

How We Are Known

The Master Class in Discipleship Series, August 27 & 28, 2022 | Matthew 7:12-20

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How are we known?

The Enigma machine reminds us that if we don't want to be known, getting at the truth is not easy.

The Enigma machine was invented by a German engineer shortly after World War I. Enigma machines resembled typewriters. Through interchangeable rotors and connections, they encoded letters so that the resulting message was nearly indecipherable.

The Poles broke the Enigma code as early as 1932, but by the beginning of World War II, the British and their Allies had not yet broken the Enigma code.

Realizing that their codes were compromised, the Germans continued to add complexity, particularly to naval and high-level communications. The Allies were in the dark.

A team of 9,000 British intelligence officers set to work at Bletchley Park, an English estate that had been converted into their headquarters. They sought to gather, decipher, and process German signals intelligence.

With the outcome of the war in the balance, the Enigma machine kept German secrets safe.¹

We don't always want to be known accurately.

Social media exaggerate this tendency. On social media we curate the images we share with people. We show our best moments and use filters to make the pictures look better.

When we do, we create for other people a distorted picture of who we really are.

We don't always want to be known accurately.

However, whether we want to be known or not, we will be known!

In Matthew chapter 7, Jesus says in multiple ways that we are going to be judged.

He says that we will be judged with the judgement we apply to others.

He adds that on the day of judgments, he will know and welcome some and not others.

He says that some will build their lives on him and his teachings, while others will not.

We will be judged. In that judgement, who we are will be known.

How are we known?

That's the question in Matthew chapter 7 as Jesus wraps up the Sermon on the Mount.

When we are judged, who we are will become completely transparent no matter what.

Who are we when we peel away all the layers of pretense?

¹ <https://bletchleypark.org.uk/our-story/enigma/>, <https://historyofyesterday.com/the-machine-that-changed-the-course-of-world-war-ii-7bbfe296b79c>

Since you and I are facing judgement, we want to know the answer to that question. For answers, we turn to Jesus' words in Matthew 7:12-20.

We are known by our character.

In Matthew 7:12 lets us know how important our character is:

"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

The word "so" points back to the previous passage and the character of God.

The word in the original language conveys the sense of "therefore" or "since."

Jesus is referring to and giving us an implication based on what he just said.

Last week we looked at the passage immediately previous to this one.

In it, Jesus told us to ask, seek, and knock for everything we need to live the disciple's lifestyle because our Father will give it to us.

Jesus went on to explain that God is good and powerful and knows what we need. God's gifts to us and his actions toward us demonstrate his character.

So, since that is the case, Jesus argues, we are to do the same.

What we do should flow out of our character, out of God's character inside of us. Whether or not our actions flow out of God's character, our actions will indeed reveal our character.

That's what Jesus is saying here.

What does the character of God we have been told about look like in the life of a disciple?

Jesus demonstrates this in the simple teaching we call "The Golden Rule."

Whatever we wish others would do to us, that's what we are to do to them.

We should treat others the way we want to be treated, certainly not more poorly.

Jesus says that this teaching summarizes or represents the Law and the Prophets.

The Law and the Prophets represented most of the Old Testament.

That means the Law and the Prophets represented the Word of God, the revealed will of God.

In other places, Jesus himself (and others) summarized the Law and the Prophets with the simple commands to love God and to love our neighbors.

Here, Jesus is boiling it down to an even simpler principle.

Loving God is demonstrated in our love for our neighbors, and our love for our neighbors boils down to the simple concept that we are to do to them what we want them to do to us.

If we do, Jesus says, we are keeping the heart of the Law and Prophets.

How are we known? We are known by our character.

Do we treat others the way we want to be treated?

If so, we demonstrate that we are God's children with God's character growing in us.

Otherwise, we demonstrate that we don't have the family resemblance and something dark is thriving in us.

We are known AND DEFINED by our character.

We are known by our choice regarding Jesus.

In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus makes clear that we are known by our choice regarding him:

"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

First, let's examine this image.

There are two gates. Each gate leads to a path, a road, or a way.

The two gates are different from one another as are the two attached roads.

One gate is wide. The road it accesses is easy, broad, and accommodating. Because the gate is wide and the way beyond it easy, many enter by that wide gate and take that broad way. The wide gate and easy road lead to destruction, eternal destruction. What does that mean? Of course, we are talking here about hell. If someone takes the wide gate and the easy road, when that one is judged, that judgement leads to hell, which is eternal death.

However, there is another gate. Unlike the wide gate, this gate is narrow. The road it accesses is hard, meaning that it is difficult; the word Jesus uses implies that there is suffering attached to taking this road. Because the gate is narrow and the way beyond it difficult, few take the narrow way. The narrow gate and difficult road lead to life, eternal life with God.

Baskin-Robbins reminds us that we like lots of choices, not just two.

Baskin-Robbins was founded shortly after World War II by two brothers-in-law.

From the start, Baskin-Robbins was known for having 31 flavors, one for each day of the month.

Actually, there are more than 31 flavors, and the list of flavors develops over time.

However, variety and options are so fundamental to Baskin-Robbins that both the classic and updated logos incorporate the number 31 into the B and R.²

Baskin-Robbins' success reminds us that we like lots of choices, not just two.

However, this kind of blatant, binary choice is well known in the Bible.

We can choose to be with God or against him. We can choose wisdom or folly. We can serve God or stuff. God presents us with stark, binary choices.

One of the clearest examples of this kind of choice occurs back in the book of Deuteronomy.

In Deuteronomy, Moses stands before Israel to remind them of the Law and God's plan for the nation. He calls Israel to keep that covenant and to stay with God. He warns them of the price of disobedience and offers them the blessings that come with staying with God.

He makes the choice clear but stark in **Deuteronomy 30:15** where he says,

² <https://baskinrobbins.com.sg/content/baskinrobbins/en/funfacts.html>

“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.”

The Bible is clear that we face a very clear, stark choice.

Ultimately, this choice boils down to one about Jesus.

Jesus speaks about a gate or a door. He is that gate or door. In **John 10:9** Jesus says plainly,

“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.”

When Jesus says that there is a narrow gate that leads to a difficult path, he is calling us to make a choice about himself. Will we come to the narrow gate that is Jesus and choose it?

Jesus speaks about a road, a path, or a way. He is that way. In **John 14:6** Jesus says,

... “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Will we walk the difficult path that is the lifestyle Jesus lives and teaches his disciples to live?

That’s the choice. It’s a choice about Jesus.

How are we known? We are known by our choice regarding Jesus.

This choice is immensely consequential.

If we choose the wide gate and the easy road, then we choose death and destruction.

If we choose the narrow gate and the difficult road of Jesus’ and the disciple’s lifestyle, then we choose life now and life for eternity.

We are known AND DEFINED by our choice regarding Jesus.

We are known by the voices we listen to.

In Matthew 7:15-16 Jesus talks about the voices, authorities, and advisors we listen to:

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?”

The Bible repeatedly warns us about false prophets.

False prophets and false teachers are those who say they are speaking for God but who are actually speaking for themselves. What they say is not God’s Word. It’s untrue.

Again, in the book of Deuteronomy, as Moses wrapped up his instructions to the nation of Israel at the end of his life, Moses reminded them in **Deuteronomy 18:20** that the Lord said to him, “But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.”

False prophets and teachers are dangerous!

In **Matthew 24:11** Jesus warned again about false prophets. They are real, they will happen, they will do harm. He said, “And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.”

Here, Jesus warns us that these false prophets are disguised.

If it weren’t so consequential, the picture would be funny.

They are dressed up like a harmless, innocent sheep.

However, inwardly they are dangerous and intentional like a wolf.

The impression this picture creates is of a creature that is stalking God's people, hiding, and looking for an opportunity to deceive by false messages and destroy God's people.

These false prophets are dangerous because they make finding the narrow way more difficult.

Remember what Jesus said about the narrow gate and difficult way? Few will find it.

False prophets make finding Jesus, the narrow gate, and the difficult way even tougher!

False prophets keep people on the broad way to destruction, they keep people from finding the narrow gate, and they keep people from being willing to endure the difficulty that the narrow road requires. These false prophets, then, are extremely dangerous.

We are all surrounded by false, dangerous prophets.

Ours age is consumed by voices advocating a radical kind of secularism. In many places, God is not welcome in the public realm.

We are surrounded by voices pushing a radical kind of humanism. They claim that humanity is the pinnacle of all things, that we are capable of creating our own realities and determining our own destinies.

False prophets advocate a radical materialism. The universe is a closed system that is self-generated and self-renewing. That which we can touch and sense is all that really matters.

The cornerstone is radical individualism. "I think therefore I am" now stands as the beginning of a creed, "I think therefore I am what I think I am." I am whatever I think and get whatever I want.

There are false prophets all around us all, bombarding us with messages that call us away from God's will, the narrow gate, and the difficult way.

How are we known? We are known by the voices we listen to.

If we listen to false voices, they utterly consume our thoughts.

If we listen to false voices, they ultimately become false choices.

We are known AND DEFINED by the voices we listen to.

We are known by our actions.

In Matthew 7:17-20, Jesus broadens his test for discerning false prophets to us all:

"So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits."

Jesus has a test for knowing false prophets.

If these false prophets are both dangerous and surreptitious, then learning to recognize them is critically important. "How will I know?" the wise disciple asks.

Jesus comes armed with an answer. We will recognize false prophets by their fruits.

A false prophet's life will demonstrate the falseness of their message.

A false prophet will speak and act in contradiction to God's Word.

False prophets may talk about loving God, but they won't actually obey him. They will speak and act in unrighteous, immoral ways publicly or secretly. To love God is to obey him. That's righteousness.

False prophets may talk about loving others, but their words and actions will ultimately harm others. Plus, they will speak and act unjustly toward others publicly and secretly. To love others or our neighbors is to sacrifice for them, to treat them justly, to treat them as we would like to be treated ourselves. That's justice.

Righteousness and justice, loving God and loving our neighbor. That's the Law and Prophets.

It may take time and scrutiny, but false prophets are ultimately known by their actions.

This test applies to all of us.

Actions tell us everything we need to know about what's going on inside the way fruit tells us everything we need to know about the nature of a plant.

To summarize what Jesus said, apples come from apple trees, and healthy fruit comes from healthy trees. Unhealthy fruit comes from unhealthy trees.

Once again, our actions demonstrate our character.

That's true of false prophets, and it is true of us all.

How are we known? We are known by our actions.

Ungodly actions demonstrate ungodly character, and ungodly character means that we have a void inside where God is supposed to be.

Godly actions demonstrate godly character, and godly character comes from God inside.

We are known AND DEFINED by our character.

Eventually, British intelligence broke the Enigma code, and it changed the course of World War II.

The team at Bletchley Park, led by mathematician Alan Turing, cracked the Enigma code.

Eventually the Allies were able to read German messages on both the Western and Eastern fronts, on land and at sea, and even among high-ranking German leaders.

Decoded Enigma messages enabled the Allies to route ammunition, fuel, food, and troops across the Atlantic while avoiding deadly German U-boat blockades.

Keeping the D-Day invasion of Europe on schedule probably saved years of warfare and millions of lives. This intelligence probably determined the outcome of the war.³

Things can't stay hidden forever.

We all will be known. How will you be known?

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-18419691>