

Sermon 44, The Narrow Gate, Matthew 7:13-14

Jerome: Attend to the words, for they have an especial force, "many walk" in the broad way - "few find" the narrow way. For the broad way needs no search, and is not found, but presents itself readily; it is the way of all who go astray. Whereas the narrow way neither do all find, nor when they have found, do they straightway walk therein. Many, after they have found the way of truth, caught by the pleasures of the world, desert midway.

“Sometimes it seems that the easy way gets easier all the time.” — Dan Doriani

Matthew Henry's Outline

His proposition: We must make religion our business, and be intent upon it; we must be strict and circumspect in our conversation.

- I. The Way of Sin
 - A. Its Alluring Aspects
 - 1. You Need Leave Nothing Behind to Enter That Way
 - 2. You Will Have Abundance of Liberty in That Way
 - 3. You Will Have Abundance of Company in That Way
 - B. Its Forbidding Aspect: It Leads to Destruction
- II. The Way of Holiness
 - A. Its Forbidding Aspects
 - 1. It Is Hard to Find and Hard to Enter
 - a) You Must Be Converted to Enter It
 - b) You Must Fight Against Yourself to Enter It
 - c) You Must Be Willing to Forsake All to Enter It
 - d) You Can Enter It; It Is Not Locked
 - 2. It Is Hard to Stay In
 - a) It Requires Daily Mortification
 - b) It Gets Easier
 - 3. It Is Lonely
 - B. Its Alluring Aspect: It Leads to Life
- III. Application: Enter the Narrow Gate!

My Outline: I can't improve on Matthew Henry's, and so the outline of this sermon is taken directly from his commentary.

My proposition: You must enter by the narrow gate and stay on the narrow way, because it's the only way to find eternal life.

In our church Sunday School class, we are working our way through Psalm 119. I personally find our times together very rewarding, and I think that everyone else does too. But occasionally we come across a verse in that psalm which seems utterly incomprehensible, particularly to a modern way of thinking. One such verse is verse 45 of that magnificent psalm, which reads, “And I will walk at liberty, For I seek Your precepts.”

We’ve sung that. We’ve talked about it. We’ve lived it, those of us in this room who seek to follow Jesus Christ with our whole lives. And yet, to most of the people who live around us, who work with us, who entertain us, it is total nonsense. How could seeking God’s precepts produce liberty? Women’s lib was about reducing the number of rules that governed women’s behavior.

In today’s passage, we see that Jesus openly preached the flip side of that. The Christian life is narrow and constrained. The Christian way is not broad and open to anything. The Christian message is not inclusive, but exclusive. Yes, walking in God’s commandments is ultimately a freeing experience. But Jesus doesn’t promise that it’s going to feel freeing right away. Instead, He openly declared to the crowd listening that following Him is hard. This sermon is about the difficulty of the Christian life.

What I want to show you with God’s help is that though the way is difficult, it is necessary. The Christian must pursue God’s way. It is narrow, but it is the only path to freedom.

Alternative introduction

Jesus’ teaching this passage is hardly novel. In fact, it is really quite standard for the Bible. All through the Bible runs this theme of two ways leading to two destinations. Psalm 1 talks about it — the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. Psalm 119 talks about it — that’s why we call our Sunday School “Undeified in the Way.” Abraham and Lot show it: Abraham lived in the promised land, while Lot lived in Sodom. Isaiah prophesied about the way of holiness, but Hosea added that transgressors stumble in that way, are unable to follow it to the end.

Moses put the choice starkly: life, or death. Jesus puts it in the same terms. One way leads to life, and the other leads to destruction.

Fundamentally, then, this morning’s sermon must, to be faithful to this text, be an appeal to you to choose the right way. This is not an academic exercise. This is all about action. Choose the right way! Follow Jesus, in His way, no matter the difficulty and cost. After all, Jesus warns us up front that the right way is expensive. It will cost you everything — but it will also give you everything. The wrong way, though, is cheap (at first). It has no toll, no entry barrier, no bar to getting on.

I. The Way of Sin

We can call this way the way of sin. You enter it through a broad gate, and you can walk in any number of ways on it, because it is wide.

A. Its Alluring Aspects

Why is it so alluring?

1. You Need Leave Nothing Behind to Enter That Way

In the first place, it is alluring because it has a broad gate. You can bring all the baggage you want with you. You don't have to leave behind your pride, your bitterness, your sense of importance, your favorite pleasures and sins, your right to complain, or anything else. The gate is wide.

2. You Will Have Abundance of Liberty in That Way

Second, you can do anything you want. Any kind of lifestyle is acceptable in this broad way. We can call it the way of the world. Just do what feels good, and you'll fit in. Do what everyone else is doing, and you'll be a traveler in good standing on the broad way.

Our culture teaches that freedom is doing whatever you want. Well, on this way, you can do whatever the bleep you want. That's why it's so attractive. It makes no demands. It requires no sacrifices. Sure, the world expects a certain degree of conformity. But the world has and has always had a place for just about any kind of perversion and wickedness. If only you look hard enough, you will find someone who will encourage your lifestyle and share it with you.

3. You Will Have Abundance of Company in That Way

Finally, Jesus says that many people are crowding into this way. You will have everyone else doing the same thing.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in his sermon on this text, points out that we have few urges stronger than the urge to fit in. Sure, there are a few eccentrics out there, but even they generally fit in somewhere, to some recognized subculture or other. That's why everyone wears certain styles, and not others. Why is no one here wearing a ruff? Men, why no tights? Greeks and Roman soldiers believed that few things were more manly than a miniskirt. And if we lived in those eras, that's what we'd be doing, because we would want to fit in. That's why we don't wear those styles today — because they don't fit in.

For most people, this is probably the most attractive component of the broad way. It's popular. You'll have plenty of company. If you've ever tried to share your faith, then you've probably had someone tell you, "I want to go to Hell. All my friends are there." Brothers and sisters, Jesus is not lying. He's telling the truth when He says, "My way is comparatively unpopular. The other way is far better traveled."

But there's one problem with this broad way.

B. Its Forbidding Aspect: It Leads to Destruction

The problem is that it goes to destruction. You don't have to leave anything behind. You don't have to lose your companions. But you do have to go to destruction. You do have to go to eternal fire.

This destruction doesn't mean that you will simply lose your existence and be done with it. No, it means conscious endless torment. It means that you will feel and experience indescribable agony for eternity, never ending. That's because you refused to obey God, refused to listen to commands, and insisted on going your own way. Ironically, your own way is not particularly or especially yours at all; it is the way that everyone else is going too.

II. The Way of Holiness

But the way of holiness is a different story. The way of holiness is the one that Jesus commands us to travel on. The narrow gate is the one He commands us to enter through. This means following His commands, obeying His rules, submitting to the new life He offers. This way too has forbidding aspects.

A. Its Forbidding Aspects

1. It Is Hard to Find and Hard to Enter

First of all, few find it, and few enter it. That's because it's hard. Yes, the Christian life is hard! Jesus taught that His yoke was easy, but He didn't teach that every aspect of the Christian life would be easy. If it were easy, everyone would do it. That's why virtually everyone who get a little electricity and a signal has a TV. You can go travel in the wilds of Africa or Mongolia and see a mud hut or a small yurt with a satellite dish outside it. TV is easy, and everyone watches it at least a little because it is so stinkin' easy. But reading is hard. For every person who reads and enjoy Aristotle, how many watch and enjoy TV? For every person who can make a basket from the 3-point line, how many watch TV sports? It's a whole lot more than 1-1, and the reason is because watching TV is easy, but making long shots and reading Aristotle are hard!

a) A Man Must Be Converted to Enter It

Well, Matthew Henry mentions four of the difficulties associated with entering this narrow gate and walking on this narrow way. First of all, you must be converted to enter the gate and walk on the way. You can't do it without your heart having been fundamentally changed. Who can change his own heart? No one. God has to change the heart. This is so difficult that no one can do it on his own.

b) A Man Must Fight Against Himself to Enter It

You also have to fight yourself. Jesus says that you have to be poor in spirit to get the reward of the Kingdom of Heaven. Your spirit, the part that makes you get up and go, has to be turned against itself in some sense. It has to be opposed to its own wickedness, fight against its own foolishness, want what it simultaneously doesn't want.

c) A Man Must Be Willing to Forsake All to Enter It

To get into this narrow way, you have to leave your baggage behind. You can't bring your guilt, your bitterness, your anger, your favorite sins with you. The gate is narrow, and like Bilbo, you can't squeeze through without losing your bright brass buttons.

Are you willing to give up everything to get through this gate? Are you willing to leave behind family and friends, job and status, wealth and pleasure? Jesus says that if you're not, then you can't be His disciple. He doesn't always require us to give up those things when we enter the kingdom. But He does require us to be willing to give them up. He does want us to be aware of the fact that He is more important than all of them put together.

d) A Man Can Enter It; It Is Not Locked

Yet though the gate is narrow, it is not shut. There is no cherub there with a flaming sword that turns every which way to guard the way to life. When our first parents fell, there was such a

cherub and there was such a sword. They could not get back into God's presence. But Jesus opened that gate, took that cherub off duty, and made a way for us all to re-enter God's life-giving presence. He opened the life-gate that all may go in, as the hymn has it.

So though the way is hard to find and hard to enter, it is not impossible. No! Thank God. He has promised to convert those who call upon Him. He has promised to conduct them safely to Heaven by His own power and mercy.

2. It Is Hard to Stay In

Yet the way of holiness is hard to stay in. Once you've come through the gate of conversion, the Christian life still lies ahead of you. As Matthew Henry said, after the Red Sea the Israelites weren't yet in Canaan; there was still a wilderness to cross. After you become a Christian, this narrow way can seem really long.

a) It Requires Daily Mortification

You stay in it by putting your sins to death and by asking forgiveness for them. Indeed, it takes both grace and effort to kill sin. It's the grace of God that teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, says Paul. God forgives our sins, and that motivates us to eliminate them from our lives. To stay in this way, you must constantly ask God for forgiveness. Each sin doesn't take you out of the right way into the way of sin — God forbid. But the more you sin, and the more easily you sin, the more you should wonder whether you are in the way of holiness at all.

b) It Gets Easier

Yet the narrow way does get easier. It is narrow, because it is hedged around by a broad law. The Christian has a limited range of lifestyle options. Irresponsibility, lying, loafing — these things are off-limits to the Christian. Yes, true Christians may be homeless, may be poor, may be frowned on by those who run society. But they may not be dishonest or lazy.

But the longer you walk in this narrow way, the more comfort you find in it. The more you enjoy it. Why? Because you are going in the footsteps of Jesus.

3. It Is Lonely

The way is lonely, in that fewer go on it than go on the broad road to destruction. But it is not lonely, because Jesus is on it with you. The greatest human joys are close personal relationships, and this is no exception. Going with 800,000 of your closest friends is nowhere near as special, fun, and delightful as going with your very best friend, your very closest friend, the one who means the most to you.

B. Its Alluring Aspect: It Leads to Life

And not only do you get to go with Jesus, but you also get to go to life. He leads you to where you need to be: in His presence, experiencing eternal life.

Some of you have perhaps read Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*. I haven't read the whole thing, but I once opened it and read a scene that has stuck with me to this day. The character is trying to escape from the communist world to the free world, and she gets shot and wounded crossing the border. She falls into the snow and lies there, injured, yelling at the top of her lungs "I want to live!"

Do you want to live? Do you have a desire for life deep in your bones, just like that woman did? As Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* cries out, "Life, life, eternal life!"

Don't embrace death. Don't accept eternal death as an option. You must long for life. You must long for the God who only can give life!

III. Application: Enter the Narrow Gate!

And so, enter the narrow gate. Jesus warns us that a day will come when many will want to enter it, but will not be able to do so. Come to Jesus. Ask Him to change your heart. Ask Him to forgive you and cleanse you and equip you to walk on the way of holiness. Choose life!

Renounce the evil that leads to death, and choose the good path that leads to God. In Him, and in Him alone, is the life you crave. Amen.