and came up to my house.
3. The poet Robert Frost lived in New England for much of his life (Lawrence, Dartmouth, Harvard).
4. Much of his poetry is associated with his life here in New England and the landscape and nature.
5. One of his most famous poems is *The Road Not Taken*... The last three lines of the poem go:

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*

6. In life, we choose all sorts of roads (jobs, family), and we choose spiritual pathways (beliefs).
7. How we live our life now in relation to God will take us down one road or another.
8. How do you know if you're on the right path, if you're walking with God? **(Slide #2)**

I. Two roads lead into eternity, one wide the other narrow (**Read Matt 7:13-14**)

A. The broad way is the easy path, but it leads to destruction.

1. Jesus talks about heaven and hell all throughout the gospels.
2. The image we get is of a busy highway filled with distracted drivers.
3. They're distracted by their jobs, families, friends, achievements, spirituality.
4. They're distracted by the norm, what's easy, what we all have to do everyday.

(The broad way is the easy path, but it leads to destruction.)

B. The narrow way is the hard path, but it climbs to eternity.

1. A gated turnoff with nothing but tire treads leads into the woods, mountains, and wolves.
2. The word "narrow" is a verb and means "to press, squash, persecute, cause to suffer."
3. Hebrews 11 says the heroes of the faith were mocked, flogged, chained, imprisoned, stoned, etc.
4. Our hardship is living counter-culturally, saying "no" to what the world says will make us happy.
5. Jesus promises those "few" who find this unpopular path find eternal life.

(The narrow way is the hard path, but it climbs to eternity.)

C. Johanan ben Zakai was a Jewish sage who lived in the first century (30 BC - AD 90).

1. He helped write the Mishnah, which contains the Jewish oral traditions.
2. He saved many Jewish lives during the great revolt that led to the destruction of the Temple.
3. He did this by negotiating with Vespasian, a Roman commander who became emperor.
4. At the end of his life he wept on his bed, and when his disciples asked why, he answered:

Do I then go to appear before a king of flesh and blood, whose anger, if he should be angry with me, is but of this world? [...] Verily, I go rather to appear before the King of Kings of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be he, whose anger, if he should be angry with me, is of this world, and the world to come, and whom I cannot appease with words or bribe with money! Moreover I have before me two roads, one to Paradise and one to Gehenna, and I know not whether he will sentence me to Gehenna or admit me into Paradise.

(Two roads, lead into eternity, one wide the other narrow.)

(Our next section, narrows the focus to those who appear to be on the narrow road) (Slide #3)

## II. Two types of people go to church, one fruitful the other rotten (Read Matt 7:15-20)

### A. Rotten people attack the truth and can't produce good fruit. (2 images: wolves, trees/foilage)

1. Jesus compares "false prophets" to wolves in sheep clothing.
2. A prophet is supposed to speak God's truth, but a "pseudo-prophet" speaks lies and falsehoods.
3. The word "ferocious" means "rapacious, ravenous, robber."
4. Wolves are always hungry for more, greedy for power and money (prosperity gospel).
5. They will use others to further their own agenda, pretending to love Jesus (politicians).
6. Don't trust in them because it's impossible for them to do good, to bear fruit.
7. It's biologically impossible for a thorn-bush to produce grapes or for thistles to produce figs.
8. When a church is full of rotten people, it turns cold, hallow, ungracious, and oppressive.

### B. One of Aesop's fables is called "The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing"

1. It's the story of a crafty wolf and a watchful shepherd.
2. The shepherd is so watchful the wolf can't get in and eat the sheep.
3. But one day the wolf finds a sheep skin and dresses in it and strolls into the pasture.
4. The wolf manages to catch and eat a lamb but that evening he goes in with the flock.
5. And it just so happens that on this night the Shepherd decides to have mutton, sheep stew.
6. So he picks up a knife, goes to the fold, and kills the wolf dressed in sheep skin.
7. Our shepherd promises one day every rotten tree will be "cut down and thrown into the fire."
8. Wolves and thorn-bushes may fool us, but you can't fool Jesus.

(Rotten people attack the truth and can't produce good fruit.)

### C. Fruitful people love the truth and can only produce good fruit.

1. What's the difference between a fruitful person and a rotten one? The heart.
2. When Jesus says, "every good tree bears good fruit" he uses two different words for good.
3. The first, agathos (ἀγαθός), tells us the tree itself is good (right characteristics and functions).
4. The second, kalos (καλός), tells us what the fruit's core goodness produces—beauty.
5. At seminary, the students celebrated Kalos, a night for poems, stories, acting, and songs. (S#4)
6. The ESV, "So, every **healthy tree** bears **good fruit**, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit." (v. 17)
7. When Jesus changes our hearts, beauty radiates from the inside out. (organic, natural)
8. That beauty will be a love of truth and lots of good fruit.

(What is the fruit Jesus is talking about here? What are the pears, plums, apples, and bananas?)

- D. Fruit is: 1) repentance of sin, 2) confessing Jesus, and 3) understanding and obeying God’s message.
1. First fruit is... **repentance of sin** (turning mind/heart/will from disobeying God)

Matthew 3:8 Produce **fruit** in keeping with **repentance**. (NIV®) (Slide #5)

2. Second fruit is... **confessing Jesus publicly** (Pharisees cast demons/demons, faith story/baptism).

Matthew 12:32–34 <sup>32</sup> Anyone who speaks a word against the **Son of Man** will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. <sup>33</sup> “Make a tree good and its **fruit** will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. <sup>34</sup> You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? **For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.** (NIV®) (Slide #6) (c.f., Matt 21:33-43)

3. Third fruit is... **understanding and obeying God’s message** (parable sower scatter seed, hear)

Matthew 13:8, 23 <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil, where it **produced a crop**—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown... <sup>23</sup> But the seed falling on good soil refers to **someone who hears the word and understands it**. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.” (NIV®) (Slide #7) (c.f., Matt 21:19)

4. If we look at the wider story of the Bible, we also see character fruit (live like Jesus).

Galatians 5:22–23 <sup>22</sup> But the **fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (NIV®) (Slide #8)

5. As a community of Christians, we will recognize fruit in each other’s lives.
6. We fight fruitlessness in each other by helping each other grow in Jesus (judgement text, 7:1-6).
7. Notice how Jesus doesn’t say to evaluate people by their gifts or talents, but by their fruits.

(Two roads lead into eternity, one wide the other narrow.)

(Two types of people go to church, one fruitful the other rotten) (Slide #9)

### III. The types of people find heaven, but only one will enter. (Read Matt 7:21-23)

- A. Religious people know how to say and do the right things, but it won’t be enough.
1. Religious people know how to address Jesus the right way—“Lord, Lord” means “Yahweh”.
  2. Religious people even do good things: 1) prophesy, 2) cast demons out, 3) perform miracles.
  3. You can know all the right things to say and do but still not know Jesus.

(What’s the difference between a religious person and someone who goes to heaven?)

(The difference is a real relationship with Jesus Christ.)

- B. Relational people know Jesus and he knows them, and he’ll be enough.
1. Jesus’ last words cut to our hearts, “I never knew you.”
  2. The word “know” isn’t just intellectual knowledge, it’s **heart intimacy**.
  3. Matt 1:25 says Joseph did not “consummate” or “know” their marriage until Mary gave birth.

4. “To know” was a “Jewish idiom for sexual intercourse between a man and a woman.”
5. Does Jesus know you? Have you exposed your most private secrets to him?
6. Do you share everything with him, your money, home, friends, family, body?
7. Is he a stranger you don’t trust, or is he more like a friend who says, “Oh yes, I know [Name]”?
8. The only way we can successfully bear fruit is by knowing Jesus. **(Slide #10)**

John 15:4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. **Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.** (NIV®)

Conclusion: **(Slide #11)**

1. Come and walk the narrow road with Jesus.
2. The only reason we can find heaven is because Jesus is leading us there.
3. Jesus is our path finder, our wolf slayer, our fruit grower, and not just our Lord, but our lover.
4. Is Jesus your Lord? Is Jesus your lover? Does he know you?
5. Maybe you’re a thorn-bush or a thistle that doesn’t believe in Jesus but wants to.
6. Jesus takes a thorn-bush and wears it as a crown—he transforms thistles into fruit.
7. Christianity is the harder path full of trouble, but Jesus is our trailblazer.

(Come and walk the narrow road with Jesus.)

(How are you going to respond to Robert Frost's poem?)

(Are you going to take the normal highway or the trail in the woods with Jesus?)

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*

8. Come and walk the narrow road with Jesus.

Invitation:

1. If you’re ready to start your journey down the narrow road, come talk to me after the service.
2. We’ll pray together and invite Jesus to come and lead you on your way.

Benediction: 2 John 3 Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, will be with us in truth and love. (NIV)