

The Sermon On The Mount

The Beautiful Tune We Love So Well And Play So Poorly

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
(Matthew 5:3 ESV)*

*“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”
(Matthew 7:24–25 ESV)*

The Narrow Gate

August 14th, 2022

Matthew 7:13-14

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Matthew 7:13-14. We are coming to the end of our long, slow walk through the Sermon on the Mount. Generally speaking, verses 13-28 are recognized as the conclusion to this magnificent discourse. Pastor Matt walked us through the summary statement last week, in terms of the ethical portion, and so now here, Jesus begins to bring this sermon in for a landing; he begins to call for response. In this section, he talks a lot about BINARY OPTIONS. He talks about the good road and the bad road. The good tree and the bad tree. The wise man and the foolish man. There aren't a lot of "third options" in this closing section – Jesus is calling upon us to make a BINARY CHOICE – and we don't like binary choices in the post-modern West, do we? We like SHADES. We like NUANCE. We want a SPECTRUM of options – but Jesus isn't a SPECTRUM kind of guy – he is a "this way or that way" kind of guy and so many of us are going to find this conclusion a little jarring – and that's ok. We don't read the Sermon on the Mount to be confirmed in our modern prejudices, we read the Sermon on the Mount to hear again the beautiful tune. So I hope you have your bible open by now to Matthew 7. I'll be reading verses 13 and 14. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

“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.” (Matthew 7:13–14 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Now – while you have your Bible open in front of you, just flip 20 or 25 pages to the right to Luke 13:22-30. Jesus apparently recycled parts of the Sermon on the Mount in other contexts and exchanges – and why wouldn’t he? This is BRILLIANT and INSPIRED stuff - and so it seems that some of these paragraphs in the Sermon on the Mount became whole sermons and discourses on their own and some of those contain extra illustrations and further explanations that are very helpful, and that is certainly the case here. Listen to what Luke says in chapter 13. He says:

He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. ²³ And someone said to him, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” And he said to them, ²⁴ “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. ²⁵ When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ ²⁶ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ ²⁷ But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’ ²⁸ In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. ²⁹ And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.” (Luke 13:22–30 ESV)

Alright – so that is obviously related content. It feels like a Director’s Cut of the same scene. In fact, we wonder whether Jesus might have actually said all of this in the Sermon on the Mount, but it just didn’t make its way into Matthew’s inspired summary – now obviously, we can’t know that for sure, but thanks be to God – Luke under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, provides this material here.

So, zooming out, I want to look at this content – this teaching about the narrow door or the narrow gate and I want to try to understand it by asking a couple of organizing questions.

1. **What is the narrow gate?**
2. **What is the way that leads to destruction?**
3. **Will only a few be saved?**

Let's begin with the first question:

What is the narrow gate?

Well obviously we are dealing here with a figure of speech – and a figure of speech that Jesus used a fair bit over the course of his ministry. Just flip over again in your Bibles to John 10. If you found Luke 13 then just go another 20 or 25 pages to John 10. And I hope you don't mind all this page flipping, but the best way to understand what Jesus is saying in one passage is to compare to things he said in another. So listen to what he says in John 10. He says:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”⁶ This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. (John 10:1–6 ESV)

So here in John 10 Jesus uses the figure of the door to represent “coming at something the right way”. Anyone who tries to hop over the hedge is, generally speaking, some kind of hooligan or ne'er-do-well – but the one who enters by the DOOR obviously knows that he or she has every right to be there. You understand this. If the police are driving through your neighbourhood and they see you walking up to your door and walking right in the house, they probably don't stop and question you, but if they see you with one leg passing through a window on the ground floor, you better have some ID in your pocket, right?

That's what Jesus is saying in the first 5 verses, but the disciples were having trouble with that figure of speech, John says in verse 6. So, he uses it again in a slightly different context. Listen now to verses 7-9:

So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, **I am the door** of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ **I am the door**. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.” (John 10:7–9 ESV)

So putting that all together, Jesus is saying, “You want to come at the Kingdom of Heaven the right way. You want to walk in through the front door, as opposed to trying to sneak in through a side window. You've got to approach things the right way or you will be treated like a thief, a hooligan or a ne'er-do-well.”

And of course, Bible readers understand that the right WAY to come at the Kingdom of Heaven is through JESUS. Jesus says that exactly, 4 chapters later, in John 14. He says:

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except **through me.”** (John 14:6 ESV)

Alright – so figure of speech fully explored and understood. The NARROW GATE refers to the CORRECT WAY of salvation. You have to approach the Father THROUGH a right relationship with Jesus if you want to be admitted to the Kingdom of Heaven.

I mentioned a couple of weeks ago that John Bunyan's little allegory Pilgrim's Progress serves as an ever-ready illustration of the Christian life – and it very much intends to. Bunyan tells the story of a Pilgrim named CHRISTIAN who is fleeing the City of Destruction and hoping to make his way to the Celestial City – again the symbolism here is all on the bottom shelf. Now, as part of the story, Christian gets lost and bogged down during the early part of his travels. He begins to despair that he will ever make any kind of progress on his journey. Finally he is visited by a man named “Evangelist” who points him toward the “wicket gate”.

Now the word “wicket” is an old English word we don’t use anymore – except at Blue Jay games. If you purchase your tickets ahead of time for a Jays game, where do you pick them up? At the ticket wicket. A wicket is a small, narrow opening – it is that little plastic slot that they pass your tickets through. So – Evangelist points Christian toward the WICKET GATE. Bunyan tells the story this way:

(Note to Visuals Team: Do not display this story. I will just read it)

“In time he found the wicket gate. Over the small narrow gate was written: KNOCK, AND THE DOOR WILL BE OPENED TO YOU.

He knocked, saying: “May I now enter here? Will he within open to sorry me, though I have been an undeserving rebel? Then shall I not fail to sing his everlasting praise on high.”

At last a serious man came to the gate. “I am Goodwill. Who knocks? From where have you come? What do you want?”

“I am a poor, burdened sinner. I come from the City of Destruction, but I am going to Celestial City, so that I might be delivered from the wrath to come. I am told this gate is the way. Are you willing to let me in?”

“With all my heart.” Goodwill opened the narrow gate and yanked Christian inside.

“Why did you do that?” sputtered Christian.

“There is a strong castle near here where the devil Beelzebub is the captain. He and his army shoot arrows at those who come to this gate, in the hope they die before they enter.”

“Thank you for your quick action,” Christian praised Goodwill.¹

That’s the story of Christian’s passage through the narrow gate of salvation. Notice that a man named Goodwill PULLED HIM through – that represents God’s grace and help in passing through the narrow way. It is all of grace – and yet we must seek and press in even as we are sought and helped to pass through. So first and foremost we need to understand that “the narrow gate” represents the right way of salvation – or to be even more precise – it represents the right ENTRANCE WAY to the right way of salvation. Beyond the narrow gate there is a narrow way. The Way of Jesus is described by Jesus in particular ways. He SAYS that it is a narrow way – it is restrictive and confining. D.A. Carson puts it this way, he says:

“God’s way is not spacious, but confining... There is no room for me to set my opinions against the Lord’s, no room to set goals in any way at cross purposes to his, no room to form attachments which vie for the central place the Lord Jesus must have.”²

There is not a lot of wiggle room in the way of Christ, is there? It really is “his way or the highway”. Jesus says that, actually, in Luke’s summary of the Sermon on the Mount. He says:

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46 ESV)

Do you think this is a democracy, Jesus says. Do you think we are negotiating? No. I am the Lord. I am the Way – and on this road it is MY WAY or the highway. There is your binary choice again.

So it is a narrow way, it is a confining way and it is a difficult way – Jesus says that in verse 14:

“For the gate is narrow and the way is **hard** that leads to life” (Matthew 7:14a ESV)

¹ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress Updated In Today’s Language* (USA: Barbour Publishing Inc., 2010), 16-17.

² D.A. Carson, *The Sermon On The Mount: An Evangelical Exposition Of Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 123.

Now, what does Jesus mean by that? Well, he indicated the sort of experience he envisioned for his followers back in the concluding verses of the Beatitudes. He said:

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
(Matthew 5:11–12 ESV)

So Jesus says, it is GREAT NEWS if people are reviling you and persecuting you and saying all kinds of nasty things about you – on my account – because that would tend to indicate that you are on the road that leads to heaven. That is generally speaking the experience in this world of those who are on the way to the celestial city. So – blessed indeed are you.

The road that leads to heaven is narrow, it is confining and it is HARD. Jesus never promised his disciples anything else. He said time and time again:

“In the world you will have tribulation.” (John 16:33 ESV)

The Way of salvation is narrow, it is hard and as a result, few are those who travel on it – at least as compared to the road that leads to destruction.

That’s your other option. Let’s take a look at that now.

What is the way that leads to destruction?

In verse 13 Jesus says:

“For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.” (Matthew 7:13 ESV)

Well, obviously then, Jesus is saying that the way that leads to destruction is the majority route, the way that looks easiest and most appealing to the most people. It is the way of the crowd – as opposed to the way of the cross and it is the path that leads to eternal damnation.

In short, Jesus is saying that if you want to be a Christian, if you want to enter the Celestial City, you have to be content with the fact that you will not be part of the crowd. You will not get to travel with the herd. Martin Luther was eager to press that point home on his people. He said here:

“This a Christian must know, and he must be prepared for it, so that he does not allow himself to be hindered or vexed, if the whole world lives otherwise, and he must by no means adapt himself to the course of the mass.”³

Are you prepared for that?

That’s a part of what it means to be a Christian that we haven’t had to think about in this country until very recently. North America is a weird place – historically speaking. The Americans have their founding narrative about the Pilgrims on the Mayflower – most of whom were devoted Christians hoping to establish a free homeland where they could practice their Christian faith free from persecution. Here in Canada, our founding narrative too is deeply Christian at the root. Have you ever taken a tour of the Parliament buildings in Ottawa? Have you ever looked up and noticed all the Scripture verses hidden in the walls and in the ceiling? It would be hard to swing a cat and not hit a Bible verse in that place – not that I’ve ever tried that. There are Bible verses EVERYWHERE! And many, if not MOST of the Fathers of Confederation were committed Christians!

But that was then – and this is now.

Christians in this country USED TO BE part of the crowd – but the crowd, by and large, has drifted away. In fact, things are even worse than that, according to a recent Angus Reid survey

³ Martin Luther, *Commentary On The Sermon On The Mount* in Lexham Classics, translated by Charles A. Hay (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2017), 278-279.

conducted this past spring. Not only have the great mass of Canadians wandered away from the Christian faith, it appears NOW that they view the Christian faith with hostility. Only 30% of Canadians said they viewed any type of religion as beneficial to the country and – as the Winnipeg Free Press reported:

“When asked which religion was more beneficial or negative, respondents named Evangelical Christianity as **the most damaging**, followed by Islam and Catholicism”⁴

Are you hearing that?

The crowd isn't with you anymore, my friends, in fact, they have become noticeably hostile toward you.

Are you ready for that?

That's not a rhetorical question; I'm asking you that as your pastor.

Young people – you are here today probably because your parents brought you or because your friends are here, or because you are just used to coming here on a Sunday morning. Good. We are glad you are here. But are you ready to follow Jesus in the face of hostility from the crowd? You need to decide that in a way that my parents and my grandparents did not.

Are you thinking about that?

Are you prepared for the fact that you will almost certainly face mockery and verbal abuse from your classmates at university if you continue to follow Jesus Christ.

Are you prepared for that?

⁴ <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/arts-and-life/life/faith/2022/04/30/survey-examines-canadian-attitudes-to-religion>

Are you prepared for the fact you will almost certainly face employment discrimination if you refuse to get on board with the sexual and gender consensus of the culture. If you won't fly the flag – if you won't wear the shirt – if you won't contribute to the office group gift for the same sex couple – if you won't call HIM HER – if you won't play the game, say the words and mouth the platitudes that are demanded by the majority in this culture – you will pay a very heavy price in the work place and in the public square in the years and in the decades that lie ahead.

Are you prepared for that?

We are going back to the way it used to be, my friends, and we are going fast. The wind has turned, the tide has changed and many who were here in the hay day have abandoned this road UNDER PRESSURE.

Ask anyone my age.

When Christ followers my age get together we almost always end up talking about all our friends from High School who were with us at Christian club – who went on the youth retreats – who raised their hands at the alter call, who went on the mission trip and who had front row seats at the Petra concert – who haven't darkened the door of a church now in years. Who don't identify anymore as Christians. Who haven't cracked a Bible or said a prayer in decades. We started out as a huge crowd – and now it feels like we're the last men and the last women standing.

We are the generation of apostasy.

You are the generation of decision.

You know what you are getting into. The Christian Way now is narrow FROM THE GATE. It starts hard and it continues hard and unless there is some kind of Great Revival or New Reformation – it will end hard.

Are you prepared for that? Are you prepared to BELIEVE GOD when everyone else around you is saying something else? Are you prepared to believe what he says about who he is, who you are and who Jesus is when everyone else around you is believing and saying and promoting something else? Are you prepared to stand alone – like the Apostle Paul, so often, had to stand alone? Will you say, like he said:

“Let God be true, and every man a liar.” (Romans 3:4 NIV)

Because that’s what it is going to be like for those who choose to follow Jesus in the years and decades ahead.

And that leads us to our final question:

Will only a few be saved?

Well, I suppose, on one level that question has already been answered. Jesus said:

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

And yet, in the parallel passage in Luke when someone asked him a follow up question he says:

“And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.” (Luke 13:29 ESV)

So which is it? Is it FEW or is it MANY? And I think the answer is BOTH. It is FEW in the sense that only a FEW PEOPLE in every culture will walk the way of Jesus but it is MANY in the sense that those FEW PEOPLE will eventually be found in every tribe, tongue and nation on planet earth – such that at the end there will be a great myriad of people – beyond what anyone can count or number crying out in glory:

“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”
(Revelation 7:10 ESV)

I think it's both. It's like Noah's ark in that sense. There were MANY animals on the ark – but only a FEW from every species. But enough, by the grace of God – to seed and start a whole new world.

Will you be part of it?

That's where Jesus puts the emphasis. The guy in Luke 13 asks him the same question we're asking. He says:

“Lord, will those who are saved be few?” (Luke 13:23 ESV)

He was hearing the same teaching we're hearing and so his mind goes to the same place our minds go. But look at where Jesus goes – he says:

“Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. ²⁵ When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ (Luke 13:24–25 ESV)

Jesus says, “Don't worry so much about how many will enter – just make sure YOU ENTER. Strive to enter through the narrow door.”

Listen, my friends, this is what we were talking about two weeks ago – Jesus isn't introducing new content here. You don't do that in the conclusion of a sermon – you just double down on things you've already said. That's what Jesus is doing here. He already said, ASK, SEEK, KNOCK:

“For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” (Matthew 7:8 ESV)

He already told them TO KNOCK on this door and to WALK IN THIS WAY. He told them to CARRY ON! He told them to persevere!

Listen my friends, in the decades to come we are going to understand experientially what John Bunyan was talking about when he said that the Christian life is a WAR. That feels like a metaphor right now – but in the days to come, it is going to feel like the literal, actual truth. You are going to have to FIGHT to follow Jesus in this culture. You are going to have to PRESS THROUGH many dangers, toils and snares. You are going to have to STRIVE to enter the narrow gate and you are going to have to STRIVE to persevere on the narrow way.

Now you say, wait a second pastor – I thought it was God’s job to make us persevere? Don’t we sing that song, “he will hold me fast”?

Well, that’s true. God does say that and we do sing that – but he also says that many who start out were never really ROOTED in the first place. And when the sun came up and things get hot many people are going to fall away. Jesus talked about that all the time. He talked about the person who:

“has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.” (Matthew 13:21 ESV)

So how do we put all that together? I think what the Bible is saying here is that God will hold THE FIGHTERS FAST. If you keep on asking, keep on seeking and keep on knocking – then he will hold you fast. No matter what comes. No matter what opposition you face. If you fight to follow Jesus then he will hold you fast. Thanks be to God, let’s pray together.