



The Narrow Way that Leads to Life

Two Gates and Two Ways

Matthew 7:13-14 (ESV)

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¹³ "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. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

Introduction

The words of Jesus that Michael just read to us mark the beginning of the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. The one command found in these three sentences is what we will give our attention this morning.

Here at the conclusion of this sermon, Jesus aims at application of the truth he has thus far presented. He does so by way of **four parts**, which serve as four warnings, each involving paired contrasts.¹

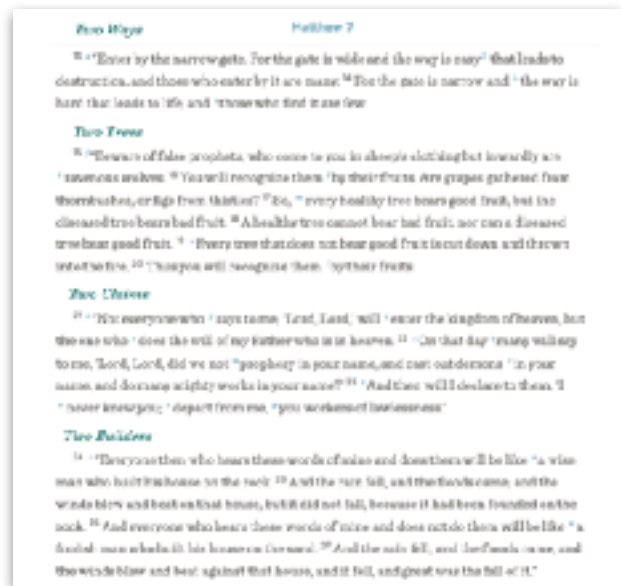
First, in vs. 13-14, Jesus contrasts **two gates** that lead to two different ways.

Second, in vs. 15-20, he contrasts **two trees** which yield two different kinds of fruit.

Third, in vs. 21-23, he contrasts **two claims** of knowledge.

Fourth, in vs. 24-27, he contrasts **two builders** who build on two different foundations.

In doing this, Jesus forces his listener to ask the question, **Which one am I?** His primary point is to call for a determined response to his teaching. Jesus will not allow his listeners to easily walk



¹ D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 188.

away from him without a decisive response. His words are not mere words, but rather are an exposition of spiritual realities. He will not tolerate ambivalence. Jesus has nothing less than the eternal destiny of souls on his mind as he concludes this incredible sermon.

We will consider together the first of these four warnings. We find it in 7:13-14. Jesus will contrast two different gates that lead to two different ways of life, entered into by two different clusters of people, that result in two different eternal destinies.

The Imperative

This portion of Scripture includes only one imperative. Jesus gives only one command. Thus, it's easy to know what Jesus is aiming for and what he is calling his disciples to do. Diagramming the two sentences makes this easy to see. Note the one imperative supported by two purpose clauses, each beginning with the word 'for.'

"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."

The one command is clear, "*Enter by the narrow gate.*" This single command of Christ is the one notion to which we must give our attention this morning so that we can obey it.

Enter What?

Enter what? Into what is Jesus commanding his disciples to enter? Into what does this gate lead? Certainly it is *the kingdom of heaven*. This becomes clear just a few verses later.

Matthew 7:21 (ESV) "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Jesus has in mind entrance into the kingdom of heaven. This entire sermon has been about the kingdom of heaven. It is been the central theme from beginning to end. Jesus mentions the kingdom of heaven in the very first sentence of this sermon ("Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." 5:3) and here in the conclusion he is mentions it again. He specifically references the kingdom of heaven throughout this sermon no less than seven times (Mt. 5:3, 10, 19, 20; 6:10, 33; 7:21).

That Jesus is talking about heaven is also clear from v.14 since the gate he describes is one "*that leads to life.*" We must be clear. *Nothing less than heaven and hell are at stake* here. What Jesus is talking about is entering into heaven. Thus, *the narrow gate* about which he is

speaking is a metaphor for entering a way of life that ultimately leads to heaven. Anyone who wants to go to heaven ought to focus his full attention to these words of Jesus.

Why Give this Command?

Why does Jesus give this command? He gives two reasons; because *hell is easy to enter* (v.13) and *heaven is hard to find* (v.14). We must consider both.

The Wide, Easy Way to Destruction (v.13)

The first reason Jesus gives this command is found in v.13. It is because hell is easy to enter.

Matthew 7:13 "For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction..."

It is easy to enter destruction and Jesus would have you avoid it. Jesus here uses the word '*destruction*,' but by it he means what we understand to be hell. The Greek word is '*arōleian*' (ἀπόλεια). The word means,

"...definitive destruction, not merely in the sense of the extinction of physical existence, but rather of an eternal plunge into Hades and a hopeless destiny of death."²

Throughout the New Testament³, this word is used to refer to the final destiny of Satan⁴ and his followers—both angelic and human, who have rejected God and his Son, and gladly embraced lives of rebellion and unrepentant sin.

The word 'destruction' is intended to communicate irreconcilable ruin and not cessation of existence, since those who enter therein are described as being in a condition of "eternal punishment"⁵, "everlasting contempt"⁶, and a kind of "burning"⁷ the smoke of which "goes up forever and ever."⁸ Think of this word 'destruction' as a synonym for hell.

The Wide Gate

Jesus says, "*the gate is wide... that leads the destruction.*" The gate to hell is wide. The "wide gate" means there is no restrictions. There are no limitations or requirements at this gate. It is a spacious gate with plenty of room to enter into this gate. This gate accepts all and excludes none. Everyone is welcome here.

² Albrecht Oepke, "Ἀπόλλυμι, Ἀπόλεια, Ἀπολλύων," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 396.

³ See Jn 17:12; Rom 9:22; Phil 1:28; 3:19; 2 Thes 2:3; 1 Tim 6:9; Heb 10:39; 2 Pet 2:1, 3; 3:7, 16; Rev 17:8, 11.

⁴ Revelation 20:10.

⁵ Matthew 25:46.

⁶ Daniel 12:2.

⁷ Revelation 18:18, cf. Mark 9:47-48.

⁸ Revelation 19:3.

The Easy Way

After entering into this gate, one discovers that behind it "**the way is easy.**" The path is smooth and easy. There are no hinderances to impede your progress. The way is free from rocks and roots that might make walking difficult. This way is amazingly free from difficulty. There is no hard hiking here. This is the path of least resistance. It is never uphill and in fact it is just slightly less than flat. The descent is so gradual that it's almost imperceptible. You can walk in this way without even losing your breath.

Those Who Enter Are Many

Given the wide entrance and the ease of walking this way, it's no wonder that this path is quite popular. "**Many are those who enter here.**" The majority has quickly embraced this wide gate and easy way. It is easy to "go with the flow." No resistance is required to simply jump into the jet stream and move with the masses. Since so many people have entered into this wide and easy way, certainly there must be something good at the end, right? How could so many people be wrong about this wide and easy way?

On the Way to Destruction

But Jesus would warn us. Jesus says we ought to be wary about this wide way. This wide, easy way actually "**leads to destruction.**" The many on this path are blind to where it leads. The many who are walking this wide and easy way are pleasantly progressing to hell.

This illustrates the fact that the whole world presently lies under a curse. The default course of humanity and popular culture is not one of spiritual neutrality, but rather a pleasant progression towards permanent destruction.

All of creation lies under God's curse upon sin (Rom. 8:21-22; cf. Gen. 3:17-18). "The whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 Jn 5:19).

Every human being who is not currently under the blood of Jesus is currently under the threat of condemnation (Jn. 3:17) and eternal destruction. Apart from the grace of Jesus and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are "*by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind*" (Eph. 2:3).

Every human being enters into this world as a "child of disobedience." We are born as "*sons [and daughters] of disobedience*" (Eph. 2:2). Our natural inclination is to "love darkness more than light" (Jn. 3:19).

Does your own experience of the world apart from Christ not confirm this? To sin is simple and smooth. To do what is wrong is not hard work. Without Christ it is easy to lie. And we are all on the wide and easy way to hell, running happily with the crowd—**unless** we hear the voice of Jesus calling us to do something about it. We are all blind and deaf to the danger of our condition **until** we hear the voice of Jesus calling us out this way of destruction and into the

way that leads to life. This is why Jesus sounds this warning and gives this command. The way to hell is wide, easy, and filled with crowds.

Thus, Jesus commands, "Enter by the narrow gate." The first reason Jesus gives this command is because it's easy to enter into hell.

The Narrow, Hard Way to Life (v.14)

The second reason why Jesus gives this command is because *heaven is hard to find*. We see this in v.14.

"For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." **Matthew 7:14**

The Narrow Gate

The gate is narrow that leads to life. The gate to heaven is narrow. The "narrow gate" means there are restrictions. There are limitations and requirements at this gate. It is not spacious, but there is enough room to enter into it if you want to. This gate excludes many and accepts (admits) only a few.

The Hard Way

Why? Because this way is hard. Many stand at this gate and peer beyond it and they see that the way is difficult. The path is not smooth, and there are many hinderances along the way. It is fraught with difficulties. There is much to impede going forward. Perhaps they see something like what our team saw while they were in Ecuador. This is the steep path they had to climb up in order to get to the village in which they were working. It was not easy, but it was worth the trip and the Lord helped them.

There are bumps and boulders to block the way. And the entire path appears to be uphill. One could grow weary simply observing the path. Who would want to enter in at that gate?!



The Few Who Find It

The answer is, not very many. "*Those who find it are few.*" It is interesting that this gate must be sought if it is to be "found." Jesus did not use this same word when describing the first gate. He simply said, "Many enter it." But this narrow gate must be *found*.

No one accidentally happens into this narrow gate. It is only found by those who are actually seeking to enter into it. Only a few do. This way is not a popular way. Only a minority enter in at this gate. Could this way really lead to someplace nice? Could such a difficult way lead to a desirable destination?

The Way That Leads to Life

Jesus says, Yes. This hard way "*leads to life*." Since Jesus is referring to the kingdom of heaven, this life is life of an entirely different kind than the physical life we know and experience today. The life about which Jesus speaks is a heavenly kind of life. This is not the life of this cursed and broken world. This is a life sourced in a spiritual kingdom. This is not mere physical life. The life to be had here is nothing less than *eternal life*.

Enduring life. Everlasting life. Full life. This way is a living way. Would you have it? Jesus comes offering LIFE, not death. He would turn you out of your way to death and into the way of life.

Do you hear the voice of Jesus saying, "Enter by the narrow gate." Choose life so that you may life.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we must mediate on the narrowness of this gate and difficulty of this way.

The Gate is Narrow

The gate to heaven is not a wide one. Jesus says it is *narrow*. It is narrow because what he is introducing here he will later make explicit. He and he alone is the gate into this heavenly kingdom.

Jesus will later say, "*I am the door*" to the kingdom of God (Jn 10:7). He will also say, "...he who does not enter... by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber." (Jn 10:1).

The Samaritan woman at the well will hear Jesus make an astonishing confession.

John 4:25-26 (ESV) ²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

Jesus will then affirm as much to a crowd of Jews in Jerusalem.

John 8:23-24 (ESV) ²³ He said to them, "I am from above. I am not of this world. ²⁴ ... unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins."

Forgiveness of sin is humanity's primary problem. *Sin is what keeps mankind from God.* Jesus is *the only man who ever completely kept himself from sin.* Thus, he and he alone is the only man who can save anyone from his or her own sin. Jesus commanded his disciples to preach this fact.

Luke 24:47 (ESV) "...repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

This is exactly what Jesus' disciples did. They stood before the people and their rulers in Jerusalem and very boldly proclaimed the narrow truth that forgiveness of sins is found only in the person and power of Jesus.

Acts 4:12 (ESV) "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Peter preached this same gospel message to Gentiles in Caesarea too. He stood before the Roman Centurion Cornelius and his whole family and said about Jesus,

Acts 10:42-43 (ESV) "...he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

The apostle Paul advanced that same gospel message among the Gentile world and when anyone attempted to alter this truth or distort this singular, saving, gospel message, he invoked the strongest of curses.

Galatians 1:6-9 (ESV) ⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— ⁷ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

The narrow gate that leads to eternal life is found only in Jesus of Nazareth, who lived a completely sinless life, who always perfectly obeyed God the Father, who died an atoning death, who rose victoriously from death on the third day, and who then presented himself alive to his disciples for forty days, after which he ascended alive into heaven, where he is today seated at the right hand of God. This is the only gospel that can save any sinner.

The Way is Hard

Jesus also said this way is hard that leads to life. How is it hard? It is hard because it requires nothing less than the death of your belief that you can save yourself. Jesus said,

Matthew 16:24-25 (ESV) ²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

"Taking up your cross" means dying to self. It means completely letting go of confidence that you can be righteous before God apart from Jesus. "Taking up your cross" means having no hope that you can save yourself and all hope that Jesus can save your soul. In self is only sin. In Christ only is salvation.

Following him means having confidence in him that he and he alone can save. Following Jesus means letting go of all other gods and keeping him and him alone in your sights. Following him means confessing that through his death and resurrection alone can your sins be forgiven. Following him means trusting him completely that he will lead you in a way that is completely good. Following him means resting in him and him alone.

Will you obey his command? Will you enter by the narrow gate? Will you turn out of the easy way? Will you count the cost of the difficulty of following Jesus? Will you embrace how hard it is to be in the minority? Which would you rather have, destruction and death or eternal life?

Ask Jesus to forgive you of your sins and he will.

Ask Jesus for the life that only he can give and he will give it to you.