

## Session 5

November 12, 2023

### WON'T ALL PEOPLE ULTIMATELY GO TO HEAVEN?

Matthew 7:13-23

Last week's lesson focused on the error of *pluralism*, the old idea that "there are many roads that lead up the same mountain." This week's lesson disputes the related idea of *universalism*, that none of it really matters because "we all go to heaven anyway." Universalism fails in a number of ways. *Logically*, it makes no sense. Does anyone really believe that someone like Saddam Hussein or Adolf Hitler will share the same eternal destiny with someone like Mother Teresa or Billy Graham? And if so, why would that eternal destiny necessarily be some form of heaven? Couldn't it just as likely be some form of hell? *Theologically*, universalism makes no sense either. To accept it would mean either accepting that all religions are not only valid but equally virtuous (at best); even those that contradict one another. Or (at worst) that all religions are man-made farces with no relationship whatsoever to the God who made the heaven we will all supposedly inhabit! Fortunately, universalism is firmly disputed by the Bible in general and by the words of Jesus in particular. He addressed the issue in the final chapter of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus pointed out that universalists accept three faulty assumptions:

**False confidence (vv. 13-14).** Human nature says to look for the easy way. And in religion, we do the same thing. I remember a church visitor describing his previous church. He said they went in, drank some latte, listened to a band on stage, watched a video clip, heard an encouraging message, and left. "It was great," he said. "We didn't have to do anything." While I can appreciate the modern church trying to reach the modern crowd, do we really want our church logo to be "*We don't require you to do anything?*" The picture Jesus paints in these verses is of two gates. While he used the metaphor of a "sheep gate" in John 10 (see John 10:7), in this sermon He is referring to city gates. Notice what they have in common: both see traffic; both are on roads; both provide access to somewhere; both are open. But one is accessed by a difficult (think *uncomfortable*) road, and the gate itself is narrow. The other is accessed by a broad (think *easy*) road, and the gate itself is wide; literally as wide as the road itself. The determining factor here is *ease of entry*. But the final destination is what ultimately counts! The easy way is popular, but it leads to ruin. The difficult way is just that: difficult. But it leads to life. Notice that *few will find it* (v. 14). Jesus met the false confidence of the easy-way crowd with the harsh reality that *most people will not go to heaven!* For reflection: *If salvation is by grace alone, why would Jesus say that getting into heaven is difficult? What did He mean by this?*

**False fruit (vv. 15-20).** Here, Jesus warned that popular heresy is spread through popular prophets. But prophets of truth are rarely accepted by the world. That makes the average person an easy target for false prophets who preach an easy-to-believe gospel. Verse 15 is the source of the derogatory description, "a wolf in sheep's clothing." And that's how Jesus described false prophets. At first glance they look like the real deal. But ultimately, they will reveal themselves as the false teachers that they really are. So what are the fruits by which they are to be recognized? Opinions range from the errant doctrines they teach, to the practical results of those errant doctrines, to the flawed character traits of the teachers themselves, to the hypocritical

lifestyles those false teachers adopted. Regardless of how they might be identified, the results are the same. Bad fruit indicates bad trees, and bad trees are cut down and burned. For reflection: *Why do you think Jesus inserted this illustration about false teachers between two warnings against universalism? What assumptions can we draw from this placement?*

**False professions (vv. 21-23).** Unlike the *false teachers* mentioned above, this text speaks about *false followers*. Let's face it: many of our church rolls are bloated with the names of people who rarely (if ever) attend. Some churches maintain entire file cabinets dedicated to "Inactive Members." So how do we handle the multitudes of people who show up at church, make a profession of faith, are baptized into membership, and then disappear? Some denominations wrongly say they were saved but lost their salvation. The Bible teaches otherwise. Here, Jesus was clear that not everyone who works in the church or for the church (or even for the Lord Himself) is truly saved (v. 22). Like the wolves in sheep's clothing, they look the part on the outside but lack true conversion on the inside. Notice that Jesus didn't say He once knew them and then lost them. Rather, He said He *never* knew them (v. 23). Hence, they were never truly saved to begin with. For reflection: *Adrian Rogers put it this way: "The faith that fizzles at the finish was faulty at the first."*