

## THE EARLY PARABLES OF JESUS

### Message 5

Passage: Matthew 7:13-14 (read 13-25)

Words: 6324

INTRO: We are looking at the early parables of Jesus. As I see it, most of His parables can be grouped into one of three groups. There are the early parables that indicate a change will come because Israel will reject their Messiah. And Jesus is preparing them for this change. Then there is the middle group of parables, and they speak of what the Church age will be like. These are mostly found in Matthew 13. Then there are the latter parables and the Lord tells the Jews what will happen to them and their nation after He is gone, and what will happen just before He returns and when He returns.

In our first parable, the Lord told this multitude up on the mountain that they would be the salt of the earth. Well, today there are at least professing Christians, literally all over the world and this is a direct result of those who were on that mountain which included the Lord's disciples. He said they would be the light of the world. Now there is a lot of teaching about how to live the Christian life in the Sermon on the Mount that is not given in parable form. But the next parable is about the twig and the beam. We take this parable to mean we should not judge, but here the Lord taught them in parable form how to make proper judgments.

Now, our next parable is in chapter 7 of Matthew. Very few parables have caused me more difficulty than this seemingly simple parable. I have discarded probably around two extra messages in notes, trying to reduce this to a message. I think also that verses 13-25 form one unit and they form the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount. And this unit begins with the instruction to that multitude on the mountain like this, "Enter by the narrow gate." So we want to just get right into this passage.

#### IV. THE NARROW GATE

##### A. The Parable

We come then to the parable of the broad and narrow way. We begin by reading Matthew 7:13-14:

13 *"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.*

14 *"Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

Now many of these parables at first glance seem to be so simple that they hardly need much study. But once you enter them and ponder them, they are no longer simple. Such is the teaching of the Lord. Does the parable not seem simple enough?

#### B. The setting

So what is the setting of this parable? Well, the setting is the Sermon on the Mount. And verses 13-25 form the conclusion to the whole sermon. There is a lot of teaching on how Christians who will be scattered throughout the world are to live and we cannot take time for that here. So we go to the interpretation.

#### C. The interpretation

-The unidentified place

So we go to the interpretation of this parable. There is in this parable an unidentified place, and that caused me a lot of difficulty. Let me share with you my view of the two paths in the parable as I always envisioned them. The narrow and difficult road is the road to the celestial city. The broad road is the road to destruction. The narrow road has only the truly saved on it, and the broad road has everybody else on it. One is either on the broad road or on the narrow road. Is that how you see it?

So let me spell out the difficulty. In the parable, where are we when we decide which gate to go through? Are we all naturally on the broad road? Are we all naturally already through the wide gate? How does that work if we all have to decide which gate we will go through? Where is the person Jesus instructs to enter the narrow gate? Is he on the wide road? If so, he is already through the wide gate. Or is everybody born on this side of the

two gates, and somewhere in life each one has to decide which one he will go through?

Here is what Lloyd Jones says to this problem:

*There are, however, certain problems that people constantly mention when they consider this text. One is that the theology of this teaching presents a stumbling-block to certain people. The first difficulty is this. Does our Lord teach here that there is a kind of neutral position in life? Here we are pictured as standing on a road with a wide and a narrow gate before us. Is there ever a time in a man's life when he is neither good nor bad? Are we all born in innocency and neutrality? Do we deliberately enter one or the other? It seems to teach that.*

[David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Studies in the Sermon on the Mount (Kindle Locations 8361-8365). Kindle Edition.]

So we might ask, are there then three roads? Do we all enter life on one road, and before us stand two gates, each leading onto another road? Here is the question: When we are born, have we by our sinful nature itself all entered the broad path at birth? Or do we somewhere in life deliberately choose the broad or narrow road? And if so, are we, as Jones asked, born in innocency and neutrality? And then somewhere in life we choose either road? And if that is so, where is a person before he decides which road to take? I always naturally assumed that there are but two roads and we are all on one or the other.

There seems to be some place not identified in the parable and this place is where we are before we choose either of the two roads. After studying this, I want to present a view to you that may be a thought as new to you as it was to me. You need not agree, but try to think objectively about it. Here is the view I want to present to you. We are all born in a place we might call with John Bunyan, the city of destruction. We are not all naturally on one road or the other. And most of mankind will live and die in this city. There are only two roads out of this city. Those who want to escape destruction have before them but two choices to get out

of this city. One is set up by the devil, the other by the Lord. But if anyone chooses the wide gate, in the end, it leads to destruction. It is a deceptive road. It promises to let you out of this city, but in the end it leads to the same destruction as those in the city will face if they do not find the narrow road. This road promises much but it leads to hell. The other is the narrow road and it leads to life, eternal and real life.

So let us consider the gates. Where would those listeners on the Mount with Christ have pictured gates? Where did they have gates? In city walls, of course. You did not see gates out in the middle of nowhere. So listen to what Albert Barnes says of the gates, and I quote:

*The Saviour here referred probably to ancient cities. They were surrounded with walls, and entered through gates. Some of those, connected with the great avenues to the city, were broad, and admitted a throng. Others, for more private purposes, were narrow, and few would be seen entering them. So says Christ, is the path to heaven. It is narrow. It is not the great highway that men tread. Few go there. Here and there one may be seen - travelling in solitude and singularity.*

Now note that these two gates do not lead into a city. They lead out of a city. These gates both lead onto a road or path, not into a city. So those who enter by the wide or by the narrow gate enter a path, a road. They are leaving the city. They don't enter a city. The narrow road is headed to a place called life. Those who enter the broad road leave the city and think they are headed to life, but it leads to a place of destruction.

Of the roads of ancient times John Gill says: "a private way was four cubits broad (6 feet), a way from city to city eight cubits (12 feet), a public way sixteen cubits (24 feet), and the way to the cities of refuge thirty two cubits (52 feet)." I want to recommend the picture here is that of a city with but two gates. Most people are content to live in this city their entire life. This city pictures the life we are born into. This is a picture of the world. Here we live and die. In John Bunyan's allegory, this is the city of destruction.

Let me read verse 13 of our text once more:

13 *"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.*

So one might ask, why should I enter the narrow gate if it is narrow and the road is difficult? Why not enter the wide gate? Notice how our text answers this question in verse 13. It says, "For..." With that word 'for' the answer to our question begins. The answer is, "Yes there is another easier way, but it ends up in the wrong place. It says, 'For wide is the gate and broad the way that leads to destruction.'"

-The wide gate

Our question now is, just what is this wide gate? Some, like John MacArthur, think this wide gate is the gate of all false religions. I do not think that is correct. All false religion, as I see it, is what the NT calls the world. The setting of the parable is inside the city, which I call the city of destruction. This speaks of what the Bible calls the world. The word 'world' generally refers to all of lost mankind. When John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world..." that is what the word *world* refers to. My view is that all of lost mankind, which is what is usually meant by the word 'world' has some kind of religion.

Studies indicate that 84% of all people claim some kind of religion. But I think if it comes right down to it, everybody has some belief, even if it is thinking that believing in anything at all is not important. That too is a belief. In the United States only 4% are atheists and 3% agnostics. And they too have a faith, a belief. So what is the world? Well, it includes all religions except one, true Christianity. In this city are the teachings of Buddhism or Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Shintoism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, Atheism, Evolutionism or any other ism. All those make up the world. That is the city out of which these two gates lead.

So, our next question is, if those in the city are those of the world and that includes all religions, what then is the broad road? Well, Jesus is preparing that multitude on the hillside for the kingdom of God as it will be after He leaves this earth. And here is what I believe the broad gate pictures. I believe it represents false Christianity. The devil set this path up for those who are seeking truth. And here he misleads such. The rest in the city are his. The broad road pictures all those who profess to believe in Jesus and use the Bible. Here people are encouraged to enter so that they might leave this world for heaven. In many different ways they are persuaded they do not need to go through the narrow road. Here people are promised heaven. This is false Christianity. There are only two ways out of this city. One is the true way. The other is a false way. But the false way actually leads to destruction.

Now I see verses 13-27 as one unit of Scripture. And look at verse 15, the verse immediately following our parable. It says, "Beware of false prophets..." We will look at those words in a future message. But it is these false prophets that direct those who want to escape the city of destruction on through the wide gate. I believe the broad road speaks of all those who say they believe in Jesus and use the Bible, and promise eternal life, but they teach the Bible falsely. So that includes all those we call cults, of which I saw one list of over thirty, like Mormons and so on. Then it includes Roman Catholicism. And it has always included all those in protestant and evangelical churches who are not truly born again. Now all of those who use the Bible and promise heaven make up a little less than 1/3 of the world's population. So the road is very broad.

Notice now that 'many' go in by the broad gate. Here is the picture I get. Here we are looking at all of this from inside the city. There is one true gate out. And there is one false gate out. The true gate is narrow and the false gate is wide. Now go to verses 21-22. It says:

21 *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*

22 *"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'"*

23 *"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"*

Notice these people do not say, "Alla, Alla" or any other false god. They say, "Lord, Lord"? They are all professing Christians. How many enter the broad gate? Verse 22 says it is many. Not all, many. Many of whom? Many of those in the city of destruction. A few in the city of destruction find the narrow gate, but many go in by the broad gate. They say they know Jesus. They call Him, "Lord, Lord." You see, we don't have all the religions of the world here. We have professing Christians on the broad road.

These people who enter the wide gate are described in different ways by the Lord. Turn to John 10. We begin in verse 1:

1 *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber."*

2 *"But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep."*

3 *"To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."*

4 *"And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice."*

5 *"Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."*

6 *Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them."*

7 *Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep."*

8 *"All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them."*

9 *"I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.*

You see, there are those who got in some other way than by the door. I recommend that those who leave the city of destruction by the wide gate, get into that path the wrong way. But they have entered a devastating class of people. They will be judged with the Christian because of their profession of faith. Then in Matthew 13 they are pictured as those that were caught in a net and the good were kept and the bad were thrown away. In Matthew 22 these are described as those who got into the wedding hall without a wedding garment.

Let us look at this kind of Christian once more in Matthew 25. Here we have the sheep and goat judgment. This takes place at the end of the tribulation, but the devil's method is exactly the same in that time period. The sheep are the true followers of the Lord, and the goats represent, I think, those who are of the same nature as those who enter the wide gate. So look at verses

41 *"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:*

42 *'for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink;*

43 *'I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'*

44 *"Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'*

45 *"Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'*

46 *"And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

Those described here are those who say, "Lord, Lord." And they say, "Did we not do all these good things?" So we ask now, if the wide gate speaks of all false religions that use the Bible and profess to be Christian, how many is *many*? Well, about 2.2 billion of the worlds 7.6 billion. So if those before these two gates are in the city of destruction, over two thirds of the world is in the city. Now those 2.2 billion includes all those on the wide and on the narrow roads. So from those you have to subtract all the cults and at least almost, if not all Catholics. Then you have to subtract all who are in evangelical and protestant churches who are not truly born again. How many does that leave? Somebody sent me a quote by A.W. Tozer. He believed that no more than 10% of evangelicals were truly saved. He said his own denomination was no exception. And he said if he was wrong, it would be because the 10% is too high. The church, from his day until now is in much, much worse condition. If that is correct we might then say only about 7% of evangelicals are truly saved. And if that is true, then this passage is correct.

Let me share another thing I used to think. I thought because the narrow road is difficult, the broad road must be easy. So we must ask, what makes the broad road broad? I want to share here what it is not, and when we look at the narrow road, I will share what I believe it is.

I do not believe that the broad road is broad because it is easy. Not even life in the world, the city of destruction is easy. In many respects, life is not easy even for those who do as they please and sin as they wish. They die of cancer. They die in accidents. Listen to the news. Many lose loved ones. They die of many diseases. Sometimes they have diseases worse than those on the narrow road. They murder their own. They steal from one another. They wake up depressed and with hangovers. Many, many drink alcohol and smoke and do drugs and pay a huge price for their sins. Their houses burn down. They have trouble with many things just like anybody else. They die in earthquakes, storms or fires like everybody else. No, life in the city of destruction is not easy. Many commit suicide.

But what about those who enter the broad road? How is life for them? Is life easy for them? Most of the things that befall those in the city happen to them too. Only they may have added difficulties. You see, some think the narrow road is difficult because of the many things the Christian has to leave behind. In some cases this may be true. But you will find that many on the broad road, that is those who profess to be Christians, have left many of the same things behind as the true Christian has. You can check, say the Roman Catholics, and you will find many who have lived unbelievably difficult lives. They have left homes and family and money and have gone out into the world and been missionaries. Many have been killed for their faith. Many are still being killed today.

So we ask, what makes this way broad? If the broad road is that of professing Christians who are not really Christians, what is it that makes this road broad? Is it that they don't leave anything behind? Many, many of these have left home and father and mother and have become missionaries. Many have left their possessions. Many have died in foreign lands for what they believed. What makes this gate wide and this road broad?

Is it because of the clothing they are allowed to wear? Well, for many it may be. But others have stricter clothing regulations than most Christians. That is even true in the world. Take the Muslims for instance. But on the broad road there are many who have high dress standards. Take the Mormons or the Amish and many others. You see, many of the same things that are not easy on the narrow road are not easy on the broad road either, that is true for many.

When we come to the narrow road, we will consider what I believe makes the broad road broad.

-Destruction is the end of this way

We go to verse 13 to consider one more matter. It says:

13 *"Enter by the narrow gate; (and here is the reason Jesus gives) for wide is the gate and broad is the way that*

*leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.*

We now ask, what is this destruction? I will not take much time here. Let me just say that the destruction at the end of the broad road is hell. And let me just share what I have told you before. Destruction is not the same as annihilation. Most if not all cults believe that and now numerous evangelicals are taking up that view. Others just leave out talking about it. Destruction does not mean an end of existence, it means the end of an existence for which each person is meant; and the entrance into an existence of torment known as hell of which Jesus speaks in this Sermon on the Mount.

What is the broad road? It is the road of false Christianity. Many are on it. What is the narrow road? It speaks of true Christianity. Few are on it. What is the city? It is the world, and all the rest are in it.

-The narrow gate

We go then to verse 14 to consider the narrow gate. It says:

*14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

Now it says it is a narrow gate. The original of this word 'narrow' is *stenos*. It means to crowd, to cramp, to confine, to restrict (BAG). So Jesus instruction here to those sitting on that mountain is, "Enter the path to life by the narrow gate." So we now ask, what is this narrow gate? "Well", you say, "That is simple enough. It is salvation. It is Christianity." That brings us to yet a further question. For this we go to Luke 13. Here is a passage that sheds much light on our text but it also adds difficulties. We begin in verse 23:

Luke 13:23-30:

*23 Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" And He said to them,*

24 "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

Someone has come to Jesus and asked if there are few that will be saved. And Jesus answers in verse 24 with the command that they are to strive to enter through the narrow gate. So if the narrow gate is salvation, does one strive to enter salvation? The word to *strive* is *agonizomai*. It comes from a word meaning a race. And a race, if you've been in one, is an *agona*. We get our word *agony* from the root of these words.

Our question is, what makes this gate narrow? Here is what I believe it is: Sin is not allowed through. Sin is the issue. Repentance must happen before entering this gate. Check the true gospel. It begins with repentance. When we are asked, "What must I do to be saved", we say, "Oh it is so simple. Just believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Is truly believing in Christ simple? To believe in Christ does not merely mean I believe He exists; I must believe He died for me. That means I recognize that He died for my sins, which means that I must repent. And let me say this, we find little more agonizing than repentance, especially if that involves people we can see. It means confessing my sins. And after that it means believing He has forgiven me. All of this is not easy.

I believe repentance and confession of sin make this gate narrow. There may be more. But it is at least this. We could sum up the teaching of both John the Baptist and Jesus in one word 'repent'. And repentance involves confession. It is this that makes this gate differ from the wide gate. Just as I was working on this I got an e-mail article from David Cloud called, "The History of How Evangelism Was Corrupted Among Independent Baptists." And the main issue was repentance.

It is a stenosis gate. And from the word that we are to 'strive' to enter, we get the idea you do not get in easily. John McArthur says of this narrow gate, "This is a death blow to what is called easy believism, a death blow to cheap grace. This is not easy. That's why we read at the end of verse 14, 'Few are those who find it.'" Well, I think it should deliver a death blow to

Calvinism as well. How can a just God command someone to do something they cannot do, namely repent and believe? And there is no need to command something that will happen if it is commanded or not.

But I agree with him when he says further: *When people say, "You're very narrow-minded," I will often say, "You have no idea how narrow minded I really am. And whatever you think I am, I'm a lot narrower than you think I am." I'm only narrow because it's the truth. I didn't invent this. Men didn't invent this, end quote.* He is right.

In our very chapter Scripture says many will say "Lord, Lord." But the Lord says to them, "I never knew you." That means one thing. They never truly repented or truly believed. Let us go to verse 25 in our passage now. It says further:

25 *"When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are 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 you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.'*

Now you see, here we find words that also occur just after our parable in Matthew 7. Do you know why those who are saying, "Lord, Lord" are not in the kingdom? They never came by the narrow gate. They found it too difficult. And if they did not come by this gate, without question, what is missing is repentance and confession of sin.

You see, what makes this gate narrow is that you have to truly deal with sin before you can enter. We find this in John the Baptist's message. We find this in Jesus' message. We find this in the sermon on the mount. Turn back to chapter 5. Look at verses 3-4. Jesus said:

3 *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

4 *Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.*

-The narrow way

So let us look at the narrow way, or path. In these verses we have the entrance to the narrow way. There is the gate. This is where striving, agony sets in. But look now at verse 14 of our passage. It says:

14 *Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

We have considered that the gate is narrow. Now consider that the way is difficult. What makes this way difficult? Well, we might say that the gate strips us of pride. To repent and confess sin deals a more severe blow to pride than anything else I know. But to go on, Scripture says we are saved by grace through faith. When we receive anything by grace it has come as a gift. This means we have nothing to give and that strips us further of pride. Those who walk this path must do so by faith. Scripture is very clear, the just shall live by faith. I have to trust the Lord in life's difficulties. Those who truly walk this path must be reduced to faith again and again. They must be willing to walk alone. Pride has to go. On the wide road, the majority determines what is right. On the narrow road truth determines what is right. You cannot live by faith without determining what is true. Faith is based on truth.

Still further, repentance and confession do not only happen at the gate. Those who walk this path are sinners, and sinners have to repent and confess when they sin. This is a difficult road. In life, when we come to places where real difficulties set in, say a wayward teenager, or even the death of a wayward teenager or any such like situations; here we must once more be reduced to nothing if we will fully place our faith in the Lord. We must be brought to the very end of ourselves again and again. Many circumstances come in life in which we find it excruciating to trust the Lord with those

things. If you are not there now and you live any length of time, you will come to such places. Here again and again we must be reduced to nothing, if we are on the narrow road. It is an agonizing, difficult path.

Let me just mention another point here briefly. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30,

28 *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

29 *"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

30 *"For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

Can both passages be true? The answer is yes. Those who labor and are heavy laden, I believe labor and are heavy laden with their sins. When once we see our true lost condition and sin weighs on us and we are burdened down with sin, now justification by grace through faith is the greatest news any such person could hear. And coming to Christ means repentance and confession of sin, and trusting Christ for forgiveness by faith. Here such a burdened sinner finds rest for his soul. His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

But with regard to life, once one is on the narrow road, it is not easy, even though one no longer carries the burden of sin.

So we go to verse 14 once more. It says further:

14 *"Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

Note that the destination of this path is life. That is eternal life. This is John Bunyan's celestial city. It is this that all those hope for who enter both the narrow and the broad path. Only the broad path is the road of deception, and it ends in the same fires they would have ended up in had they stayed in the city. Only now they are accountable for much more.

Notice that it says there are few that find 'it'. So let us answer first what the pronoun 'it' refers to. Few find what? The gate or the way to life? Note the word 'it' is singular, both in English and the Greek. So the pronoun *it* does not refer to both, and the usual rule is that it refers to the nearest antecedent, which is the way, not the gate. I recommend that it may well be that many find this gate. When they see the narrowness of it, when they meet repentance and confession of sin and faith in Christ that allows no works to merit anything, they turn away. And thus they never step through and never find the narrow path.

Let me raise one more question from Luke 13:24. It says:

24 *Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.*

So I ask, are there those who are not able to enter? Maybe they are not among the elect, so they are not able to enter? The word for *ability* in the NT is *dunamis*. The word used here is *ischuo*. It means strength. Do some not have the strength to enter? Yes, I believe some don't have the strength. Like the rich young man who went away sorrowful, the desire for riches in his life was stronger than his desire for the kingdom. He was not willing to strive that much against his desire for riches. That is why it says, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate." The agony of letting go of these riches for the young man was too great. It would have required genuine repentance.

We don't hear much of agonizing when it comes to salvation today. It seems salvation is all so simple and easy. All you have to do is believe in Jesus. We have a generation of professing Christians who have come by way of the broad gate of easy believism, and they are not saved.

CONCL: So we conclude. What is the wide gate? It is a gate that does not require true repentance. As I see it, all who walk on the wide road are convinced they are on the narrow road. The false teachers who direct them there think they are doing right.

The facts are that of all who think they are saved, only a few truly are. Few are on the narrow road. Many are on the broad road and all the rest are in the city.

What is the narrow gate? It is the gate that requires repentance from sin. Repentance from sin means I must recognize myself as God describes me; deceitful and desperately wicked. If I have not recognized myself as that neither am I saved. But the way is narrow. It requires that I live by faith.