

E. The Way Into the Kingdom (7:13-27)

Verses 7:7-12 provide the summary introduction to this topic by showing that faith is the sole means for entering the kingdom of heaven. In the context that follows, Jesus elaborated on this truth by showing that all who seek to enter by another way – of which there is really only one, here referred to as the *wide gate* – will not find entrance but final ruination (7:13-14). The way of the wide gate is as universally appealing as it is deceptive; to the natural mind, there is no question that it is the right way. For this reason, it is unanimously (if often unconsciously) touted by the world of earthly-minded men, and only its final fruit reveals its uselessness and destructiveness (7:15-21). For all its appeal and apparent correctness, the wide gate will not provide entrance into the kingdom of heaven. The simple reason is that it is ultimately *Christless* – a house built on sand – and He is the one door into God’s sheepfold (7:21-23; cf. John 10:1-9).

1. Jesus’ ultimate goal in explaining the nature and ethic of His kingdom to His Jewish audience wasn’t to correct their misconceptions. He certainly intended His instruction to accomplish that, but with the goal that their new understanding would enable them to embrace His kingdom in truth and not miss it. Israel’s great ethical obligation to God was to fulfill their ancient calling as Abraham’s covenant descendents by appropriating the kingdom promised to him. Thus Jesus followed His explanation of the kingdom with a direct and succinct call to enter into it: “*Enter by the narrow gate...*” (7:13a).
 - a. By phrasing His call in this way Jesus was implying that more than one gate exists by which men can attempt to enter His kingdom; it’s pointless to specify a particular gate if there is only one. In fact, there is another option, *but only one*. This is a crucial truth, for it highlights the fact that, for all the myriad spiritual traditions and paths in the world, there are really only two. What this means is that every religious conception and practice (including atheism and agnosticism) is associated with one of two gates and their respective paths and destinations (so also with two trees, two claims and two houses; 7:15-27). Jesus’ description of these paired sets reveals how that is the case.
 - b. He first described the two gates as *narrow* and *wide*. When one considers a gate in terms of its relative width, what immediately comes to mind is that a wider gate permits more people to pass through it, either at one point in time or over a period of time. This is very much what Jesus intended by His metaphor: many pass through the wide gate while few pass through the narrow one.

At the same time, Jesus was careful to indicate that the relative number of people moving through the two gates isn’t simply a function of how many each can accommodate; it’s also the result of their relative visibility: Because of its small size, few are able to *find* the narrow gate (7:14b). In contrast, the wide gate is more readily seen, and, since there are only two gates, those who fail to perceive the narrow gate have no option but to pass through its more visible counterpart. As far as they are concerned, they have located and are passing through the one gate into the kingdom of heaven, and their confidence in this is only heightened by the fact that multitudes of others have exactly the same perception.

- c. Most importantly to Jesus' point, though both gates appear to lead into His kingdom, only one of them actually does so. The narrow gate is that entrance, but this doesn't mean that the wide gate is an illusion or that it doesn't open to anything beyond it. There *are* two gates, and each of those gates provides access to its own path that terminates in a distinct destination.

As one gate is narrow and the other wide, so are their corresponding paths. The narrow gate opens onto a narrow path while the wide gate opens onto a broad path. But here the imagery speaks to *accommodation* more than geometric size. The narrow path is a constrained and pressing way whereas the broad path is open and expansive. Those who find themselves on the former are restricted and hard pressed; those on the latter have broad latitude and wide range of movement.

Taken in context, this imagery has profound implications that help to explain why multitudes of people find themselves happily traveling along the broad path in spite of the dreadful destination to which it ultimately leads.

- 1) First, as noted above, the wide gate has an apparent "rightness" that begins with its visibility. The sons of Israel could see it clearly, and so it is with all human beings. And perceiving no other way into the divine kingdom (however that concept may be understood by individuals or religious traditions), the wide gate garners human confidence that it must be the right way. This universal confidence, in turn, bolsters its credibility: When men pass through the wide gate and see multitudes walking the path it opens onto, whatever uncertainties they may have had melt away and their assurance is strengthened; *can the whole world of men be wrong?*
- 2) But this expansive path does more than allow for countless pilgrims; it accommodates their various inclinations and individual movements. Whereas the narrow path is confining and presses upon those who walk it, its broad counterpart is wide and open and so affords men great freedom to move about independently of one another without interfering with each others' movement or progress. In context, this imagery points to the fact that this broad path into the kingdom of heaven doesn't constrain men to the exactness of God's truth and His ordained way; it allows each person to maintain his own judgment and convictions.

The wide gate is readily visible to all people regardless of their culture or religious orientation. It opens onto the spiritual path that is human independence and self-determination. Many have viewed this broad path as signifying ecumenism and religious toleration, but this is a contemporary Western ideal that was utterly foreign to the thinking of the Jewish multitude listening to Jesus. Ecumenism wasn't a danger for the sons of Israel; *Jesus was warning them about the "broad way" that is the natural, earthly-minded perspective which defines and determines all human beings in their estrangement from God.* Ecumenism and religious pluralism are merely manifestations of earthly-mindedness.

The broad path is the way of self-righteousness, as the historical context of the Sermon on the Mount makes clear. The Jews were in danger of missing the kingdom of heaven, not because of an ecumenical spirit, but because of their insistence upon establishing their own righteousness before God (ref. Romans 9:30-10:3). But this insistence is characteristically *human*, which explains why the vast majority of men find themselves passing through the wide gate and traveling along the broad path. For, regardless of individual spiritual orientation or religious affiliation, every one of Adam's fallen descendents regards his spiritual well-being – present and future – as ultimately dependent upon himself.

- d. As each gate opens onto a different path, so each path has its own destination: The one path leads to *life*, the other to *destruction*. The estranged mind sees only one gate leading to spiritual well-being, but that perception is as much a point of blindness as the inability to perceive the narrow gate. This way that “seems right to a man” is a fatal delusion that arises in a darkened mind cut off from the life of God. It appears right, but it leads to destruction; “*its end is the way of death*” (Proverbs 14:12, 16:25).

Once Jesus' symbolism of the two gates and two paths is understood, the meaning of the two destinations becomes clear: “Life” and “destruction” are the two available and unavoidable outcomes set before every human being; *the former corresponds to existence in the kingdom of heaven, the latter to existence outside of it*. In the end, every person will find himself either inside or outside: “inside” is participation in the renewal and restoration that will ultimately embrace the entire created order; “outside” is the destruction – the death – that is man falling short of his created identity and design. This unrealized humanness is the greatest of tragedies, and it is the inevitable outcome for all those who find their resource and confidence in themselves. ***It is the height of tragic irony that those who put their confidence in their own humanity are the very ones who will one day be confronted with and consigned to the lack of it.*** The broad way is the way of apparent freedom and self-determination, but it ultimately directs all of its pilgrims to the same destination: the final abolition of man as man. No wonder Jesus spoke of it in terms of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Luke 13:22-30).

If *destruction* is a person's non-realization of his true human identity, then *life* – as the only other outcome – must be the opposite: Life is man's realization of his true humanity in Jesus Christ; it is his full conformity to the likeness of the Last Adam. And if self-righteousness places men on the path leading to destruction, **faith** places them on the path leading to life. This, then, is the marrow of Jesus' opening exhortation regarding the way into His kingdom: *The narrow gate is perceived by faith, and the narrow path beyond it is the life of faith*. This path is confining precisely because it disallows all other perspectives and approaches to life (Romans 14:23). And, in marked contrast to the broad and accommodating path, it presses hard upon its travelers because it sets them at odds with the course of this world. Nevertheless, for those who walk it, the narrow path leads to the certain outcome of fullness of life in the kingdom of God (Matthew 8:1-13).