

Sermon Title: Two Gates

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Matt. 7:13-14 (Sermon on the Mount #29)

Date: 3-21-21

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Come with me to Matthew Chapter 7. It is the third of the three chapters we have in our Bible which is the inspired summary of what Jesus preached, all on one occasion, which is called the Sermon on the Mount. Today is the beginning of the end of the Sermon on the Mount for us, in that we begin what you might call the "altar call" of this great sermon. We're not going to finish it today, but understand that, as Jesus preached all of this, He was driving toward a conclusion. Your responses to what He says mean the difference between Heaven and Hell.

We said, at the beginning of this Sermon, that as you look at it as it flows in the context of Matthew, this is very appropriately understood to be Jesus's elaboration on His call from Matthew Chapter 4, Verse 17—which is His first recorded public message, which is exactly the same message that was preached by the last Old Testament prophet, John the Baptist, His forerunner (Matt. 3:2). In Matthew 4:17, Jesus came and said: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (NASB-1995; and throughout, unless otherwise noted). That's what He is explaining in this whole sermon.

What do we mean by "repent"? A change of mind—a *significant* change, a change so enormous that it affects how you live in every way (cf. Ps. 119:59; Is. 55:7; Ezek. 18:28; 33:11; Acts 26:18; 1 Thess. 1:9; 1 Jn. 2:3-5).

In *special* view is the false teaching of the scribes and the Pharisees. They had twisted the Old Testament system into a system of works-righteousness and salvation by works (Rom. 10:3; cf. Gal. 2:21; 3:21).

When we say "repent" in our world, most of the time we take it with the connotation that "repent" means to feel bad when you have done something wrong—and it's usually when you got *caught* doing something wrong. But the Biblical word "repent" is stronger than that. It means a change of mind so *extensive* that it changes your behavior (Ezek. 14:6; Matt. 3:8; Ac. 26:20; Rev. 2:5).

The message of this final portion of the Sermon on the Mount is that this basic change is the result of a choice between a right and wrong entrance, the right and wrong way, the right and wrong messengers, and the right and wrong basis for living your life.

This passage is the appeal toward which Jesus has been moving in this entire sermon. It is the call to become a citizen of God's Kingdom. It is the call to inherit eternal life. It is the call to choose between what seems like the easy way—which comes naturally—and the hard way, which requires letting go of everything *you* have to offer, and completely depending on God's grace and His strength (Phil. 3:7-9).

Ironically, in that time, the people who Jesus was calling to turn from the easy way and choose the hard way—or, the "narrow way"—are the people who were under the spell, under the spiritual leadership, of the Pharisees; and *their* way was actually human works. The *hard* way is grace. Does that feel a little bit like a contradiction? Well, I think we can explain it to you, and we'll endeavor to do that.

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Throughout this sermon, Jesus has been expounding God's standards. He taught us what is holy and right and perfect. He has shown us how those standards are the opposites of the standard that man comes up with—self-sufficient, self-righteous, hypocritical standards that are based on the myth, the complete misconception, that we can be good enough to gain standing with God (contra Ecc. 7:20; Gal. 3:10; Jas. 2:10). That has *never* been the way of salvation (Rom. 4:3-5; Heb. 11:4).

Remember the word "gospel." We talked about it a lot in Mark. Mark begins with: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ." The word "gospel" means "good news," or, "good message." It's the word from which, when it gets transliterated into English, we get all of our words: evangelical, evangelize, and the like.

In the Bible—and *prior* to the Bible, because the word "gospel" was not born when it was used in the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—the word, as it was understood in that time, was always a word of good news of salvation from danger—or, salvation from judgment—or, good news of the arrival of a king. You can see why the Holy Spirit would choose that word to describe the fundamental message. As more and more of the plan of God has unfolded, more and more of the details and the fullness of the Gospel has been made known (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:4-6).

At the time of the preaching of this sermon—and every other one that Jesus preached during His earthly ministry—the "good news" was tied very tightly, inextricably, to the promise of the Kingdom of the Messiah (Dan. 7:14; Mic. 5:2; Zech. 14:9). Israel was called to "Receive our King," and therefore to welcome—or, to receive—the Kingdom.

When the Gospels say that Jesus or the disciples "preached the gospel," they were not preaching, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures," which is the Gospel as defined in First Corinthians Chapter 15. Now, there's a pretty good reason for that: He hadn't died, He hadn't been buried, He hadn't been raised.

But it was still the "good news," it was the "good news" that in the Kingdom of God—or, in the terminology preferred by Matthew, since he wrote to the Jews: "the Kingdom of Heaven"; the two are the same, and they are used interchangeably in the New Testament—there is salvation from the judgment that they deserved. Remember the message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Why? Because the King was there! And He is the One who will bring that Kingdom to Earth (Matt. 25:31, 34). So, on a few occasions, their message is called "the gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; Lk. 16:16), because it was Jesus the King offering the Kingdom to the chosen people, the Jews.

Now, when Israel *rejected* that call to follow the King—and by the way: Jesus *knew* they would reject; He *promised* they would reject; and He explained what would happen when they rejected, and it *did* happen (Lk. 19:41-44)—nevertheless, when they rejected the call, He went to the Cross, He made atonement for sins, He died, and He rose again. So now, the "Gospel" includes everything that Jesus offered to Israel.

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If you believe in Christ, you get *nothing less* than what somebody would have received in the First Century, but it also includes what you might call the *fullness* of the Gospel, in that now, we understand that all the salvific work of the Gospel has been accomplished, that the New Covenant is in place. What did we do last week? We raised the cup to our lips and said, "Jesus said this is 'is the new covenant in My blood' (1 Cor. 11:25)." We stand as "ministers of the new covenant" (2 Cor. 3:6, NKJV)—even though Israel has not yet embraced the New Covenant; even though Israel has not yet, nationally, embraced her King.

We get all of the benefits of that through the Gospel. And after "the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Lk. 21:24), God is going to fulfill *all* of His promises to the nation of Israel, just as He has said (Rom. 11:25-27). And in the meantime, every person, Jew or Gentile, who believes in Christ, trusting fully in Him and His completed work alone, plus nothing else (Eph. 2:8-9)—every such person is "sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30) by what He accomplished (Eph. 1:13).

So, in this sermon—and all the others that Jesus preached—He has been showing what His Kingdom is like. It's a kingdom "not of this world" (Jn. 18:36), now. He *will* bring the Kingdom to Earth at the Second Coming (Rev. 20:4-6). But He has been showing what the Kingdom is like and what its people are like—and in very stark contrast, they stand against the teaching of the Pharisees and the scribes (Matt. 5:20).

Now it's to the end of the sermon. Now, He presents the choice: Enter the Kingdom, or not. It's binary—you're in or you're out; you can't have one foot in each place (Matt. 12:30). And this choice is the inevitable decision every person has to make in regard to Jesus Christ. This choice stands at the crossroads of *every* life; it affects *all of life and eternity*. It was the choice that Jesus offered to Israel, and it's the very same choice that He offers to everyone on this side of the Cross. Our *setting* is different, our historical context is different, but the message is not.

Israel rejected Jesus's offer of the Kingdom, so, as promised, God has set them aside for now. He will fulfill all of His promises to them, as I said, after "the times of the Gentiles"—that's the times in which we live, in which those who receive the Gospel are predominantly *not* Jews, but there are still Jews being saved as well (Rom. 11:5). Jew and Gentile together are on *equal footing* with God in the Body of Christ (Eph. 3:6), and every individual is offered citizenship in the kingdom of God's beloved Son. Read Colossians 1:13—If you believed in Christ, "He rescued us from the domain of darkness"—the realm of darkness, the kingdom of darkness—"and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son." The King isn't here, but we are citizens of that spiritual Kingdom—living, if you will, on foreign territory (Heb. 11:16), and hostile territory (1 Jn. 5:19).

So you might think of this invitation-part of this sermon as the cosmic True/False test of all time. The choices presented are, in every case, *strong* contrasts—the difference is between black and white, true and false, right and wrong, good and bad. Ultimately, it's the difference between Heaven and Hell. And the decision you make about Jesus Christ—and His Kingdom and His message—that's the most important decision in your life.

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And that is the decision before us in this passage. I'll read you the whole passage, and then we'll talk about it a little bit. Matthew 7:13-14. When I say "the whole passage," I mean our pericope for this morning; actually, Verse 13 through 29 is the sum total of the invitation. Matthew 7:13-14—"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." God has provided the way, He has shown the way, and He calls you to make the choice.

Let me back up a little bit. We know that "before the foundation of the world"—I guess that's actually backing up *a lot*, but bear with me—we know that "before the foundation of the world," God "chose" who will believe in Him and be saved (Eph. 1:4; cf. Jn. 6:37, 44; Acts 13:48; Rom. 8:30; Rev. 17:8, 14). The Bible is *abundantly clear* about that: Second Thessalonians Chapter 2, Verse 13—"God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation." That's true. That's undeniable. That's very important. A lot of people don't like it, but the Bible teaches it! The only way anyone will ever be saved is—not because *they* are so cute and cuddly, not because *they* work harder than somebody else—the only way anybody is ever saved is *one hundred percent* by God's grace, accomplished *completely* by His power, *totally* apart from anything that you can do (Titus 3:5; cf. Matt. 11:27; Jn. 3:3, 5; 6:44, 65; Acts 16:14; Rom. 5:6; 9:16).

But, *please* don't pervert that glorious doctrine called "Election"—that God chose who will be saved—don't pervert that into something it is not! That doctrine *does not negate* the pathos and the tenderness and the urgency of a passage like this one (e.g., Ezek. 33:11). This passage, and many others, put the responsibility to choose directly upon each one of us. God calls you to make the right choice, and you—*you alone*—YOU ALONE are responsible for *all* the consequences of the choice that you make (2 Thess. 2:12). So don't cop out here and say, "Well, I'd like to believe but I can't, because God didn't choose me." No, that is not *in any way* what the Bible teaches!

This is not, by the way, a new concept. God, who superintends all of history, has *always* asked people to make the right choice. Before Israel entered the Promised Land, God instructed Moses to proclaim the choice: He said, "You can choose life, or you can choose destruction—you can choose My chastening." (see Deut. 30:15)

After God guided His people Israel into the land, then it was Joshua who was the spokesman to confront the people with the choice of continuing to serve the false gods that they had known in Egypt or the false gods in Canaan, or, they could turn to the Lord Himself, who had delivered them from their bondage in Egypt. Pretty well-known passage: Joshua Chapter 24, Verses 14 and 15—"Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord"—Yahweh. "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." He said, "You have two choices here: The true God—Yahweh—or *anything else*." Those are your two choices, and those are your *only* two choices.

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Later, the Prophet Elijah stood on Mount Carmel, at that great confrontation between God and the false god Baal; and he proclaimed the same call to choose—it's in First Kings Chapter 18, Verse 21—"Elijah came near to all the people and said, ' How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.' "

Or, there's another version of it; not from Elijah's day, but Jeremiah said the same thing in Jeremiah Chapter 21, Verse 8—much later in Israel's history: "You shall also say to this people, 'Thus says the Lord, "Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death." ' " Those are your choices: life or death. Not half alive—life or death. And in that case, God gave the people a hard choice of "the way of death"—in that situation, that would be staying put in their city—or, they could submit to the will of God; which, in that case, included the chastening that God was bringing to them under the Babylonian Captivity...That was "the way of life." Does *that* sound contradictory? "The way of death" is: stay put, stay comfortable. "The way of life" is: have everything taken away from you, and go into captivity. Well, there's a pattern that's beginning to develop here. At the close of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus simply presents again the choice of all choices. The only difference is: this time, it's not tied to a nation; it's a *personal* choice to be made by each and every person, for all time.

And by the way: It is not a choice between faith and unbelief. It's not whether you believe or you don't believe, it's *what* you believe. The choice is always between *one* true way and *all* the other ways. Remember under Joshua's terminology: "If you *don't* want to serve the true God, pick one! All the gods of the Amorites, all the gods that you used to know, that your fathers used to worship in your former life."

But in reality, there have always been only *two* systems of religion in the world. On the one hand, there is God's system—this is the Gospel, God's system of *divine accomplishment*; He accomplishes what you need in order for your sins to be forgiven (Matt. 26:28), for you to be declared righteous (2 Cor. 5:21), for you to be made holy (Rom. 8:29), and to stand in His presence (Eph. 4:1). And on the other end is *every other system* that man has ever come up with; and *every other system* except Christianity—except the Gospel—every other system is a system of *human achievement*, in one way or another.

God sent Jesus Christ to die for sins as a perfect (1 Pet. 1:19), infinitely valuable sacrifice for all (Heb. 7:26; 1 Pet. 3:18), "for all time" (Heb. 10:12). And then He was to rise again, and He did (1 Cor. 15:4). And "He always lives to make intercession for" those of us who believe in Him (Heb. 7:25), until He glorifies us with Him forever, in eternity (Rom. 8:30; cf. 1 Cor. 15:53; Phil. 3:21; 1 Jn. 3:2).

On the other hand, within man's system there are *always* things to do. It has *many* different forms. I remember the agony of writing the course called "Cults and World Religions"—one of the most *painful* couple of weeks of my life, studying *all the wrong ways*. And by the way, I didn't touch *anywhere near* on all of them—but, in a sense, I *did* do all of them, because it's God's way or everything else, *anything* else.

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They're all *counterfeits*, designed by Satan to deceive people. Manmade religion is *always* about trying to reach God by human effort, whether it be channeled through a specific ritual or chanting a certain prayer or doing certain good works—it's *always* human effort. None of those systems—*not one*, not ever—has ever saved, or *can* ever save, anyone. Salvation is God's grace.

Even the Law that God gave to His people Israel through Moses—God's *own laws*, all that stuff about all of those sacrifices and all of the details of all of that—*none of that* ever saved anyone! Read the Book of Galatians. The Law was given to give you the knowledge of sin, to drive you to a Savior; it's called the "tutor to lead us to" the Savior (Gal. 3:24; cf. Rom. 7:7).

In Romans Chapter 3, Verse 20, the Apostle Paul says: "By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes"—*not salvation*—"through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." But look at the next sentence: "But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe." (cf. Rom. 10:4) What did "the Law and the Prophets" actually teach? You need a Savior! (e.g., Is. 53:5-12; Heb. 9:22)

Now, in the pre-Cross era, if you "believed God" (Rom. 4:3; cf. Gen. 15:6)—if you were walking "by faith" (Rom. 1:17; cf. Hab. 2:4)—you would demonstrate that faith by participating in all of those things that regulated your worship, all of those sacrifices; but you understood: they all looked forward to the "once for all" sacrifice (Heb. 7:27)—the "new covenant" (Jer. 31:31) that would take away sin (vs. 34; cf. Matt. 26:28; Jn. 1:29). Now, on the other side of the Cross, we get to see the whole thing.

But when self-righteous, ego-centered man is confronted by his conscience, or by the Word of God, and he begins to understand that he is sinful—well, he has to do something about it. You either call out to God to save you—or, you come up with a system that makes you *feel* righteous; you redefine the standards. Man invents religions to accommodate his shortcomings, to be sure that he can meet the new standards that *he* has created for himself.

That was *exactly* what the scribes and the Pharisees had done to the Law of God, in the day of Jesus, through their traditions. They had *lowered* God's standards. Remember Jesus, so often in the Sermon on the Mount, said: "You have heard that it was said...bur *I* say," and He shows how His standard is *greater* and *deeper*—higher, more lofty, if you will—than what their works-righteousness system had said.

They raised their own estimates of themselves. They felt that *they* had achieved a righteous standing before God (Lk. 18:9; cf. Is. 65:5). That's why Jesus made the theme of the whole Sermon on the Mount this verse that we've already seen many times: Matthew Chapter 5, Verse 20—"For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

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In that day, the scribes and the Pharisees believed with all their hearts, and taught with all the fervor that they had: "Here is what you must do in order to be righteous—and *we are righteous*, and we'll show you! We'll stand on the street corners and pray, we'll make a big deal about our giving of our alms"—it was all *outward*, demonstrable stuff; and *none of it* got to the heart! And Jesus kept saying, "Well, you've heard it was said, 'Don't commit adultery'; I say, you *don't even think about it*—because you have to deal with your heart, not merely the externals."

So now here, at the end of the sermon, not surprisingly, Jesus hammers away at the binary choices for eternity. Today we're going to look at just two verses; but in Verses 13 through 29, look at the contrast: Two gates—the narrow and the wide; two ways—the broad and the narrow; two destinations—life and destruction; two groups—the few and the many; two kinds of trees—the good and the bad; two kinds of fruit—the good and the bad; two kinds of people who profess faith in the Messiah—the sincere and the false; two kinds of builders—the wise and the foolish; two foundations—the rock and the sand; two houses—the secure and the insecure. I *think* He wants us to make a choice, and it's One or Two—there's no 1.3; there's no Option Number Three; this is the choice.

So in our two verses, we have the first couple of contrasts in this great True/False test. I tried to outline this, and I just started to overcook my brain. We don't need an outline! Look at these two verses again: "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

If I *was* going to outline this passage, it would be a one-point outline; and my English teacher would flunk me! You can't have a one-point outline! The whole key is the first word: "Enter"—that's the command. It's one of those aorist imperatives; it calls for a definite, specific, decisive action.

And what has He said is the theme? "Follow the scribes and the Pharisees, and you're going to fall *way short* of ever even entering the Kingdom of Heaven. So, guys, *here's how you get in!*" That's what He's saying.

Two paths leading to two gates, which lead to two destinations. Now, the sign over either one of these paths—this would be a confusing road sign; you would come to a fork in the road and it would say: "Heaven this way," and the other one would say: "Heaven this way." They are *both* purporting themselves to be the way to the Kingdom of Heaven (Prov. 9:4, 16; 2 Cor. 11:14-15)—but one leads there, and one doesn't. One is a "wide" gate; oh, there's a four-lane highway! The other one is the "small" gate; two little lanes, and the cars are lining up. Well, wouldn't you choose the easier one?

He says: "Choose the narrow gate." Consider that: "Enter through the narrow gate." A couple of senses in which "narrow" is the right way to describe this gate: First, it's "narrow" in the sense that it is the *only* right gate to enter. The entrance to Heaven is *not* multiple-choice, it's True/False—in or out, yes or no.

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I remember what I thought was a great gift—in the providence of God, it was one of the few times that I ever had the privilege to preach with my dad present. He told me that he came and heard me preach at Grace Church one time, but I lost him in the crowd of 3,000; I never did know he was there. But then they came up to Idaho; and they came, and they politely came to church. And when they visited, I didn't prearrange anything. I was preaching through the Gospel of John, which I had started over a year before they came to visit. On the Sunday they came, I arrived at John 14:6. I'll never forget the sermon title I chose, and I've reused it since then: "The Narrow Mind Of Jesus." Why would I say that? Well, because of what Jesus said in John 14:6—"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." He also said, in John 10:9—"I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved"

Now, understand: He did *not* say: "I'm a *nice* door. I'm a *good* door. I'm a *prettier* door than some of the other doors!" No, He says: "I am *the* door. I am *the* way, *the* truth, *the* life." So in this sense, the way is narrow because there is no latitude for choices. God does not offer you the opportunity to negotiate your own contract on how to get in! It is the exclusive way, and no others will do.

The other sense in which this is narrow is more tied to the etymology of the word. "Narrow" translates the word *stenos* in Greek; the root of that means "to groan from being under pressure." We get the English word "stenography" from it—and I bet we have no stenographers in the congregation today; it's a lost art. Stenography is shorthand, taking down shorthand; that was to refer to writing that has been abbreviated or compressed—compressed writing is what stenography is. The new Legacy Standard Bible—and actually, some of the other translations—therefore translate the word "narrow" as "constricted." The gate is constricted.

In this sense, it's "narrow" in that the person who enters this gate *has to come alone*. You can bring no one else, and nothing else with you. You cannot get in via anybody else's coattails. It is too tight to permit baggage to come with you. Maybe think of it as a turnstile; a turnstile allows only one person through a gate at a time, with no baggage. You cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven by uniting with a group; you must come individually.

Part of the twisted theology of the Pharisees was that, by virtue of their genetic identification as descendants of Abraham, signified by circumcision, they were assured entrance into the Kingdom (Matt. 3:9). Look up that passage where they said, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone" (Jn. 8:33). Half of that is true. See what Jesus said to that—pretty powerful.

Furthermore, this gate is "narrow"—so narrow that you have to leave everything behind in order to pass through it. You can't bring stuff with you (Lk. 14:33). I accidentally had a good illustration of this. I think it was in Kiev, Ukraine—heading down into the subway; it's crowded in that place. And then, as you get to where you go to this gigantic escalator that takes you down about four stories underground, it gets more and more crowded. And then you get to the escalator—you think *it can't get* more crowded, *but it is*.



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And if you're the American dude who hasn't been to his hotel yet—and you not only have a backpack on, you're also trailing a suitcase behind you—when you get there, it can get kind of dicey! And I got there, and it got really constricted; and then I stepped onto the top step and it got *more* constricted, just as my suitcase got hung up on the top of the escalator and ripped out of my hand! Now, if you're a preacher, everything is either a blessing, a sermon illustration, or both. *This was both!* I said, "Okay, this is going to be interesting here." I was thinking, "That's kind of like getting into the Kingdom of Heaven! *You can't bring your suitcase!* (see 1 Tim. 6:7). If only my backpack had been stripped off, it would have been a *perfect* illustration!

Ah, but this one also turned into a blessing. I got about halfway down, and I heard voices behind me; and here comes my suitcase, being passed along overhead, from person to person to person, and we were reunited at the bottom...and that *ruined* the illustration. It's not like you *check* your bags, and they get delivered to you in Heaven; *that* doesn't work, either!

What is it? Baggage of sin, baggage of self-will—it can't be brought along. This is the gate of self-denial. Matthew 16:24-25—"Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.' "

Remember that rich young ruler who came to Jesus? He left that meeting that day very sad. Why? Because he was very "rich" (Lk. 18:23), and he wasn't willing to become poor. That doesn't mean you have to give everything away to get to Heaven, but Jesus knew that guy's heart! He wasn't willing to let go of what was dear to him in his materialism; so He confronted him on the most personal level with what He confronts all of us, generically, in this passage: "Will you love Me more than anything else?"

To love God with everything you have is to *jettison* yourself! You give up your self-confidence, your self-achievement, your self-righteousness, your self-satisfaction. Anyone who tells you that, in order to be more mature, you need to work on your self-image, they are preaching the *anti-Gospel!* That's *exactly* the opposite!

Now, I don't mean: to get to Heaven, you have to have a *lousy* self-image. What I mean is: your self-imagined is *irrelevant*—it's what your image is in the eyes of God. You're a *sinner*, alienated from Him. You have no way to be reconciled, because you can't be good enough (Jas. 2:10), you can't atone for your own sin (1 Pet. 1:18-19)—*but God did!*

And He says: "Come, enter by the narrow gate." When you do that, you come empty-handed into the grace of God. You don't add Jesus onto the treasures that you've accumulated here on Earth; you swap them out for the surpassing riches of knowing Him! I heard a modern illustration of that the other day; if I could remember who it was, I would give him credit. He said, "You can't have Jesus as an 'app.' He has to be your operating system." And if you live in the 21st Century, you might understand that. I had to figure it out.

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Look again. Another aspect of the repentance that is part of genuine faith is about letting go of whatever else you might otherwise have brought. Again to our text: "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

The two gates lead to two ways. The "wide" gate leads to the "way" that is "broad." The other one, which is "narrow"—also translated "small"—that leads to the one that is "constricted." This is the way of the godly. The "broad" is the way of the ungodly. You can take all the baggage you want on the "broad" way. These are the *only* two ways that anyone can travel through life (e.g., Prov. 1:7; 10:28; 14:6; 17:24; 28:26; Ecc. 10:2).

The "narrow" way is the way of blessing. How can it be the blessed way when I have to take everything that God has blessed me with, and just let go of it? *That's the beauty of it all!* You get there standing *only* in His righteousness! (Phil. 3:9; cf. Ps. 71:16; 115:1).

I have a feeling that Jesus read the Psalms. You probably have, too. Listen to this, in Psalm 1; see if this doesn't match the Sermon on the Mount: "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night." Now, what does the Law do? It teaches you about sin. The one who does that, "He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but they are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."

*It wasn't brand new* that Jesus said, "Guys—there are *two ways*: one good, one bad; one right, one wrong; one Heaven, one Hell; one life, one destruction." The "broad" way looks like the easy way—attractive; permissive; not controversial; not narrow-minded; it would be the self-oriented way through life; the main rule is: just don't hurt anybody; you don't need to take a stand against sin—you can just sort of ignore the rottenness in your heart; tone down the truth if it becomes offensive; you can even give lip-service to God's Word, and you can say you admire His standards—but just be sure you don't get so carried away as to actually *study* the Word of God, or *proclaim* the Word of God, or *obey* its standards. That's the "broad" way—just float along with the currents of life. I think Jesus also read Proverbs. Proverbs 14:12—"There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." That's the "broad" way.

The "narrow" way: well, more constricted—it's demanding; it includes facing the truth. I read you Matthew's version of it; here's Luke's version of it: Luke 9:23—"And He was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me"—in other words, if you want to be on the path *He* is on, if you want to end up in the Kingdom where *He* is the King—"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily"—being *willing to die*, in this life—"and follow Me.' "

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Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Matt. 7:13-14 (Sermon on the Mount #29)

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When you come to Christ, you commit yourself to a Lord who *will* use you; He will *bless* you; He will *comfort* you; He will *encourage* you; He will "wipe away" your tears (Rev. 21:4); He will *sustain* you through the hard times—but *only* when you *truly* commit yourself to His way (2 Chr. 16:9; Ps. 145:18).

How did the Apostle Paul describe it? "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). To live is not about a white picket fence or a house in the country or world travel—"For me, to life is *Christ*."

Now, you won't be perfect about it (Ecc. 7:20). The same Apostle, in the last half of Romans Chapter 7, described that it is a battle to fulfill every command (cf. Matt. 26:41; Gal. 5:17); and you *will* struggle, you can't do it perfectly (Phil. 3:12-14; Jas. 3:2); *but He redeems you!* He did that! (see 1 Jn. 2:1-2)

Nevertheless, as you walk the "narrow" way, it's always the way of blessing. And the remarkable truth about Christianity—which sets it apart from *all the other systems of religion*—is that in Christ, you not only have a Savior, you not only have a loving Lord, you have a *Burden-bearer* (Ps. 55:22)! You cast "all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7, NKJV).

And He calls us to the life that requires the burden; but then, He enables us *in that life* to *carry the burden*, because we do it by His strength (Phil. 4:13)—we "stand" in His "grace" (Rom. 5:2). He takes care of us! Everywhere we go, everything we need, He knows our needs before we ask Him (Matt. 6:8). It's all *His life* in which we live (2 Tim. 1:1). "To live is Christ and to die is gain."

It's interesting that the description of this way—described as "narrow"—you know, would you rather walk on a wide, safe path, or a narrow one on the cliff? "Constricted"—would you rather walk on something that's going to press in on you, or would you rather be free? It *sounds* like you wouldn't like that, but here's an irony for you: The narrow, constricted way is the way of *rest*, the way of rest for your soul.

Jesus gave a different kind of invitation in a different setting, in these words: Matthew 11:28-30—"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden"—guess who He had in mind? All the people under the incredible burden of all the do's and don'ts that were heaped upon them by the Pharisees (Matt. 23:4), the crushing load of trying to be good enough. "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you"—You say, "Your yoke? 'Yoke' is what you put across the shoulders of the oxen to pull your plow! What do You mean, 'yoke'? Do You think I'm some kind of a *slave* or something?" Well...(1 Cor. 7:22; Eph. 6:6) "Take *My* yoke upon you and learn from Me"—guess who's in the yoke with you? Him—"for I am gentle and humble in heart"—*I'm not a taskmaster*, like the Pharisees are! I'm the benevolent One—"I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls"—*not* the weariness, *not* the heavy burdens! "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Why? "I take you through it! It's My life lived through you" (Gal. 2:20; cf. 1 Cor. 15:10).

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I'm going to save a lot for next time, but look one more time: Matthew 7:13-14—"Enter"—that's the command; if you want to get in the Kingdom, you have to "enter." Enter how? "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

What do you see there? Two destinations. *Only two*—there is not a third option! One or the other. "Life"—that is: salvation, Heaven, glory, the Kingdom, blessing, rest for your soul. The other option is: "destruction." What destruction? It's not annihilation; it's way worse than that. It's "eternal destruction" (2 Thess. 1:9). Read about it in Revelation Chapter 20, Verse 10—"tormented day and night, forever and ever" in "the lake of fire." Two destinations—"life" or "destruction."

There are two groups—this gets interesting: The "few." The "few"—that's a relative term, compared to the "many." The "few" are those who come to God on His terms. The "many" is everybody else: the pagans; the pseudo-Christians—the nominal ones who claim the name of Christ, but they don't obey Him; the atheist; the theist; the humanist—every person of every type who has not come to saving, obedient faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:5; 16:26; cf. Jn. 3:36; 2 Thess. 2:8; Heb. 5:9).

Now, we say, "Make a choice." You know what? If you choose the way of the "few," there may be "many" you know and you love who won't come with you (Matt. 10:37); but *you* have to make that choice—because it's about *your* soul. Which side are you on? There is no middle ground. Jesus does *not* say: "Come and say, 'Maybe.'" He says: "Come and *choose* right and wrong, good or bad, narrow or wide. No middle ground."

So, how do we apply this? Jesus was speaking mainly to Israelites. It was before the Cross. We live after the Cross. So what is it for us? Well, you know the terms: Second Corinthians 5:20—"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ..." What is an ambassador? An ambassador is someone who represents their government in the land under another government. "We are ambassadors *for Christ*," and for the Kingdom of which He is the King. We are His ambassadors, and we live here on—*not* our soil, because our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20)—"We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Maybe you've heard this before, and it hasn't struck your mind the way it is today. Maybe you're listening on livestream, and you're sort of our invisible guest, and you've never heard this message of salvation this way before. Maybe you've blown off the Gospel. Maybe you've said you believed, and you know in your heart you haven't really ever come to the point that you would say, "For me, to live is *Christ*. I want Christ! Give me Jesus!"

Then, this is the day! (2 Cor. 6:2) I'm *begging you*, as God's ambassador: Be "reconciled to God" (Rom. 5:10; cf. Jn. 3:18; Rom. 5:1; 8:1).

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In the first service, we sang a song written by Charles Wesley—"And can it be that I should gain..."—fantastic song! I understand he wrote that song a matter of a week or two after an important event; the event was when he gave his life to Christ. That was *after* he had spent years as a missionary!

Look, you can have the *words*—but have you entered by "the narrow gate"? Oh, my friend, don't leave today *without entering that gate, I beg you!*

Let's pray:

*Father, we can beg, we can plead; we do. We preach the Gospel, we beg our friends and our loved ones to come to the Savior; and yet we know: that is Your work. So, if anyone is wrestling with that decision, I pray that You will open their eyes; I pray that You will soften their "heart of stone" and turn it to a heart of clay, and that You will bring them to Yourself. And Father, help us to be faithful always to proclaim the Gospel, and include the call to decide—the call to enter through the narrow gate. Whatever each heart in the sound of my voice needs, grant that need, we pray. Maybe it's the day of new life in Christ! What a glorious day that would be, for anyone who makes that choice. And Father, above all, as we go out from this place, may it be true of us that "to live is Christ"—that's what we're all about—"and to die is gain," when we receive our promotion into Your presence. So have Your way with us, for Your glory, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*