The speculation had been swirling for two years. The anticipation sky-rocketed over the final two months. And the hype became almost unbearable during the final week. Finally (and mercifully, I might add), on July 8 this year, at 9 PM Eastern Time, it all culminated with “The Decision.” Nearly 10,000,000 people were glued to their TV screens when LeBron James announced that he was taking his talents to South Beach to play basketball for the Miami Heat. It was the most hyped-up, non-sporting sports event that I’ve ever seen. Even people in the sports world criticized “The Decision” for being excessive and unnecessary and overdone.

Well, in our text today, we find the exact opposite of that. We’ve been in the Sermon on the Mount for over 5 months. We’ve studied 92 verses of Jesus’ teaching. And today we come to the final section. We’re in Matthew 7:13-29. And in this section, all of Jesus’ teaching culminates with the biblical version of “The Decision.” And this version is anything but excessive and unnecessary and overdone. In fact, it would be impossible to overstate the importance of “The Decision” that Jesus teaches about in our text today. So read with me Matthew 7:13-29. Jesus says, *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*

*"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 thornbushes, 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.*

*"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he 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 perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'”*

*“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. 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.”*

*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.*

The very first thing I want you to notice is something that’s so obvious that you may laugh at me for even pointing it out. But I’m going to say it anyway: These verses come at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. That’s right, it took three years of seminary training and several more years of advanced theological study, but I can now confirm for you that these verses are the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

But in all seriousness, that actually is important when you combine it with the second thing I want you to notice. Notice how many contrasts Jesus draws in these verses. He contrasts a narrow gate with a wide gate. He contrasts a narrow road with a broad road, a good tree with a bad tree, good fruit with bad fruit, a wise builder with a foolish builder, rock with sand. Now, why would Jesus give so many examples of contrasts at the end of His sermon? Because Jesus is calling us to respond to His teaching, and He’s contrasting the two possible responses. Jesus does not want to leave any doubt in our minds about the purpose of this sermon. The purpose was not just so we can say, “Isn’t that Jesus such a good teacher? He really had some profound things to say, didn’t He? I enjoyed hearing that. Really interesting thoughts.” That’s not the purpose. No, the purpose is that we will actually do something with Jesus’ teaching. Jesus is calling for a response, and there are only two possible responses. You will either follow Jesus and obey Him, or you will reject Jesus and ignore Him. These two responses can be seen in verses 13-14. Jesus says, *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”*

Now, what you need to realize is that this isn’t the only time Jesus talks about gates and roads. Jesus also talks about gates in John 10:9 when He says, *“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.”* And Jesus talks about roads in John 14:6 when He says, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* In Greek the word for way and the word for road is the exact same word. We do the same thing in English when we call some of our roads park*ways* or cause*ways*. So we could also translate John 14:6 as, *“I am the road, the truth, and the life.”* And then when Jesus says, *“No one comes to the Father except through me,”* that means not only is He the road, He’s the *only* road. Not only is He the gate, He’s the *only* gate. And when you bring that back to Matthew 7 today, you realize that when Jesus is talking about the narrow gate and the narrow road, He’s talking about Himself. So the contrast between the narrow gate and the wide gate is a contrast between following Jesus and not following Jesus. The contrast between the narrow road and the broad road is a contrast between obeying Jesus and not obeying Jesus.

Jesus comes to the end of His sermon, and He says, “This is the decision that’s before you: You must choose either to follow me or not follow me. You must choose either to obey me or not to obey me.” But whatever you do, don’t come to the end of this sermon and think that there’s nothing for you to do. There is a decision to be made. Jesus is calling you to decide how you will respond to all the teaching He has given you. Will you follow Jesus or not?

And in the rest of our time together today, I want us to make sure we are really clear on what Jesus says that decision looks like. And I’ll be honest with you: Jesus says some things that scare me in these verses. Jesus says some very challenging things about following Him. And when I think about how we usually talk about following Jesus, and then I read what Jesus actually says about following Him… there are some things we need to wrestle with. We need to examine our hearts and ask, “Are we really following Jesus the way Jesus calls us to? Or are we just following Jesus in a way that makes us comfortable?” What does it really mean to follow Jesus?

The first answer is that when you follow Jesus, you follow Jesus only. Think about verses 13-14 again. Jesus says that in order to follow Him, you have to enter through the narrow gate. And like we saw just a minute ago, Jesus Himself is the gate. Even more, Jesus is the only gate. In other words, Jesus is not one of many ways to get to God. Jesus is the only way to get to God. And this truth is not very popular in our world. Many people in our world say that you can believe whatever you want and, as long as you’re sincere, you’ll get to God. But that is not what Jesus says. Jesus says the way to God is very narrow. In fact, the way to God is so narrow that it’s a one-lane road, and Jesus is the only lane. Jesus says there is only one right answer, and He is it.

And one of the things I find very interesting is that it’s only when it comes to religious issues that people act like there is more than one right answer. If you ask me what 2+2 is, and I say 5, it doesn’t matter how sincere I am, I’m still wrong. If I want to eat at Chick-fil-A in Providence, and I ask you for directions, you’re not going to tell me to take any road I want and, as long as I’m sincere, I’ll get there. You’re going to tell me to turn left onto Mt. Juliet Road, because that is the right way to go. In fact, if I turn right onto Mt. Juliet Road, I’m not going to get to Providence. I’ll be going the wrong direction. And unless I turn around and head in the right direction, I won’t ever get there.

Why would we pretend that the truth about God is any different? There is one way to get to God, and it is Jesus alone. Not Buddha, not Mohammed, not Joseph Smith, not the New Age movement, not being a good person, not *Eat, Pray, Love*. Jesus and Jesus alone.

And I know that a lot of us fully believe that trusting Jesus alone means that you don’t trust those other things. But I also want to point out that trusting Jesus alone means that don’t trust Jesus plus anything else, either. What I mean is that you don’t trust Jesus plus baptism. You don’t trust Jesus plus being a good person. You don’t trust Jesus plus church attendance. You either trust Jesus alone or you don’t really trust Jesus. You must believe that Jesus and His great work on the cross is enough to save you, and nothing else needs to be added, or you don’t trust Jesus alone. The road of trusting Jesus is a narrow road, and there’s only room for trusting Jesus. When you follow Jesus, you follow Jesus only.

The second answer is when you follow Jesus, you follow Jesus continually. What I mean by continually is that following Jesus is not a one-time decision. It’s a lifelong commitment. Think about verses 13-14 again. Jesus combines the images of a gate and a road. The gate makes us think of something you pass through once, but then the road is something that you continue on. And it’s important for us to see that Jesus puts these two things together. You don’t just pass through the narrow gate. You pass through the narrow gate and you stay on the narrow road. And Jesus presents the two inseparably. If you don’t stay on the narrow road, you didn’t really pass through the narrow gate. In other words, following Jesus means that you follow Jesus every day, you keep becoming more like Jesus every day, you keep growing in your relationship with Jesus every day. And if you don’t do those things… if you don’t keep following Jesus and becoming more like Jesus and growing in your relationship with Jesus, then you never really trusted Jesus to begin with. Following Jesus is not just a one-time decision. Following Jesus is a lifelong commitment. When you really follow Jesus, you follow Jesus continually.

And that’s closely connected to our third answer. When you follow Jesus, you follow Jesus completely. What I mean by completely is that following Jesus affects every aspect of your life. And this point is so important that Jesus says it several different ways. First, look at verses 15-20. Jesus says, *"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 thornbushes, 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.”*

I don’t know about you, but I had never noticed how different verse 15 is from the rest of those verses. In verse 15, Jesus says that false prophets come in sheep’s clothing, but *inwardly* they are ferocious wolves. In other words, if your heart hasn’t been changed, you aren’t a true follower of Jesus. When you follow Jesus, your heart is changed on the inside.

But then notice that Jesus focuses on something totally different in verses 16-20. He says a good tree bears good fruit and a bad tree bears bad fruit, and by their fruit you will recognize them. In other words, if your life hasn’t changed on the outside, you aren’t a true follower of Jesus. When you follow Jesus, your life is changed on the outside.

So, in verse 15, Jesus says that if you follow Him, He will change you inwardly. He will change your heart. And in verses 16-20, He says that if you follow Him, He will change you outwardly. He will change your life, your fruit, your behavior. And what I want you to see is that that means Jesus changes you completely. He changes both your heart and your behavior. He changes you both inside and outside. When you follow Jesus, you follow Jesus completely – inside and outside, heart and life.

Jesus emphasizes this truth again in verses 21-23. First look at verse 21. Jesus says, *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”* Jesus emphasizes that following Him means a lot more than just calling Him “Lord” with your mouth. Following Jesus means obeying Him with your life. When you follow Jesus, He will change the way you live. He will change your behavior.

 And make sure you feel the full force of what Jesus is saying here. He’s telling us that just calling Him “Lord,” or just repeating the words of a sinner’s prayer, does not mean you are following Him. The words are empty and worthless unless your life changes. When you follow Jesus, you follow Jesus completely, including the way you live. And if you don’t, it doesn’t matter what you say or what you pray, you aren’t following Jesus.

Now, compare that to verses 22-23. 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 perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'”* This time, Jesus emphasizes that following Him is a lot more than just outward obedience. Jesus says there are going to be people who prophesy in His name and drive out demons and perform miracles… and don’t get into the kingdom of heaven. In other words, there are going to be people who have all the appearances of religious and spiritual work, but still don’t get into the kingdom of heaven. Why? Look at verse 23. Jesus says, *“Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you.’”* The reason they don’t get in is because they don’t know Jesus personally, and knowing Jesus personally is the only way to get into the kingdom of heaven. Doing good religious work is not enough to get you into the kingdom of heaven. In fact, even spectacular spiritual work done in the name of Jesus is not enough to get you into the kingdom of heaven. And I have to tell you, this verse is frightening. It scares me to think about all the modern-day examples of this. There will be many who say to Jesus, “Lord, Lord, did we not attend a Southern Baptist church every single week in your name? Lord, Lord, did we not go to Mass in your name? Did we not worship passionately in the charismatic movement in your name? Did we not get baptized in your name and pray in your name and sing in your name and tithe in your name and teach Sunday School in your name and serve on committees in your name and serve as a deacon in your name and preach in your name?” Then Jesus will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers!” Church! Do you feel the weight of that? I don’t care what religious work you do, your religious credentials will not get you into the kingdom of heaven. Only Jesus will get you into the kingdom of heaven. And if you trust your religious credentials, you don’t yet know Jesus. Because when you know Jesus, there will be no doubt that only He can do this for you. If you are ever asked what you have to your credit, don’t point to your credentials. Point to Jesus! Point to Jesus! Point to Jesus! He is all you have! And He is all you need. Whatever great religious work you do, unless those things grow out of a personal relationship with Jesus, they are empty and vain and meaningless. You must know Jesus Christ personally if you are going to get into the kingdom of heaven.

Now, put that together with verse 21. Jesus says, *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”* What you say with your mouth is not enough to guarantee that you’re following Jesus. What you say must match what you do. But at the very same time, verses 22-23 show that what you do is also not enough to guarantee that you’re following Jesus. What you do must grow out of a personal love relationship with Jesus. And so once again, the emphasis is that when you follow Jesus, you follow Jesus completely. When you follow Jesus, He will change what you say, what you do, and what you love. When you follow Jesus, the words of your mouth, the actions of your life, and the love of your heart are all completely about Jesus. Anything less than that and you’re not following Jesus, because when you follow Jesus, you follow Jesus completely.

And I’m afraid that too often we settle for way less than that and call it following Jesus. Some of us claim to follow Jesus, but we couldn’t point to anything in our life that has changed out of obedience to Jesus. Others of us can point to all sorts of outward obedience to religious rules, but our hearts have never changed, because we trust in ourselves instead of trusting in Jesus. Listen, neither of those are enough. Neither of those are what it means to follow Jesus. On one hand, if you claim to follow Jesus and to have been changed on the inside, but then you never live any differently, you’re a liar. Jesus says a good tree will bear good fruit. If you’re not bearing good fruit, you’re not a good tree. On the other hand, if you follow all the rules outwardly, but your heart is never changed inwardly, you’re a hypocrite. Jesus has told us 100 times over that who you are on the inside is even more important than what you do on the outside. Jesus will not settle for one without the other. Jesus wants your heart *and* your behavior. Jesus wants every aspect of your life. Following Jesus is the most radical, life-altering decision you will ever make. And if it’s not radical and life-altering, then you aren’t really following Jesus. When you follow Jesus, you follow Jesus completely.

And after Jesus tells us that, notice how He ends His sermon. Look at verses 24-27. Jesus 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. 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.”*

Every time I read these verses, they remind me of Sesame Street. Cookie Monster used to come out with four plates of cookies. Three of the plates had two cookies on them. And one plate had three cookies on it. And Cookie Monster would sing, “One of these things is not like the other things. One of these things, it doesn’t belong. Which of these things is not like the other things? Can you figure it out before I finish my song?”

That’s exactly what Jesus does in this story about the wise and foolish builders. Almost every detail about the two houses is the same. The rain comes down on both. The streams rise on both. The winds blow and beat against both. It’s all the same… except for one difference: The wise man built on the rock, and the foolish man built on sand. That’s the only difference, and that determines whether the house stands or falls.

Of course, don’t miss the point that Jesus is really making. Jesus is not talking about houses. Jesus is talking about people. Look at the beginning of verse 24. Jesus says, *“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine…”* Jesus is talking about people who hear His teaching. Jesus is talking about you and me. We’ve heard His teaching today. We’ve heard His teaching for five months. Many of us have heard His teaching for years. And that’s why what Jesus says in these verses is so crucial for us. He says that just hearing His teaching is not enough. Look at the difference that Jesus emphasizes in verse 24 and verse 26. In verse 24 He says, *“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 then verse 26, *“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.”* Do you hear that? The difference is *not* whether you *hear* Jesus’ teaching. The difference is whether you put it into practice. The difference is whether you live it out. The difference is whether you actually obey Jesus.

That is the decision we face today. That is the decision Jesus puts before us. Jesus says, “You have heard my teaching. Now you must decide: Will you obey me or not? Will you follow me or not?”

And we need to wrestle with that decision right now. We need to decide whether or not we will live out Jesus’ teaching. Jesus says that you must follow Him only, you must follow Him continually, and you must follow Him completely. Jesus says you must trust Him and Him alone. You must pursue Him in every aspect of your life, every day of your life, for the rest of your life. You must be changed in words, action, and heart. Jesus wants to transform what you say, what you do, and what you love. Jesus wants to transform everything about you.

And the question is, “Do you believe Jesus really expects that? Do you really believe Jesus expects you to follow Him that radically and that extremely?” Do you believe what Jesus says? Do you believe that Jesus wants your entire life? Or do you tack Jesus on to the end of your weekend and squeeze Jesus into your plans and act like that’s enough?

Listen, Church, there is a real danger that we will water down what it means to follow Jesus. We tell people that following Jesus is the easiest thing they will ever do. Just walk an aisle, repeat the words of a prayer like it’s some magic formula, and you’re good to go. Church! That is not what Jesus teaches. Following Jesus is so much more than just repeating a prayer with your mouth that never changes your heart or your life. Following Jesus means that what you pray with your mouth reflects a radical change in your heart that leads to a radical change in your life. Now, don’t get me wrong, there is absolutely nothing you can do to earn or deserve your salvation. You become a follower of Jesus solely because of what Jesus has done for you and not at all because of what you have done for Jesus. That is absolutely true. But it’s also true that following Jesus is the hardest thing you will ever do. Just think about the type of things Jesus says to people when they consider following Him. He says things like, *“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me”* (Matthew 10:37-38).He says things like, *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it”* (Mark 8:34-35). He says things like, *“Go and sell everything you have and give it to the poor. Then come, follow me”* (Matthew 19:21). He says things like, *“Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple”* (Luke 14:33).

And then we say all you have to do is walk an aisle, raise a hand, or say a prayer!?! That’s not even close to what Jesus says! Jesus says if you are going to follow Him, you have to love Him more than anyone else in the world… more than your parents, more than your children, more than your husband or wife, more than yourself! You must love Jesus most or you’re not worthy of Jesus! Jesus says if you’re going to follow Him you must deny yourself. You must take up your cross. You must lose your very life for His sake. You must die to everything that is self-centered and self-serving in your life. You must die to your plans and your desires and your hopes and your dreams. You must crucify them and live for Jesus alone. Your entire life must be about Jesus’ plans and Jesus’ work and Jesus’ gospel.

There isn’t room for you *and* Jesus in your heart. If you’re going to follow Jesus, you have to die, so Jesus can live in you. Jesus also says if you’re going to follow Him, you must be willing to give up everything you have for His sake. Not a few bucks here and there, not 10% of your income, not even all your money. No. Everything! All your money, all your possessions, your home, your very life, everything! Jesus says if it’s not all His, you can’t be His disciple! Jesus demands that nothing be yours and everything be His. Jesus demands your entire life. And anything less is not following Jesus.

So if we’re going to put Jesus’ teaching into practice we must believe and teach and live the truth that following Jesus is the most radical, life-altering decision you will ever make. Jesus never presents it as anything less than that. When you follow Jesus, your heart must radically change, your actions must radically change, your very life must radically change. So the question is, “Will you do it? Will you obey Jesus or not? Will you follow Jesus or not? Will you really be a follower of Jesus Christ? Will you really be a Christian?”

And as you consider that decision, I want to point out one last thing to you. Look at verses 28-29. Matthew tells us, *“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.”*

I want to remind you that Jesus is not just any old teacher. Jesus is not just one of many great teachers. Jesus is the One who has authority unlike any other teacher who ever lived. Why? Because Jesus is the God who created you… and Jesus is the Savior who redeemed you. Jesus has double authority over your life. He made you with His own hands, and then He bought you with His own blood.

The God who made you and the Savior who bought you says that He wants your life. He wants to radically change you. He wants you to give up everything for Him. He wants you to choose Him over everything else. And the decision you now face is: What will you do with what Jesus says? Will you hear Jesus’ teaching and then blow Him off and just go on with your life as if nothing has changed? Or will you hear Jesus’ teaching and submit to your great God and worship your great Savior and give your very life to Him? Will you obey Jesus or not? Will you live for Jesus or not? Will you follow Jesus?

For five and a half months you’ve heard Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Three chapters. 107 verses. 23 sermons. And after all that, Jesus has just two more words for you. The two most radical, life-altering words ever spoken: “Follow me.” Follow me. Will you follow Jesus?