

Date of sermon: 8/21/2021
Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: Matthew 7:13-29
Title of Sermon: Admirer or Follower
Series: Deep Roots - #2

¹³ "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. ¹⁵ "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. 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. ²² 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?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

²⁴ "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. ²⁵ 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. 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. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." ²⁸ When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹ because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

If you would take your Bibles and turn in your Bibles to the Book of Matthew, the seventh chapter. Jesus is early on in His ministry, and He has gathered them off of the Sea of Galilee in an area called Capernaum, and He is teaching them. You might have heard the phrase, the "Sermon on the Mount." This is Jesus's opening teaching time. This is the time where he's kind of laying the groundwork, and, quite candidly, if you know this text very well, you know this is also the time that He absolutely fileted their hearts open. He did. It was amazing. I think when the disciples walked away from this sermon, they thought, "We don't have a chance." Towards the end of this message, I want to put together a couple of parabolic kind of stories that He tells us, as we're in this series called Deep Roots -- developing stability for unstable times.

I'm in Matthew, the seventh chapter, and I'm going to start at verse 13: "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 -- sadly, only a few find it. Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." In other words, they disguise themselves. They look like sheep, they attend the church, they go to church with you. Some of them are in your small group, your community group. I'm not trying to make you suspicious -- I'm just trying to give you what Jesus is saying. These folks are going to be hanging out with you. "By their fruit you're going to recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?" No. "Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit, and a good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit." It's just Farmer's Truth 101. We all know that. "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you're going to recognize them. You see, not everyone" -- this is kind of a parenthetical statement, I think -- "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' is going to enter into 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?'" Yeah, they did. "'And in your name did we not drive out demons and perform many miracles?'" Pretty heady stuff! They did! "And then I will tell them plainly, 'You did some phenomenal stuff. The problem is, I didn't know you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

"Therefore" -- conclusion. If all that is true, and I presume that you agree with me that it is, because it's from the Scriptures -- "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; and yet it did not fall." Why? "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 tumbled down.' "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 the teachers of the law."

The Olympics just came and went, in case you weren't aware. And you might not have been, because NBC lost millions. Because the viewership was so low. I'm not going to get into all the reasons why -- I have no idea, ultimately. I just know that they were terribly low. But the reality is, if you missed them, you missed some really cool things. You missed Carissa Moore, who -- I'm not a surfer, would never try it -- if I tried it at this stage, I'd probably kill myself. But Carissa Moore won a gold, and it's like -- wow. It's amazing. One that was probably a little closer to my heart -- I'm not a great skeet shooter, but Vincent Hancock. He won the gold medal in skeet-shooting. If you ever watch these guys, I am telling you -- it seems to me like they can get a sparrow at two miles. They're amazing. Maybe the one that captured all of our attention -- why? Because he won more than one medal -- was Caeleb Dressel. I don't think any relation to the Dressels in our church. Where is Mr. Dressel? Right there. No relation, right? Okay, probably even spells it incorrectly. I watched him. I was amazed! Utterly amazed. But -- truthfulness, I did not alter my life's behavior one iota after the Olympics. In other words, I'm an admirer, I'm just not a follower. I am. I'm an admirer. I admire these people. I admire Caeleb. I admire Vincent. I admire these guys. Probably especially the ones that pull eight-hour jobs and train in the morning, train at noon, and train in the evening. Those are the guys I'm kind of impressed with. I mean, Caeleb probably makes millions. But some of these guys that are actually in the Olympics, man, they're not millionaires! I mean, they're slugging it out in their jobs just to do their hobby! I admire them.

Here's the reality -- I'm not a follower. In other words, I didn't get up the next day and think -- "I am gonna be in the 2024 Olympics. I'm gonna change my diet, I'm gonna change my behavior, I'm gonna quit my job, I'm gonna follow them, and I am targeting the Olympics." Now, I guarantee you, somewhere there's a little kid who did. I guarantee you, Caeleb one day watched the Olympics, one day watched a Mark Spitz or a Michael Phelps, or somebody, one day, and somewhere out there, there's a little girl who watched the equestrian jumpers and said to herself, "I'm gonna do that." And because she said that -- you know this -- because it happened this year. Somewhere out there in the United States, and probably all over the world, there is a little girl, there's a little boy, who has made a decision, and they're not just simply an admirer. They're a follower. And they're really different people. They are. Admirers -- they applaud. Followers -- they surrender. It's not just -- [clapping] "That was great, Caeleb! Kerri, do we have any ice cream?" No no no. I applauded! I mean, I was standing cheering for him! That's an admirer. But a follower doesn't do that. Follower surrenders. "I'm gonna commit myself to going to the gym. I'm gonna commit myself to going to the pool. I'm gonna change the very fabric of my life." And sometimes even families -- "We're gonna take our daughter to another state. We're gonna enroll her in this school." See, followers are really different than admirers. They act.

People who are admirers -- they admired Martin Luther King. But very few of them were arrested with him. And even fewer had their homes burned, as he did. There were a whole lot of people that -- "Hey, Martin Luther King! I do! I'm with you! I believe that all people are created equal in the image of God. I absolutely! I'm with you!" But when he got arrested, they walked, or when his house got burned, they didn't pay for it. They were admirers, but they weren't followers. There are a lot of people who admire Mother Teresa, but there are very few people who sold pretty much all that they had and moved to Calcutta. You see, there's a real difference, and that's not just today, that was with Jesus. The reality is, when it comes to Jesus, there are many admirers and very few followers. That's what He says. "Enter through the narrow gate. Wide is that gate. Broad is that road that leads to destruction. And many" -- let me say, because of the rest of this text -- the majority -- "enter into it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life. Only a few find it." How can that be? Because when Jesus finished the Sermon on the Mount, He was packing the place out? He was. "When Jesus finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching." They came from everywhere. They weren't just around the region of the Sea of Galilee. They were from everywhere. The Scripture tell us that they came from all over the region. They had heard about this guy! This guy who turns water into wine, this guy who does miraculous things, this guy who teaches in a way that they had never heard anyone teach before! The crowds were huge! But the followers -- the text says -- very few. Why?

When Jesus had all these crowds together, what did He do? He went through them, and He asked a few of them, and He said to each of them what? "Come follow me." And He gave them a term. Do you remember what the term is? The term was "disciple." They became Jesus's disciple. What does that term mean? It means student. It means follower. It means a learner. That's what a disciple is. It's a person who follows another person and adheres to their teaching and learns from their teaching. It comes from the same root and the same origin of the word "discipline." What does it mean to be disciplined? It means to set yourself aside to be shaped. So, if you will, or if you go to the barber, if you go to the stylist, they're going to shape your hair. You're going to discipline your hair. That's what you're doing. You're giving that person time, you're setting aside time to be shaped, to be disciplined. For those of you who go to, you know, a therapist or, you know, and somebody who's doing rehab on your knee -- you're disciplining yourself. What are you doing? You're taking time and allowing somebody to discipline you, to shape you. That's what Jesus invited these folks to do. And that's why there are few. When He was all said and done, and you go through the text with the feeding of the five thousand and the wine at the wedding and everything else -- and people were drifting away -- there was a moment that Jesus turned around, and He looked Peter in the eye, and He said, "Are you gonna leave, too?" Why did He make that statement? He made that statement because the vast majority of people left. He made that statement because He started right here. He made that statement to Peter because Jesus understood there's a whole lot of admirers, but there are very few followers.

How do you know the difference? Well -- the text tells us that admirers can be identified by their fruit. That's what the Scripture tells us. "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they're ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them." The promise with this is, it makes it look like they've got fangs coming out of their mouth and they, you know, they snarl at you like a wolf. But they really don't. These individuals, they go to church. They volunteer. They're at the Boys & Girls Club. They're kind. We're gonna know them by their fruit? Yeah. But you have to understand, they're gonna be deceptive. Why? Because they're following the father of lies. They're following a person who -- lying is his native tongue. It's called Satan. And so, because of that, these individuals who are admirers of Jesus -- but not followers -- are gonna do everything they can to be seen just like you. They will.

One of them was a gentleman by the name of the Rich Young Ruler. He came to Jesus one day, and he said to Jesus -- "Hey, Good Teacher." I mean -- and notice what else he did. He came and he bowed in front of Jesus -- he bowed! I mean, it's like -- how humble and submissive and kind is that! He came and he bowed in front of Jesus, and then he said, "Good Teacher -- what can I do to enter into the kingdom of Heaven?" I mean, good night! If you walked out and some guy said, "You know Christ?" and they bowed and said, "I want to do -- whatever you tell me to do, I wanna follow Christ" none of you would say, "You're a wolf! Ah ha want to, I know you -- you're a devil!" You wouldn't! Man, you'd lead the person to Christ, go home, call somebody, make sure I know by Monday! "Whoo hoo! I led somebody to Christ! He came, and he fell right outside the --" Yeah. That's what you would do. That's what the Rich Young Ruler did. He came and he bowed in front of Jesus. He said, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit the kingdom of Heaven?" And what did Jesus say? "Go sell everything you have, come follow me." And what did the young man do? He went home broken-hearted. Why? Does that mean that the only way you get into Heaven is if you go and liquidate your bank account? No. No. Jesus understood that that man's idol was his money. And by the way, if money is your idol, Jesus is going to ask you to give that up, too. Because Jesus won't allow any idols to come between you and Him. But the fact is, Jesus ran into admirers all the time. How do I identify them? They go to church. They volunteer. They might even give some. But what's the fundamental thing that they do? Let me give you a couple of traits.

Number one -- they put parameters around Christ. In other words, they want to retain control. You'll see it over time. Not at first -- you didn't know, the implication is it's pretty strong -- that these individuals who come into the church -- watch out for these false prophets -- they come to you in sheep's clothing. Well, the reality is, they're gonna walk in, and for a long time -- it might be for a while -- but all of a sudden you're gonna notice that there's gonna be some things when it comes to Christ, when it comes to yielding to the Holy Spirit, when it comes to the law of God, the Word of God, and the word on the street, the word somewhere else -- they're gonna begin to say, "Ehhh! I think I'm gonna go with the world." When it comes to the control of their life, you now, tell you what -- I don't think Jesus is too excited about

you sleeping with somebody that's not your wife. "Well -- I mean, c'mon. I mean, Jesus understands." Well, He's very understanding. He also has an opinion. And what you're doing is, you're saying, "Oh, yes! I love Christ! I admire Christ! I follow Christ! But I have Him boxed over here as long as He doesn't mess with just a few things that I want. I understand getting drunk -- you know. I don't get drunk very often. Just -- oh, you know, maybe at parties once in a while at work." See, what happens over time is, you begin to see that they put parameters around God, and they tell God this -- "I love you. I admire you. But ultimately, I want to retain control in certain areas of my life." They want to retain control.

Secondly, they do whatever they need to do to fit in with whatever crowd they're in. That's what they're doing here. They're wolves in sheep's clothing. Why would they do that? Why aren't they just wolves hanging out with wolves? I mean -- what's wrong with wolves, right? If you're not a sheep, why hang around 'em? It's because they've developed a passion for what we call a chameleon life. They've discovered that "When I'm here with all the wolves, I get some benefit, but I kinda like these sheep over here! I mean, they're kinda nice. And by the way, when I hit some difficult times and I can't pay my rent, I just call the sheep, and they're like, 'Whoa, you're one of us! We love you -- we'll help you out!'" The reality is, there are individuals who determine their face based upon what they want. They do whatever they need to do to fit in to whatever crowd it is. They're people who are forever shifting kind of their convictions to allow themselves to fit in to whatever crowd they're in.

Third -- they have a rare ability to sit in the critic's chair. Don't miss the fact -- watch out for false prophets. What do prophets do? They declare the word of God. They declare judgment. Think about this -- they are people who have a twisted character, who cloak themselves in righteousness for the purpose of telling you you're not living well. They are people with twisted character who cloak themselves in church language for the sole purpose of gaining the benefit of the sheep but ultimately acting as a judgmental prophet among them. They are people who plead for grace for themselves and have very little grace for others. They are people who have an answer for everything, and there's nothing in their world that is not black and white, and they can tell you the truth about everything. And usually, when you're finished with them after about an hour, you feel deeply bruised, tired, and discouraged. Because their whole purpose in life is to speak a word of judgment.

Admirers. They can be identified by their fruit. Jesus doesn't want you to be an admirer. "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is a wise man." Jesus is terribly concerned that you and I would walk out with a chameleon-like attitude where we're always shifting ourselves with ultimately a heart of judgment. Jesus wants you to be a fully devoted follower. Well, how do I do that, Pastor? Let's roll back up to a few verses. Let's go back up to verse 7. This is where He tells you how to walk in. Verse 7 says, "Ask and it's gonna be given to you; seek and you're gonna find; knock and the door will be opened to you. Everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; to him who knocks, the door will be opened." It seems terribly too simple, doesn't it? Seems like, "Oh, no -- no way. There's no way." Ah -- it's that simple. What makes it challenging is, if you ask, you're asking Christ. If you seek, you're seeking Christ. If you knock, you're knocking on the door of Heaven. Why would you do that? Jesus just finished the Sermon on the Mount. Go back and look at chapter 5 in particular. Because He was talking to these dear friends, and -- He was talking about sin. "Oh yeah, I'm a sinner." And Jesus, He said, "Well, you are a sinner, but not -- not as good a sinner as you think you are." "Well, what do you mean, Jesus?" "Uh -- you ever committed adultery?" "No way, Lord! I haven't done that, man. I've been true to my wife! I've never committed adultery." "You ever had lust in your heart?" "Well, everyone --" "Good. You're an adulterer. You're as bad as the prostitute who walks on the street. You're no different at all. And if you think you are, you're a self-righteous prostitute." "Whooo! Really, Lord!" "Yeah."

"Ever murdered anyone?" "Oh, no! Huh-uh. Wanted to! Had a high school English teacher. Didn't like her much. No, Lord, I've never murdered anyone. Never even come close! Lord, I haven't even had a good fight!" "Have you ever hated anyone?" You ever despise the president? How about in the last week? Have you ever rationalized your hatred of a person and your utter desire for this person to be wrecked and ruined and destroyed? Have you ever justified that with a rationale for all the righteous things that you hold onto? You ever hated somebody? You're a murderer. You see, when Jesus said, "If you seek me, you're gonna find me. If you ask --" the question is, what are you asking for? Are you

asking for Christ to clean up your moderately good life? Are you asking Jesus to save your fairly put-together life? Are you asking Him to save a sinner? A murderer? An adulterer? Because if you are, then it really is simple. It's amazing. In fact, in the words of the song, it's Amazing Grace. And the sound of it is sweet. And Jesus wants you to be a fully devoted follower, and that, my friends, is how you begin, and that's how you walk. Not mustering up a bunch of righteous activity, but coming to Christ with the simple acknowledgment of, "Jesus, I've heard your sermon. I agree with it. I need help." And you knock, and you seek, and you ask. And what does He promise? He promises that if you ask, you will receive. Ask what? Christ to forgive you. Ask what? Christ to save you. Receive what? Righteousness.

It seems absurd, doesn't it? It does to me. How is it that the road that leads to life only a few find? When it's so easy! It blows my mind. Until you try and crucify your own pride. Until you try to earn your way to Heaven. Until you come to Jesus with parameters around your life. And then you realize the distinction of an admirer and a follower is this: Total absolute trust. "I trust you with everything, Jesus. You can have it all. You died for me." And the Scripture says that, "Do you not know that you are a temple of the living God? It is God. It is God who dwells in you. You are not your own," the Scripture says. "You were bought with a price. Therefore, honor God in your body." You see, an admirer has conditions. "I admire you, Jesus, but I'm not about to completely alter my life." And a follower says, "You can have it all. I understand that I'm an adulterer. I understand that I'm a murderer. I understand that my righteousness is filthy to you! You can have it all." And not only is that the way you begin, but Jesus wants you to build your life so that it will stand. He promises that there's gonna be winds that come. There's gonna be storms that come. The rain comes down. The streams rise and the winds blow and beat against that house. And COVID comes, and mandates come, and there are differences of opinion, and then there's vaccines that come, and I might lose my job if I don't get it. There's all kinds of tension. And my family is split, and my children won't let me see my grandkids because I'm this side of the vaccine and they are on the other side of the vaccine. And all of a sudden, things start to get split and it gets really ugly, and Jesus says, "I want you to stand. I want you to weather that. I don't want it to destroy you. I don't want you to have to go home and put a pillow over your head and say, 'I can't take it! I can't take any more news, I can't take any more phone calls, I can't take it! I'm gonna implode!'" Jesus says, "I don't want you to get there." Jesus wants you to build your life so that it will stand. How do we do that? We ask. We seek. And we knock. And we say to Christ, "You can have it all. You can have it all. Take me. Lead me. Take my broken family. Take my fragile economy."

"You said, 'Don't let your hearts be troubled. In this world, you are going to experience all kinds of difficulties.' Lord, you are prophetically correct!" And He said, "But take heart. I've overcome the world. Ask me. I'll help you. Knock." See, it doesn't stop. That's just not the entry point in -- that's the journey. The difference is, the admirer may have moments where they're infatuated with Jesus, but they don't walk with Him in trust. "I like you, but I just want to remain in control of my life." The follower says, "You can have it all. And I will stop at nothing. I will ask, I will seek, I will knock. I will come to you and I will agree with you, Jesus. You're saving a wretched individual. You can have it all." And Jesus says, if you give that to Him, you'll stand. But -- the real honest thought is, Jesus turns around to Peter, and He said, "Are you gonna leave, too?" Peter says, "Where else are we gonna go? No one else has the words of eternal life." Whoa! Wonder where he got that. Let's look back at this text one last time. If you look at verse 14: "But small is the gate, narrow the road that leads to life." It doesn't make life simple -- it just makes it bearable. It doesn't make life easy -- it just makes you strong. The difference is, some people -- in fact, the majority -- they're admirers. Pretty impressed with Jesus. They go to church. They use the language. Few are followers. You can tell the difference. One seeks control, another has given it all up. One changes with the wind; the other is steady. One -- they become the critic of everyone. Telling everyone how to live their life because they've figured it out. Followers. They walk in grace and they give it.