

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Which Way to Heaven?

Scripture: Matthew 7:13-14

Code: 2252

Open your Bible with me and look together at Matthew, chapter 7, verses 13 and 14 – Matthew, chapter 7, verses 13 and 14. Those two verses form the text for the message from the Word of God which we'll be looking at this morning hour. In chapter 7 of Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount, which began in chapter 5, comes to a great crescendo, a great climax. That climax is stated in these two verses. The remainder of the sermon to the end of the chapter simply is an expansion of these two verses. Listen as I read them. "Enter in at the narrow gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be who go in that way. Because narrow is the gate, and hard is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

That is a provocative statement by our Lord. That is really the point to which He has been driving in all of the first part of this great, masterful sermon. He brings the whole thing to the climax of a decision, a choice. Two gates which bring the individual to two roads which lead to two destinations which are populated by two different crowds. The Lord then focuses on the inevitable decision that has to be made regarding that which He has been saying. Someone has well said that all of life concentrates on man at the crossroads. That's really true. From the time of our life when we are old enough to make an independent decision, or any decision, life becomes a matter of constant decision-making.

Every single day of our lives we make decisions, about everything. We decide what time we'll get up or if we'll get up in the morning. What we'll eat, wear. Where we'll go, what we'll do. Constantly, life is a matter of decisions. We just pick roads all the way through life, and so it is fair to say that life consists of man at the crossroads. Ultimately, and inevitably, there is a final choice; a choice that not only determines time, but a choice that determines eternity. That choice is the one to which our Lord speaks in these verses – the ultimate choice. Now, it has always been God's effort to bring man to the making of that ultimate choice, always. There's always an option, so that there's always a choice; and the choice that is ultimate is the choice that God is most concerned about.

For example, through Moses, God confronted the children of Israel, in the 30th chapter of Deuteronomy, and said this: "I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil. Therefore, choose life, that thou and thy seed may live." God gave to the people of Israel the ultimate choice, life or death, good or evil, and called for a decision. Joshua, who followed Moses as the leader of the people of Israel as they entered the Promised Land, in the 24th chapter of Joshua, and the 15th verse, said this: "Choose you this day whom you will serve" – whether the gods of your

fathers, or implied, the true God. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" – again, the choice.

Jeremiah heard God say, in chapter 21, and verse 8, "Unto this people shalt thou say, 'Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I have set before you the way of life, and the way of death.'" Elijah on Mount Carmel called for a decision. In 1 Kings, chapter 18, and verse 21, he said: "How long will you halt between two opinions? If the Lord be God follow Him: if Baal, follow him" – the ultimate choice. In John, chapter 6, we read that many followed Jesus, many called themselves disciples, but in John 6:66, it says that "many of them turned their backs and followed Him no more. And Jesus said, 'Will you also go away?' And Peter said, 'To whom shall we go? Thou and Thou alone hast the words of eternal life.'"

Peter articulated his choice. Some walked away, and some stayed. Jesus, said Simeon, was a child born for the rising and the falling of many. Jesus becomes the crux of every man's destiny. The choice is made at the crossroads of Christ, if you will. Choose life, or choose death. Essentially that is what Jesus is saying here, in Matthew 7:13 and 14. John Oxenham, the British poet, wrote it this way: "To every man, there openeth a way, and ways, and a way, And the high soul treads the high way, and the low soul gropes the low. And in between, on the misty flats, the rest drift to and fro. But to every man there openeth a high way and a low; And every man decideth the way that he shall go."

So our Lord here confronts men with a decision; he says a choice must be made. One writer says, "It's make-up-your-mind time on the mountain." Let me suggest to you there are two things you cannot do with the Sermon on the Mount. One of them is you cannot stand back and admire it. Jesus is not interested in bouquets for His ethics. Jesus is not interested in folks who want to just admire the virtues of the ethical statement of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus wants a decision about your destiny. I believe there is a second thing you can't do with the Sermon on the Mount, and that is to push it into some prophetic tomorrow. I don't think Jesus is suggesting that this is for some far future era.

I think He is demanding a decision now, in this time. I believe there are many people who admire the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount; that's not what Jesus wanted. And I believe there are many people who take the characteristics of the Sermon on the Mount and its demands, and push them off to the future kingdom; I don't think that's what Jesus wanted either. What Jesus demanded was a choice, an act, an ultimate decision, to be made at that time and that moment, on the basis of what He had just said. A deliberate choice has to be made. Christ came to bring a kingdom. He was a king. He was the King. He was the King of kings. And He came with a kingdom that was unique, and special, and separate, and different from all the kingdoms of the world.

And men would not understand His kingdom unless He articulated its principles, and so in this masterful sermon, He has articulated the principles of living in His kingdom. And now He gives us the

choice to either enter it or stay out of it. That's the choice He wants every man to consider. He demands a response. You know now the qualifications of the kingdom. You now know the standards of the King. What is your response? What is your reaction? That's the issue. And I believe that Jesus calls for action. I believe verses 13 and 14 are the apex, the climax to which He has been moving throughout this entire sermon, to bring people to the point, to bring us to the point where we respond.

And, beloved, the choice is utterly clear-cut; there are only two choices, the narrow gate, the narrow way, the wide gate, the wide way, that's it. There are no other alternatives. None. And I like what John Stott says about that. He says, "Jesus cuts across our easy-going syncretism." We tend to want to become eclectic in developing systems of religion, but Jesus says it is clear-cut; it is this or that, and that settles it. Now, some people might say, "Well, how in the world could Jesus make such a clear-cut issue about religion when there are so many religions facing man?" Well, there aren't so many, either. There's just the true and the false, right? There's just the right and the wrong; that's as simply stated as I can state it.

In fact, all the way through the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is contrasting true religion – His standards – and false religion – the religion of the day, the religion of man. The contrast is between divine righteousness and what it demands, and human righteousness and what it demands. The contrast is between Christ, and the Scribes and the Pharisees. There's only two. Now, let me add a footnote on that. The contrast here – and I want you to understand this, or you'll never understand the passage – the contrast is not between religion and paganism. And I've heard so many people use it that way – that the narrow way is the way of Christianity that goes to heaven, and the broad way is the drunken orgy that's going to hell.

It is not a contrast between godliness and Christianity, and irreligious people, pagan people, openly lewd and lascivious, godless, immoral masses, on their way merrily to hell. It is not that. It is a contrast in two kinds of religions, both roads marked "this is the way to heaven." Satan doesn't mark roads "this is the way to hell." That's not very deceiving. It is not a contrast, then, between religion and paganism; it is a contrast not between righteousness and declared unrighteousness, it is a contrast between divine righteousness and human righteousness, between divine religion and human religion, between true religion and false religion.

The Pharisees' problem is indicated to us in Luke 18:9, when it says the Pharisees "trusted in themselves, that they were righteous." That was their religion. And that was inadequate. Every man makes a choice. And the choice is this: either you're good enough, on your own or through your system, to make it to heaven, or you're not, and you cast yourself on the mercy of God through Christ. Those are the only two systems of religion in the world. Now, you may see around the world 10,000 different religious names and terms, but there are only two religions in the world – let me remind you – only two. There is the religion of divine accomplishment, God has done it all in Christ, and there is the religion of human achievement, we do some of it.

This is the religion of grace, this is the religion of works. This is the religion of faith, this is the religion of the flesh. This is the religion of the heart, this is the religion of the external part. Man-made systems of religion that are based upon the fact that we don't really need a savior – we have the capability and the capacity to develop our own righteousness; just give us a little religious environment, give us a few rules, a few routines, some rituals, and we'll crank it up on our own. That's the religion of human achievement, and it comes under myriads of different titles, but it's all the same system because it's spawned out of the same source, Satan himself. And he packages it in different boxes, but it's the exact same product.

On the other hand, the religion of divine accomplishment is Christianity, and it stands alone. Tragically, most of humanity is on the road of human achievement, believing they can reach the highest plane of potential destiny because of some innate capacity and capability, through their own good works and good deeds. That's the contrast. Jesus is saying, "Look, there are two roads marked 'to heaven.' One is the narrow, compressed road of divine righteousness. The other is the broad road of human righteousness." You see, the Jews had taught that they could make it on their own. That's why it was so shocking when the apostle Paul said, "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in God's sight," Romans 3.

And Paul said, "The law came in order to stop our mouths from any claim to righteousness, and to render the whole world guilty before God." The law came to show us our sinfulness, but when self-righteous, ego-centered man saw that he was sinful by the law, he didn't want to face his sinfulness. So he set the law aside, reinvented a new system that accommodated his shortcoming, and then, on the basis of the man-made system, affirmed to his own mind that he was righteous. That's human achievement. The Lord's whole thrust in the Sermon on the Mount is to break the back of that kind of a system. To show them that all the way through that system doesn't make it, that their view of everything is wrong.

And the whole purpose of the Sermon is to bring them to where He began the sermon. Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are they that mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. In other words, He starts out where He wants to end up, with people who are broken with a beggarly spirit, mourning over their total sinfulness, meek in the face of God and his law, and hungering and thirsting for what they know they don't have but desperately need, the righteousness of God. He wants to bring them right back to where He started, at that brokenness over sin. But the Pharisees never got the message.

I mean you hear the Pharisee in Luke 18, and he prays; "I thank Thee that I'm not like other men," and he said, "I do this, and I do this," and all through that prayer he never expressed one need to God, never one need, because he never thought he had a need. Because he was so good as he was. And in the corner is the man pounding on his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Jesus

said, “That man went home justified, not the other one.” Jesus wants to bring mankind to a point where he realizes his utter incapacity to please God in his own flesh. And in desperation with a broken spirit, meek and mourning, he cries out for righteousness from God. The Jews, of course, thought they were righteous.

They thought they were on their way to heaven, on their way to the kingdom, but Jesus forces them to rethink, and to make a decision, and a choice. It’s the same choice that every one of us has to make as well. Now, as we come to verses 13 and 14, the choice is crystallized. And, by the way, as I said, this is the pinnacle, and the remainder of the chapter just stretches this thought out and illustrates it. We’ll be seeing that in the weeks to come. But from here on, the choice is clear. There are two gates; the wide and the straight. There are two ways; the broad and the narrow. There are two destinations; life and destruction. There are two kinds of travelers; the few and the many.

There are two kinds of trees; the good and the corrupt. There are two kinds of fruit; the good and the bad. There are two builders; the wise and the foolish. There are two foundations; the rock and the sand. And there are two houses, and there are two elements to the storm that He discusses. In other words, the clear-cut decision is the whole issue at the climax of the sermon. And I repeat, Jesus does not want bouquets for the ethics, and Jesus does not want postponement of the requirements. What He wants is action, response, and He forces us to a decision, and people, I don’t think, have really understood this passage. And I think, when we’re done this morning, you will see it in a new way.

There are four contrasts I want you to see in these verses – four contrasts. Number one: two gates – two gates. “Enter in at the narrow gate, for wide is the gate.” Then verse 14, “because narrow is the gate.” Two times He mentions the narrow gate, once He mentions the wide gate. Two gates – only two. Both roads, as I said, point to salvation. Both roads point to God. Both roads point to the kingdom. Both roads point to glory. Both roads point to blessing. Both roads point to heaven. Both roads don’t go there. One is self-righteousness, and one is divine righteousness. Before you get on the road, you have to go through the gate. So the gate comes first.

Now, let’s look, first of all, at the narrow gate. And this is basically the crux of the interpretation, so we’ll spend a little more time on this. I want to just begin to develop the concept that’s involved in this narrow gate. First of all, the first thing I see as I look at verse 13 is you must enter. Did you get that? You must enter. There’s a sense of urgency here in this aorist imperative. It demands a point of action right now. Do it now, enter now. This is the time, this is the moment, this is what God is calling for. You must do this. It is not an option. It is a command, an absolute command. Now, the Lord Jesus had been teaching them a very narrow way of life.

Their way had all kinds of tolerance for sin. They had all kinds of laws beyond the law of God. They had all kinds of standards beyond the standards of God. They had invented a system that was manmade and was far-reaching, and all of these kinds of things were part of their system. And Jesus

said, "You've got to get rid of that, you've got to get rid of that, this is what it is, this is what it is," and He narrowed it and narrowed it and narrowed it down, until by the time He came to chapter 7, verse 12, He had presented to them a very refined and confined approach to living to the glory of God. And they got the picture that it was a very narrow, prescribed way.

And Jesus spoke, they say at the end of the chapter, "as one having authority." He didn't drag up all the stuff of the rabbis; He just nailed down the specifics. And so they got the picture. Compared to their system it was very narrow, very prescribed. And Jesus says, "You must enter this narrow way. If you're going to be in My kingdom, you've got to come on these terms." He demanded immediate action. It is an absolute command without an alternative. It is not enough to listen to preaching about the gate, it is not enough to admire the ethics, you've got to enter it. "You cannot enter the kingdom," He says, "unless you come on these terms, abandoning your self-righteousness, seeing yourself as a beggar in spirit, as mourning over sin; as meek before a holy God, not proud and boastful; as hungering and thirsting for righteousness, not believing you have it."

You have to enter on His terms. Hell will be full of people who admired the Sermon on the Mount. You must enter. Second point, you must enter this gate. You must enter this gate. Enter in at the narrow gate. He says there is a wide gate, but He doesn't tell you to enter that one, because it leads to destruction. You must enter. You can't stand out and admire it. You've got to go through, and if you're going to be in the kingdom, you've got to go through this gate. Now, that's very narrow, isn't it? I mean that's very prescribed. People say, "You know, Christianity doesn't give room for anybody else." That's exactly right. We don't do that because we're selfish, or because we're proud, or because we're egotistical; we do that because that's what God said.

If God said there were 48 ways to salvation, I'd preach all 48 of them. But there aren't. "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be" – what – "saved." None other name. Jesus - Acts 4:12. "I am the bread of life – I am the way the truth and the life – I am the door – anyone who comes in any other way is a thief and a robber," John 10. "There is," I Timothy 2, "one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." Only one, no other name, Christ and Christ alone, it is that narrow, it is that prescribed. There are no alternatives. You must enter. By an act of the will, an act of faith, you have to enter on God's terms through God's prescribed gate; and Christ is that gate. He is that way. And holy God has the right to determine the basis of salvation, and He has determined that it is Jesus Christ and Him alone, and that's the way it is.

Thirdly, you must enter, you must enter the narrow gate, and you must enter alone. You must enter alone. I see this as implicit in the text. If you study the term "narrow," you get the idea that it's a very narrow gate. In fact, many commentators would say that the best expression of this in a contemporary way would be a turnstile. One of those things which you have to go through all alone; the metal is very close and there's a little arm there that you push, and you go through. Now, I know

our family, when we go to the zoo, or we go to get on a train somewhere, or go somewhere on an airplane, every once in a while you've got to go through something like that, a turnstile.

And everybody is in a big hurry, and we always realize when we get there that we can't all go through together, can we, children? We must go through one at a time. That's the way it is with a narrow gate. You don't come to the kingdom of Christ in groups. The Jews believed hey, we're in the kingdom, we're all on the road together, we all came through together, based on Abrahamic heritage, based on Jewish ancestry, based on circumcision, we're all here together. And I think there are people who think that they're on the right road to heaven, they got on when they got to church. They came to church, we're all in the church and the whole church got on together. There are no groups coming through the turnstile, folks.

You go through all alone. Salvation is individual. People have never been saved in pairs. Oh, when one believes it may influence another to believe, but everyone's salvation is exclusive and intensely personal. It admits only one at a time. And that's kind of hard, you know. Because all our life is spent rushing around with the crowd. All of our life is spent doing whatever everybody else does, being a part of the group, being a part of the gang, being a part of the system around us, being accepted. And all of a sudden, Christ says, "You're going to have to come, and you're going to have to come through this deal all by yourself." And to a Pharisee, that meant you're going to have to say goodbye to those people and that system, and step out alone.

There's a price to pay, a real price. It isn't enough to claim your Abrahamic ancestry, it isn't enough to go back to your circumcision, it isn't enough to say, "I was born in a Christian family; I've been in the church all my life." You don't come into the Kingdom in groups. You come in an individual act of faith. You must enter, you must enter the narrow gate, you must enter alone. Listen to this one: you must enter with great difficulty – with great difficulty. Now, I know that shocks some people, because we hear all the time that getting saved is easy. All you have to do is just believe, sign on the dotted line, walk the aisle, raise your hand, go to the prayer room, whatever. And we've made it easy.

The only thing is, when we get done the people aren't on the right road, because they didn't come through the narrow gate. Now, without shocking you too much, I believe it's very, very difficult to be saved. Did you hear that? Let me show you why. It says at the end of verse 14, regarding the narrow gate, and regarding the narrow way, "Few there be that" – what – "find it." The first implication is that you're not even going to know it's there unless you're what? Looking. The Old Testament prophet said, "You'll find Me," says God, "when you search for me with all your heart." I don't believe anybody ever slipped and fell into the Kingdom of God. I don't believe it's easy. That's cheap grace, easy-believism.

That's the revivalist approach. Raise your hand, walk the aisle, sign the card, and you're in. "Well, I believe; I believe in Jesus." Fine, you're part of the family. Few there be that find it implies that you've

got to look for it; that you have to search for it. Let me take it a step further. Look with me at Luke 13, and I'll show you a verse that will really shock you. Luke 13, as Jesus, in verse 22, is going through the cities and villages teaching, He came toward Jerusalem. As a result of His ministry, it was apparent to the people with Him that not everybody was responding as they thought they should. It's always hard for us to understand why people don't respond to Christ.

And so one of them said to Him, in verse 23, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" I mean it was his observation that not many people responded. "Lord, is just a few?" "And He said unto them," and He gave them the answer to the next question – the one they didn't ask. The first question's answer was "yes;" the next question would have been "why?" To which the answer would be, "Because you must strive to enter in at the narrow gate." And the word strive is *agnizomai*, from which we get to agonize, which is used in 1 Corinthians 9:25 of an athlete agonizing to win a victory; which is used in Colossians 4:12 of laboring fervently; which is used in Paul's letter to Timothy in the idea – chapter 6, verse 12 – of fighting. In other words, the Lord says it is an agonizing, it is a warfare.

It is a fervency that is demanded, a striving to enter at the narrow gate, and there are many – as opposed to the few – who will seek to enter in, but won't be able. Now watch this. It's difficult to get saved, Jesus says, number one, because you've got to be seeking, and there are maybe many who are seeking. But when they find out what it costs to strive to enter, they're not willing to do that. That's a very strong statement. Listen, Christianity doesn't come by walking an aisle. You don't become a Christian in some cheap and easy fashion. In Matthew 11, and verse 12, the Bible says, "The Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." There's almost a violence in the entrance into the Kingdom.

In Luke 16:16, the Lord said, "Every man who comes into the Kingdom presses his way into the Kingdom." Now, this is not what you hear, but this is what Jesus said. The Kingdom is to those who seek it with all their hearts. The Kingdom is to those who strive, who agonize to enter it, whose hearts are shattered over their sinfulness. Who mourn in meekness, who hunger and thirst, and unquenchably satisfied, long for God to change their life. It's not for the people who come along in a cheap way and want Jesus without any alteration of their living. When Jesus emphasized that one cannot sleep his way into the kingdom, Jesus was saying, "In order to be in My Kingdom you must have earnest endeavor, untiring energy, utmost exertion."

In fact, in John 16:33, he said, "You mark it right now; in this world, you will have tribulation." It's never easy. It's never easy to become a Christian, because you've got all hell against you. All Satan and his demons, and the fifth column that Satan has is the flesh that is in you, and all of that resist it. And in the power of God, we must overcome Satan and the flesh to enter the Kingdom. William Hendriksen says, "The Kingdom, then, is not for the weaklings, the waverers, and the compromisers. It is not for Balaams, or rich young rulers, or Pilates, or Demas." But he says, "It is not won by means of deferred prayers, and unfulfilled promises, and broken resolutions, and hesitant testimonies.

“Rather, it is for the strong and the sturdy, like Joseph, and Nathan, and Elijah, and Daniel, and Mordecai, and Peter, and Paul; and let us not forget Ruth, and Deborah, and Esther, and Lydia.” End quote. I believe that one of Satan’s pervasive lies in the world today is it’s easy to become a Christian – it’s easy. It’s not easy. It’s not easy at all. It’s a very narrow gate. You go through all alone, and you go through agonizing all the way over your sinfulness. You have to be broken in your spirit. Somebody might say, “Well, that sounds like the religion of human achievement you were talking about.”

No, it’s when you come to the brokenness, and the recognition that you of yourself cannot do it, then Christ pours into you grace upon grace to strengthen you for that necessary agonizing to enter it. In your brokenness, His power becomes your resource. You must enter, you must enter the narrow gate, you must enter alone, you must enter with difficulty, and next, you must enter naked. You can’t go through a turnstile with luggage. Have you ever noticed that? It’s a mess; can’t do it. It is the gate – watch it – of self-denial. It is not the gate that admits the superstars, who want to carry all their garbage in. It is a gate where you strip off all of self, and self-righteousness, and sin, and immorality, and everything. You unload it, or you don’t come through it.

The rich young ruler came to the gate. He searched, he really searched. And he found Jesus, and he said, “What do I need to do to enter the Kingdom? I’ve come to find out; I’ve been searching. I want to be in the Kingdom.” The Lord went right to the heart of the problem, and said, “Go take everything you have, sell it, and give it to the poor.” And you know what he did? He hit him right at his suitcase. He was trying to get through the strait gate with the baggage of his riches. And frankly, on the other hand, he had self-righteousness, because when the Lord talked about all of the things he should have been doing, he said he did all those things.

So here he came, with self-righteousness in one hand and all his money in the other, and he couldn’t get through, and the Bible says, “He went away sorrowing.” He had sought, but he wasn’t willing for the selfless, self-denying, agonizing over sin, and the stripping to nakedness that is necessary to enter the gate. If you didn’t come that way, I have a good feeling that you’re on the wrong road. It says “heaven,” but that’s not where it’s going. It may even say “Jesus.” There must be a jettisoning of self, self-confidence, self-righteousness. I think it’s wonderfully expressed by the Lord in Matthew 18:3, where He says, “Except you become as a little child, you can’t enter the Kingdom.”

What is it that marks a little child? It is utter dependency – utter dependency. “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.” Saving faith is not just an act of the mind; it is a stripping of the self, in utter nakedness. It is a beating of the breast, “Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.” And I believe the Lord here is dealing with the danger of an easy salvation. “Just come to Jesus. It’s so easy. Just believe. All you’ve got to do is believe. Pray a little prayer.” There’s nothing wrong with believing, nothing wrong with praying a prayer, but those things do not bring true salvation when they occur in a

vacuum. We are nothing and have nothing to commend ourselves to God.

Next, you must enter, you must enter the narrow gate, you must enter alone, you must enter with difficulty, you must enter with nakedness, and can I add, you must enter repentantly. I don't believe you come through unless your heart is repentant over sin, turning from sin to serve the living God. When John the Baptist was preparing a people to receive the Messiah, they were coming and they were being baptized because they wanted to have their sins cleansed. Anyone, in a Jewish context, knows that the preparation for the coming of Messiah was the purging of the heart of its sinfulness. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, that great preacher, said, "You and your sins must separate, or you and your God will never come together.

"No one sin," he said, "may you keep. They must all be given up. They must be brought out like Canaanite his kings from the cave, and be hanged up in the sun." End quote. We turn from sin to God, there must be repentance. Finally, you must enter the narrow gate alone, with difficulty, naked, repentant, and in utter surrender to Christ – in utter surrender to Christ. I do not believe that a person can be regenerate as Christ indicates it here by simply adding Jesus Christ to their carnal activities. I don't believe salvation is addition; I think salvation is transformation. The whole message of 1 John is that if you are truly redeemed, it will manifest itself in a transformed life, where sin is confessed, where obedience is characteristic, where love is made manifest.

Salvation is marked by a changed life. Jesus even said, "I can tell My true disciples, for they obey My word – they obey My word." Somebody says, "Well, I'm a Christian," and there's no sign of obedience in their life, they may think they are a Christian, but they got on the wrong road. Sure, it was marked "heaven," and sure, it may have been marked "Jesus," but it isn't the right road – a narrow, narrow gate. In contrast, there is a wide gate. We don't need to say much about it; it's obvious by contrast. The wide gate – well, everybody can get on together. You don't have to come on alone, the whole gang's coming on. They all got on together. They joined the church, and they all got on together. Nothing individual about it.

The whole crowd came. No self-denial. Hey, you can bring all your baggage, your sin, all your immorality, all your lack of repentance, your lack of commitment to Christ – you can just come along, the gate of self-indulgence. There are a lot of people who claim to be Christians, and they are utterly and grossly and totally self-indulgent. My heart grieved to see one last night on television who claimed that, went on to show utter self-indulgence. I question that. Pride, self-righteousness, self-indulgence, sins of all sorts are welcome on the broad road, but if you've got them, you don't even get on the narrow road, because you can't get through the gate with that stuff. A West Indian who had chosen Islam over Christianity said this: "My reason is that Islam is a noble, broad path. There is room for a man and his sins on it, and the way of Christ is far too narrow." That's the choice.

Two gates, two gates lead to two ways. Look again – two ways. What are the two ways? There is the broad way, verse 13, and there is the hard way, or the pressed, compressed, confined way, verse 14. That's exactly what it says in Psalm 1. There is the way of the godly, and the way of the ungodly. Psalm 1, verses 1 to 3, the way of the godly, verses 4 and 5, the way of the ungodly, verse 6, the result of both. The choice is the same as it's always been: the way of the ungodly, and the way of the godly. Now, look at the broad way. I mean once you come in the wide gate, the whole gang's there; it's easy living, man, right? There's no precipice. There's lots of room. You can just stroll and roam.

No rules, no morality is particularly binding. There's room for diverse theology. There's tolerance of every conceivable sin. Just as long as you love Jesus, or as long as you're religious. There are no curbs, there's no limits, there are no boundaries. All the desires of the fallen heart are fed on that road. There's no need for a beatitude attitude. There's no need for humility. There's no need to study the Word of God. There's no need for hard, internal moral standards. You can just go along with a typical, mechanical, religiosity that is no more than hypocrisy. It takes absolutely no character; it's like a dead fish floating down stream. It's very easy. Current does it all.

It is called, in Ephesians 2:2, the course of this world, but the utter tragedy of it all is in the Proverbs it says, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." It's the broad way. No rules. No standards, except those made by man to fit into your comfortable little system. And Psalm 1:6 says, "The way of the ungodly shall perish." As opposed to that, there is a hard way, verse 14. Your Bible may say "narrow." The best translation is a constricted way. It literally means to press together, to be confined. It's like a narrow path on a precipice, very narrow. And that's why Paul says, in Ephesians, you must walk circumspectly, with your eyes open, because you just can't float and flip-flop.

It's a very narrow way. It is hemmed in on both sides by the chastening hand of God. You step off this side, and whack, you get your spiritual knuckles hit – same on the other side. The requirements are great, and strict, and refined, and clear-cut, and there's no room for any deviation or departure from them. It must be the desire of our heart to fulfill those, knowing full well that when we fail, God will chasten, and then God will wonderfully and lovingly forgive, and set us on our feet again. You say, "Well, it's a hard, and a strict, and a narrow way; sounds to me like something I wouldn't want." One wonderful thing about it is that all the hardness, and all the narrowness, and all the restrictions are born by Christ Himself, so that His yoke is easy for us, and His burden is what – is light.

I mean when you come on that way, you'd better take stock of what you're asking for. In Luke 14, verse 25, what do we read? "And there went great multitudes with Him, and He turned and said to them" – here comes a big crowd following Him, big pile of people. He says, "Look, if you're going to follow Me you ought to know some things. If you don't hate your father, your mother, your wife, your children, your brothers, your sisters, and your own life, you can't be My disciple." Try that on somebody the next time you're go to share the gospel with them. "You want to be a Christian? All

right, hate your mother, your father, your sister, your brother” – make it as hard as it possibly could be made.

“You’re going to have to step out of the crowd, you’re going to have to say goodbye to everybody you love, or you can’t even be My disciple, and then you’re going to have to pick up a cross and live a crucified life.” Now, try preaching that at the next revival, and see how many come down the aisle. You know who’d come down the aisle? The people who should come, who want to make the right commitment; and Jesus went on to illustrate this. “For which of you, intending to build a tower, doesn’t sit down first and count the cost?” I mean, no man is dumb enough to build something without analyzing what it’s going to cost him. “Or what king in the world is going to go to war without analyzing how his troops stack up against the enemy?”

“So likewise,” verse 33, “whosoever he is of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be My disciple.” Boy, Jesus really drew a hard line. If you’re not willing to say no to everything, and to say ‘I will, as God enables me, walk that narrow walk,’ knowing full well that you cannot do it on your own by your own achievement, but knowing that God will give you grace upon grace to do it in your weakness through His strength, you’re willing to live that way, then you’re coming legitimately to Him. You better consider persecution. In this world you’ll have tribulation. “A day will come,” Jesus said to His disciples, “when they think they’ll do God service by executing you.” John 16, “You’re going to spend your life running from those who want to kill you.”

You don’t walk on this narrow way with your bare feet. This isn’t a luscious meadow. The road is hard. And Christianity has never been presented by our Lord as a soft option for the weak kneed and the weak hearted. You declare war on hell when you start. And hell fights pretty tough. And you live the rest of your life with a beatitude attitude, where you’re constantly trying to deal with your own pride, your own desires, your own selfish will. Jesus said to Peter, “Follow Me, and by the way, Peter, it will cost you your life.” Are you coming on those terms? Are you coming on those terms? Because that’s the narrow way. It’s hard, it’s pressed, it’s confined, and when you wander off the path, you’re going to be chastened.

You say, “Well, it sounds awful.” No, because all the hardness is picked up by Christ, and the way becomes a way of beauty. Now, when you make your choice, remember the third thing: there are two destinations – two destinations. Back again to Matthew, chapter 7 – there is the broad way that leads to destruction, and there is the narrow way which leads to life. There’s the way of life and the way of death, as Jeremiah said it, as Joshua said it, as Elijah said it, as Moses said it. It’s the same thing, the way of life the way of death. Psalm 1 said it. The godly enter into blessing, the ungodly perish. There’s the way of life and the way of death. The word destruction here simply refers to ultimate, eternal judgment in hell, everlasting torment.

And I don't have time to get into all the developing of that; we're going to see plenty of it as we continue through Matthew. The Lord says that life ends up in one of two places. All religions in the entire world, apart from the religion of divine accomplishment in Christ, will end up in the same place: destruction. It's easy to go that way, it's easy to get on, take all the stuff you want. It's easy to walk along, there's no standards. It just gets tough at the very end. No restrictions, and it's crowded, but it ends up in hell. The religion of human achievement, all the way from humanism and atheism, which is the ultimate religion of human achievement where man is God himself, clear to Judaism without Christianity, is going to end up in the same hell.

And as John Bunyan said, "The entrance of hell is from the portals of heaven." What a shock it's going to be for some people. On the other hand, the narrow way is going to open up into eternal bliss. The broad way narrows down into a terrible pit. The narrow way opens up into the fullness of an unspeakable, everlasting, unclouded fellowship of joy with God that we can't even imagine. It isn't so much that these are defining quantities of life as they are defining qualities of life. And the choice is yours. Consider the destination, because you're going to spend forever there. And how will men choose? The final point: there are two crowds, two gates, two ways, two destinations and two crowds.

The way that is wide, verse 13, many there be who go in that way. The way that is narrow, verse 14, few there be who find it. That's really amazing. Most people are on the road of human achievement. The masses of people are on the wrong road. People often ask me, "Do you think that there will be more people in heaven or hell?" Jesus said here, many, few. You go back to the Old Testament, and you'll find that there was always a remnant of believing people. The one time in God's redemptive history that seems to be unique is in the tribulation. According to Revelation, chapter 7, verse 9, it says there will be an innumerable number of Gentiles redeemed out of every people, tribe, and tongue, and nation, and that the whole nation of Israel will be redeemed as well.

There may be a unique kind of evangelism response in the tribulation that is going to bring a great mass of the world's population to respond to Christ. But for this time, and for this age, the reiteration of the truth is few, few, few, few, few, because men would rather hold onto their own sin, Jesus said. They love their darkness. They would rather believe in themselves – few. In Luke 12:32, Jesus looked at His disciples, and He said to them this: "Fear not, little flock." The word little is *mikron*, from which we get micro, something small. "Fear not, little flock." It is the same word used in Matthew 13 of the mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds. It's always been a little flock.

It's always been the few who seek with all their hearts, and who agonize in the power of God knowing their own human inability to enter, because they are willing to pay the price and count the cost. In fact, in Matthew 22:14, Jesus put it this way, "Many are called, but" – what – "few are chosen." Few – it's so easy to choose the broad way. It's such an easy way to go, you just go with the crowd. And you can add Jesus to it and feel religious, and go to church, or belong to some kind of system of religion that tells you that's the way to go. You never deny yourself, and you wind up in an ultimate disaster.

In Luke, chapter 13, again – I want to just point this out to you and then close with an illustration – Luke 13:24. Jesus said this: “Strive” – or agonize, we saw that earlier – “to enter in at the narrow gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and not be able.” Now listen: “When once the master of the house is risen up, and has shut the door, and you begin to stand outside, and knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us, we know You, it’s us, Lord, Lord;’ and He’ll answer and say unto you, ‘I know you not from where you are.’ Then shall you begin to say, ‘We have eaten and have drunk in Your presence.’” Some might say, “We’ve taken communion, we’ve fellowshiped.”

“And He’ll say, ‘I’ll tell you, I don’t know you from where you are: depart from Me, you workers of iniquity.’ And there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrown out.” These are not irreligious people, these are religious people, who thought they were on the right road, but it was not the right road. And they’re going to bang on the door. I tell you, I can’t think of a more horrible scene than people under the illusion that they’re saved, only to find out that the door is shut in their face. Back in Matthew 7, Jesus says, “Many go that way” – many on the broad road. You want to meet that many? Go to verse 22.

“Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name have cast out demons, and in Thy name done many wonderful works?’” Sounds so good. “And then will I profess unto them, ‘I never knew you, depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.’” What a shock. The many on the broad road are going to find out that that wasn’t the road to heaven; the door will be shut in their faces forever. Listen, the way is narrow, but I’m happy to announce it’s wide enough to take in the chief of sinners. You’ve got to come alone. You can’t escape the choice, it’s an utterly inevitable choice. To make no choice is to make a choice, and you face that choice.

A letter was written to the *Melbourne Daily* paper after the Billy Graham Crusade of some years back. This is what the man who wrote the letter said: “After hearing Dr. Billy Graham on the air, viewing him on TV, and reading reports and letters concerning him and his mission, I am heartedly sick of the type of religion that insists my soul and everyone else’s needs saving, whatever that means. I have never felt that I was lost, nor do I feel that I daily wallow in the mire of sin, although repetitive preaching insists that I do. Give me a practical religion that teaches gentleness and tolerance, that acknowledges no barriers of color or creed; that remembers the aged, and teaches children of goodness and not sin.

“If in order to save my soul I must accept such a philosophy as I have recently heard preached, I prefer to remain forever damned.” And he signed his name. And that’s the choice everyone makes. You either invent a nice little religion that fits you, or you take the truth of God and accept it. That’s the choice you make. One gives life, the other death. Let’s pray. Thank You, Father, this morning for speaking to us so pointedly. These are hard words, hard words for us to face because of our sin. May

we face them. Thank You, though, that when we enter that narrow gate there is great security and confidence, as our hearts cry out Abba Father, knowing full well that we're Your children.

We pray for those in our midst this morning who have not yet entered into that narrow gate, counted the cost, stripped themselves of themselves, surrendered all to You, and come in faith. We pray that this may be that great day. God, may we, as 2 Corinthians 13:5 says, examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith. Oh, what a great fear to be deluded all our life long, only to be shut out. May it not be so. While your heads are bowed for just a moment, as we close our service the prayer room to my right will be open, the counseling room, the counselors will be there. Don't go away without Christ, open your heart to Him. Perhaps you need someone to help you, pray with you, counsel with you.

If that's the case, instead of leaving, come to the front and to my right through the doors and someone will be there to do just that. Enter that narrow gate to that narrow way that leads to life.

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