

The Narrow Way Matt. 7:13, 14

Intro. I humbled myself last Sunday by telling you about my misadventures driving an ice cream truck one summer during my college years. The short of it for those who may not have heard...I had two accidents in the span of 30 minutes. My transparency inspired a Face Book comment. It read this way and I quote...*"If you decide to moonlight as an ice cream truck driver, please give us a call."* Sincerely, a local driving school (which will go unnamed.) Now tell me, where is the mercy in that remark?

In the interest of sharing humiliation and not keeping it all to myself...and with my wife's permission...I want to begin with another story that in on way involved me. It was late summer 1983. Peggy and I were new to Mayfair and still learning our way around. Our children were 6, 4 and 3. In conversation with a lady from Mayfair (who will also remain anonymous), Peggy heard about a children's clothing store in Grand Blanc that had an outstanding sale that week. Because Peggy hadn't yet ventured south of Miller Rd., she piled the kids in the car and set out with driving instructions she'd been given. Now I'm guessing the instructions directed her to stay to the right where 75 and 23 divide. The jury is still out whether she mistakenly saw I-69 coming and exited right or was mistakenly told to take I-69. This may never be resolved and *"it's wise to let sleeping dogs lie."* But the fact remains...Peggy exited I-75 and got on I-69 headed east. She proceeded east on I-69 while searching for the Grand Blanc Rd. exit. With rising concern, she passed one exit after another. But alas, she had been forewarned not to be concerned if it seemed she'd gone a long way. An hour passed. Tension was running high and the kids were running short of patience. She finally realized she'd taken the wrong route when she saw a sign that read, **"Welcome to Canada."** True story!

Yet here's something else entirely true. There's a right way and a wrong way to get to heaven from earth. Just as sure as I-69 runs north of Grand Blanc, every way but God's way is guaranteed to miss heaven! And that's not all. Just like I-69 east, every wrong way leads further and further from heaven and ultimately to Hell. That's the message of **Matt. 7:13,14** in a nutshell.

Let's read these verses and pray. **"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.** Pray

1. The narrow gate – "Enter through the narrow gate."

Ancient cities were typically protected by high walls that defined their boundaries and surrounded their precincts. It's possible the walls of some Israeli city were in view from the mount where Jesus was speaking. Jesus often drew analogies from his surroundings and situations familiar to his audience. People and their animals would enter through these city walls by means of various gates. As you probably know, the old city of Jerusalem and the heavenly city of Revelation have 12 gates.

When Jesus said, **enter**, He urged His audience to make a crucial decision. The verb **enter** is an aorist imperative which demands a definite and specific point in time action. In other words, do it right now. The doorway you entered this morning brought you from the outside to the inside. One moment you were out, the next you were in. In the same way, the kingdom of heaven has a point of entry...a gate. By trusting Christ to save us we need only enter this gate one time. We are in the kingdom or out. 150x's the NT declares that entrance is attained by personal faith plus nothing. Because salvation is the work of God, Paul spoke of our entry into the kingdom this way...**For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.** The moment we believe, God brings us in.

In one of His seven “I am” declarations Jesus said, **I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. (Jn. 10:9)** To enter the narrow gate is the decision to believe and embrace Jesus. As Matthew systematically laid out in the opening chapters, the fact that Jesus is Israel’s Messiah and the savior of the world is proved by His genealogy, by the details of his birth and early life and by the many prophecies He fulfilled.

Up to this point in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus described the righteous character, morality and values of those who are citizens of His Kingdom. As we’ve pointed out previously, a key verse is **5:20** where He said, **For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.** Here Jesus said entrance into His kingdom requires a righteousness that surpasses that of the most holy men His audience knew. Suppose a college announced they would only accept students with a 5.0 grade point average...not 4.0 but 5.0! What Jesus said here had the same impact. The average person must have thought...*“Who then, can qualify? / Whose righteousness can possibly surpass theirs? / Who can be more reverent and holy than our teachers? That settles it...we’re out.”*

But the Pharisees and law teachers were fakers and hypocrites. They didn’t live up to kingdom standards...they lived by rules they made up. Their self-righteousness was demolished by the Beatitudes alone! So what did Jesus mean? Did He intend to create guilt and fear leaving everyone sinful, defeated and without hope? Yes and No! Yes, in the sense that He wanted His audience to know that no one is qualified to enter based on their own efforts and performance. But No, His ultimate purpose was not to leave people hopeless but to point us to the righteousness that can only be received by faith as a gift of God’s grace. The righteousness of the Pharisees and law teachers was based on human performance...rule-keeping and works. Yet no one can be justified or made right with God on that basis! No one ever has and no one ever will. The law is powerless to correct us or make us righteous. Rules can only expose our sinfulness. The Good news is that God provided righteousness knowing we could never produce what He requires by our own best efforts. This righteousness has nothing to do with what man can do but everything to do with what He would have done for on a wooden crossbeam. In **Rom. 1:16, 17** Paul wrote...**I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."**

In **Matt. 22** Jesus compared the requirement for entering His kingdom to a wedding banquet for the son of a great king. When a royal wedding was planned in the ancient east, the king would provide festival clothing for his guests to wear. (Imagine adding that expense to the costs of a wedding!) This festival clothing represents the righteousness God gives us when we believe and embrace His Son. Yet to emphasize the absolute necessity of justification by faith, **Matt. 22:11-13** presents the impossible situation of a man who enters Christ’s kingdom without the righteousness He provides. **"But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'** This is what the NT epistles mean when by putting on Christ. God clothes the believing sinner with the righteousness of His Son. From that moment, God sees not the tattered filth of our sinfulness, but the beauty of His Son’s righteousness.

In **Jn.10:9** Jesus said, **“I am the gate.”** Later in **Jn.14:6** He said, **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** The apostles of the first century clearly understood that God’s way of salvation is narrow and exclusive. As recorded in **Acts 4:12** – Peter boldly preached...

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” Later, Paul wrote to Timothy and said, **For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men--the testimony given in its proper time. - I Tim. 2:5, 6** When properly understood, the entire Bible proclaims Jesus as the only entry point by which sinners like us may enter His Kingdom.

2. The wide gate and broad road – “For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.” – v. 13b

If the narrow gate represents faith in the Lord Jesus, the wide gate represents every other way of salvation. All sorts of entry points and spiritual paths have been imagined and proposed. One of the biggest lies on record is the one told the Islamic martyr. He blows himself up believing 70 virgins are waiting for him in heaven. But just as Jesus taught in these verses, every scheme can be reduced to just two: The broad way and the narrow way...man’s ways and God’s way. Twice in the Proverbs we hear this warning... **There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. (Prov. 14:12 / 16:25)**

Depending on whose count you accept, there are 21 major religions in the world and 33,000 divisions or denominations within those 21 religions. C.S. Lewis said, *“Man is incurably religious.”* Like people passionate to discover their roots, religion is man’s attempt to reconnect with the God who made us in His image and likeness. A faint but certain knowledge of God is written on the heart of every human being. And God has gone to great lengths to make Himself known. He revealed Himself through Creation / through Revelation (the Bible) / and through Incarnation (God actually becoming man and living on earth for 33 years.) But Satan has muddied the waters. From the very beginning he cast doubt on the trustworthiness of God’s revelation and distorted the truth about Him. Paul minced no words in tracing the source of all that is false and misleading. **I Tim. 4:1 - The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.** False religion is the work of Satan. The vast assortment of religions proves how successful Satan’s efforts have been.

Yet smitten by pride and tolerance, the prevailing idea is that many if not every path leads to God. Almost everybody claims to be on some sort of spiritual journey! Yet the average person views the pursuit of God and eternal life like climbing a mountain. They’re convinced it doesn’t matter which path you choose because every path leads to the same mountain top. So it doesn’t matter if your Supreme Being is Buddha / Confucius / Allah / the God of Israel and the Bible / or some personal designer god without a name. And it doesn’t matter if you offer sacrifices / live by some legalistic set of rules / follow Jesus / or chant and dance out in the woods while smoking pot. It doesn’t matter if your sacred book of choice is the Koran / the Book of Mormon / the Bhagavad-Gita / or the Bible. I wish I was exaggerating but I’m not! These many religions and their specific requirements are represented by the **wide gate and the broad road**. Jesus said **many enter this way**. Rejecting the narrow gate, the majority of people choose the **wide gate and the broad road**.

But we need to think a bit more about the difference between the narrow road and the broad road. Jesus said there are only two roads to choose from. So let’s think about the broad road for a moment. As we said, the broad road represents the way of religion and works. Each way that makes up this broad road insists we must do certain things and not do certain other things to be made right with God. When the average person is asked what is required to get into heaven, they invariably emphasize human responsibility. *“We must do the best we can / we must keep the 10 commandments / we must love others and live by the Golden Rule / we must go to church / we must not harm anyone / we must be generous and kind / we must be sincere...the list goes on and on.* These are things most people believe we must do to get right and get in.

Yet the Bible reveals several major problems with the broad road:

1. How can anyone ever be sure they did enough? If entrance into heaven is determined by the good we've done weighed against the bad, how can a person ever know if the scales are tipped in their favor or against them? The whole question becomes a matter of guesswork. And that's what it boils down to for most people. When asked, "What about you...do you you'll make it into heaven? The answers typically go like this... *"I hope so" / "No one can know that for sure. I guess I'll find out someday."* Life's most important question...but only 1 in a 100 is sure of the answer! Jesus invites us to enter...right now. The Bible insists we can be sure we are members of Christ's Kingdom. Our Father wants us to be saved and sure of it! **I Jn. 5:13 - I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.** But there's no assurance for those who choose the broad way. It isn't possible when the doing is up to us!

2. If God is moral, as most religions insist He is, how can good things make up for the wrong things we've done? It doesn't work that way for a lawbreaker! Imagine what happens when a speeder tries to get off by assuring the officer he/she drove far below the speed limit the day before. Would that work? Or suppose a murderer pleads innocent on the basis that he once gave some money to charity. Justice demands punishment. And punishment can't be averted by any amount of good works. The Bible declares a day when every human being must stand before God and give account for every-thing we did, said, and thought. So those who reject Christ and try to come to God by compensating efforts will find themselves without a covering or atonement for their sins.

3. This is the big one. It isn't God's way! **Eph. 2:8, 9 - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast.** Salvation and entrance into Christ's kingdom isn't based on what we did or failed to do, it's based on what God has done. God set heaven's entrance requirement...righteousness. And God then met that requirement by providing righteousness as a gift received by faith. Any theology that doesn't acknowledge that God has the right to decide who enters His kingdom is woefully deficient!

4. There's one additional problem with the broad road. Jesus said it doesn't lead to the destination people are hoping for. It **leads to destruction** and many are going that way. MacArthur writes, *"The broad way is the easy, attractive, inclusive, indulgent, permissive, and self-oriented way. There are few rules, few restrictions, and few requirements."* The **many** include pagans as well as those who are Christian in name only, atheists as well as religionists, theists as well as humanists, and Jews as well as Gentiles...every person from whatever age, background, persuasion, and circumstance who has not come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Here's a case where following the crowd is not dangerous, but fatal. The majority is wrong and headed for ruin.

Some teach today that the punishment and torment of Hell isn't forever. You need to know that isn't true! The **destruction** spoken of here isn't the same as annihilation or extinction. The Greek word *apoleia* signifies total ruin and loss. When the Scriptures are compared, the destiny of the unsaved isn't the total loss of being, but total loss of well-being. This warning echoes **Ps. 1:6 - For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.** So the **broad way** represents the many paths that have no power to lead us to God, yet none of them advertise that. None have a sign over them that says, *"This way to Hell."* Instead, they all promise salvation.

3. The small gate and narrow road - But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. – v. 14

In contrast to the **wide gate** and **broad road** or the ways of man, is the way of God. The gate is small because it represents faith in one single man of history, Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the focal point of redemptive history. From the beginning when the entire race fell and was plunged into the realm of sin and death, God promised to send a redeemer...a champion who would crush the head of the serpent. **Gen.3:15 – “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”** As time passed God’s promises became increasingly clear and focused. A male child would be born...he would be a descendant of Abraham and David. The time of His birth, His birthplace and many circumstances surrounding His coming were announced long beforehand. Then Jesus came and fulfilled all of God’s promises. In **Gal. 4:4, 5 – Paul summarized the significance of Christ’s coming. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.** Only one man in all of history has the credentials and the power to save us...Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God! After **chap. 7** Matthew begins to report the displays of His power. Are we narrow minded because we believe Jesus is the only way? Absolutely! **I Jn. 2:2 - He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.**

But notice, the road is also narrow. If the gate represents the point of entry or faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, the road represents a life of following Him. While salvation is a free gift received by faith, becoming His disciple demands self-denial and obedience. **Matt. 16:24 - Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.** On this narrow road there’s no room for materialism or a consuming passion for money and earthly goods. **(Matt. 6:19, 20)** There’s no room for prejudice / hatred / or a merciless unforgiving spirit **(Matt. 6:14, 15)** and there’s no room for self-righteousness or judgmentalism. **(Matt. 6:1)** The **narrow gate** is Jesus and the **narrow road** is fleshed out by the life He lived and taught.

In contrast to the **many** who choose the broad way, only a **few** choose the **small gate** and the **narrow road** that leads to life. **II Pet. 3:9 - The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.** Yet **II Thess. 2:10** says, **They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.**

God has opened a way of salvation. His invitation says, **“Whosoever will may come.”** Yet this way is not wide as people imagine it to be, nor is it inclusive as people prefer it to be. The point of entry is tight and compressed because only one man of history can save us. The path Jesus calls us to take is narrow and compressed because it’s the path of righteousness He has marked out for us. He asks us to walk in His footsteps. So which path have you chosen? Have you believed the testimony of God? Have you trusted the Son of God to save you. You can make that choice and enter through the narrow gate this morning. I urge you to repudiate every other way and trust the Lord Jesus. John Oxenham (British poet) wrote this...

*For every man there openeth
A Way, and ways, and a Way,
And the High Soul climbs 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 His Soul shall go.*

Communion