

## **Two Ways; One Choice**

### *Matthew 7:13-14*

If there is one thing that is part of the American way it's to have a lot of choices, right? Like many of you I grew up with only three TV stations to watch (well, four if you count PBS). Now, you can literally have 100s of stations. We only have about 15 stations ("baby cable") and our kids don't think that is enough choices. In the town where I grew up we had one theater that played one movie each night. Here in Manhattan we have 12 options, but most of us love to find an AMC 30 where there are dozens of choices from which to pick.

Or think of all the choices you have at the grocery store. Go to the milk aisle and you can get skim, 1/2%, 1%, 2%, or whole milk. Or go down a bit further to the orange juice case there are all sorts of choices. Tropicana has options like Antioxidant Advantage juice (high in vitamins C & E); they've got their Calcium Plus Vitamin D juice; they've got Healthy Heart with Omega -3 juice; they've got their Healthy Kids juice with vitamins A & E & D, plus extra calcium; and, they've got their newest juice, Trop50, which has less calories because it is 60% water. And we haven't even talked about high pulp, low pulp, no pulp, country style juices.

Guys, if you've ever tried to go buy the right shampoo for your wife, you know that there are choices. Right? If I'm going to be lucky enough to get the kind Cindy uses, I'll have spend a thirty minutes to make sure I've got the right one because there are so many choices.

Well, I think the point is clear, having a lot of options is simply part of our way of life here in the United States. But as we come to the passage we are considering today, Jesus is very clear that when it comes to our lives, we don't have a lot of choices about how we will live. In fact, we have really only have one choice and that is to follow Jesus or not.

Today, we are looking at Matthew 7:13-14. This passage marks a transition point in the Sermon on the Mount. In verse 12, Jesus said:

*Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

In a kind of summary of all that Jesus has taught up to this point, He offers the Golden Rule. If you live according to the Golden Rule, your behavior will conform to what Jesus has taught in the Sermon on the Mount. He then makes the comment that *this is the Law and the Prophets*. In other words, this kind of living fulfills the teaching of the Law and the Prophets.

Now, back in 5:17-20, Jesus had talked about the Law and the Prophets there as well. These two references to the Law and the Prophets form an inclusio (i.e. bookends), which indicate that all that lies between them has been dealing with the same content -

how disciples are to live in the kingdom of God and how such living fulfills the true direction of the Law and the Prophets.

And with this bookend then there is a point of transition where Jesus moves from teaching ethics to offering warnings and challenges. In the remainder of the Sermon, Jesus presents four contrasts between two ways, two trees, two claims and two foundations. Today, we are going to be looking at the first of these four contrasts where Jesus talks about:

## **I. Two Ways** (Matt. 7:13-14)

Let's begin by reading Matthew 7:13-14. Jesus said:

*<sup>13</sup> "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. <sup>14</sup> "For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it.*

Jesus commands his listeners to *Enter by the narrow gate*. In a literal sense, gates were a very common thing. There were gates that were the entry points to towns and to homes and even to different areas of the temple. Some of these gates were large and quite easy to find. Jesus, of course, is not speaking literally. He speaks figuratively of a *narrow gate* - a gate through which Jesus calls people to enter.

Jesus then presents two parallel descriptions of two gates and two ways with two groups of travelers arriving at two very different destinations. In these descriptions He makes is clear why a person should choose to enter the narrow gate.

Of the first gate, Jesus says that it is *wide, and the way is broad*. Think of the gates that lead into the parking lot up by the KSU stadium off Kimball Ave. When those are opened some of them allow four lanes of traffic to come and go. They are wide gates. This wide gate of which Jesus speaks is easy to find, it's easily entered and it is very inviting.

It is a gate that leads to a way that *is broad*. This path does not require anything of those who travel it. It doesn't require one to lay down selfish ambition or pride or sin or anything. That it is a broad way implies an ease and a comfort in traveling this way.

The other gate, however, is *small, and the way is narrow*. Think of the turnstiles that you have to go through to get into Bramledge Coliseum. They are quite different than the gates into the parking lot, right? They are small. You can't push baby strollers through them. You can't go through them two-by-two. To get through them, it can only be you. This *small* gate is very different than the wide gate. It requires one to lay down everything to pass through it. It requires that one deny oneself, lay aside sin and selfish ambition.

This gate leads to a way that is narrow. This word, *narrow*, in verse 14 is a different word than the one in verse 13. In verse 14, it is a word that comes from a related word that means tribulation. And so, it is very possible that part of the narrowness of this road is that it is a road on which the traveler will experience persecution and opposition.

Paul seems to say a similar thing when he speaks to some of his disciples in Acts 14:21-22. We read there:

*<sup>21</sup> And after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, <sup>22</sup> strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."*

Suffering and persecution seem to be part of this narrow pathway. But as well, part of the narrowness of this road is that it is a road on which one is expected to live out the rigors of discipleship. This is the way of truly following Jesus as His disciple. To do so means to take the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount seriously and seek to live them out.

Now, as far the travelers, Jesus says that through the wide gate *many are those who enter by it*. And why wouldn't that be true? This is the easy way. This is the way that costs nothing. If you want to go through that gate, you will have plenty of company. But through the narrow gate, Jesus says *few are those who find it*. This is the gate and the way that costs something of the traveler. Not as many go this way.

The final thing that Jesus says about each of these ways is that they each have a destination. The broad path, Jesus says, is the way *that leads to destruction*. As it does elsewhere in the New Testament, *destruction*, refers to final ruin. This is the destination of the first way, the easy way. It ends in eternal destruction. Destruction, not in the sense of non-existence, but destruction in the sense of eternal, unending death and separation from God.

The second way, the narrow way, Jesus says is the way *that leads to life*. This is speaking of eternal life; eternal fellowship with God. It is speaking of life in the consummated kingdom

Later in Matthew, Jesus will teach again about these final destinations. In Matthew 25 Jesus says:

*<sup>32</sup> "And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; <sup>33</sup> and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. <sup>34</sup> "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."*

And then in verse 41:

<sup>41</sup> *"Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;*

And then in verse 46:

<sup>46</sup> *"And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

Eternal punishment or eternal life - these are the only two destinations for our lives. Those who go through the wide gate and walk the broad way are headed to the destination of eternal destruction. But *the righteous*, those who went through the narrow gate and walked the narrow path are headed to a destination of life - eternal life.

One overcast, rainy Friday night during my freshman year in college I was driving home from college to see one of my high school buddies who was home from a different college. I had been to his place out in the country many times, but since I was traveling from Kearney instead of the town where I grew up, I took a different route to his house. But I was pretty sure I knew the way. If you've ever been up in south-central Nebraska, this is where there is literally a gravel road every mile. I was traveling on what I believed was the right road and when that road curved a certain way, I was convinced I was on the right road, because all of these roads are straight. But the one going to his house had a curve in it and so when I saw the curve I was convinced. I was cruising along, probably driving 50 or 55 believing that in just a mile or two more I would see the turn to his house, but as I crossed into the next section (the next mile) what had been a nice gravel road, turned to a dirt road (If there is not a home on the a mile section sometimes they are not maintained with gravel). But with all the rain it wasn't a dirt road, it was a muddy mess. I tried to stop, but couldn't before I traveled quite a ways on this muddy road and got stuck. I got out of my car, stood in two inches of mud and realized I had no idea where I was. See, there are no dirt roads if you take the right way to Mark's house.

A person on this wide path might be convinced that they are on the right path, which will lead ultimately to a good destination. But just like my trip, there was an actual reality about the destination of the road that I was on. It didn't matter if I thought I was on the right road. I wasn't and in the end there was a certain destination - getting stuck on a muddy road. So, too it doesn't matter what we can convince ourselves of regarding the destination of the path we are on, what matters is what Jesus says is the ultimate destination of each. One path leads to destruction and the other to life. We need to be careful that we truly know what path we are on.

Two gates. Two paths. Two groups of travelers. Two destinations. Jesus says that there are no other options. There are no other gates. There are not other paths. There

are no neutral-party travelers. We might like to think that there is a third option where we can say, "Yes, I want Jesus as my Savior, but I don't really want to follow Him full out. I want Jesus as my Savior, but I don't want to lay down my own ambition and plans and ways." But Jesus doesn't give us a third option. Either a person follows Jesus full out on the narrow path or he doesn't.

## **II. One Choice**

As we come to this point in the Sermon on the Mount, in presenting these two ways, Jesus is calling us to a decision. He is calling us to follow Him on the narrow way. He is calling us to be fully devoted to Him without any reservations. There are two ways, but just one choice. There are no other options.

D.A. Carson says this about these two options:

Nothing could be more calamitous than to meditate long and hard on Matthew 5:1-7:12 and then to resolve to improve a little. The discipleship which Jesus requires is absolute, radical in the sense that it gets to the root of human conduct and to the root of relationships between God and men. A person either enters the kingdom or he does not. He walks the road that leads to life, or he walks the road that leads to destruction. There is no third alternative. Nothing, nothing at all, could have more crucial significance than following Jesus" (*The Sermon on the Mount*, 122).

Nothing in all of your life is of greater significance than this choice of whether you will follow Jesus or not. The Sermon on the Mount is not about a call to "improve a little;" it is a call to a life of radical, absolute discipleship. That's the choice before each one of us.

This morning I want to give you an opportunity to respond to this call to enter through the narrow gate and to follow Jesus fully. We enter this gate by faith in Jesus alone. It is a gift of grace that we don't earn. In fact we can't earn it. We don't pass through this gate by living a righteous life for we can never be righteous enough. It is simply a gift of grace that we receive by faith.

Jesus came and laid down His life on the cross to pay for our sin. Every sin of commission; every sin of omission that we ever have or ever will commit was laid on Jesus Christ when He died on the cross. He paid the penalty for our sin. And so what is offered to each one of us is a gift of grace where our sins can be forgiven and the righteousness of Jesus can become ours. We receive it by coming to God in repentance and faith. We turn from a life of walking the broad path; of doing things our way and we turn to follow Christ. We accept that His death is the basis of our forgiveness. When we do this, the Bible says that we are born again spiritually (John 3). We are born into the kingdom of God.

And to live in the kingdom of God is to walk this narrow path; it is to live this life of discipleship where we follow Jesus period. It means leaving everything at the gate. We lay everything down. Jesus really doesn't give us the option to trust Him as Savior, but then to live our lives as we please.

If you struggle to make this choice because it just seems too costly and too hard I would say to you that it is costly and it is hard. But here's the deal, you need to look at it from the vantage point of the destination. In the end when you arrive at the final destination, I can guarantee you that you will look back at the cost and any difficulty and you will say that the cost was worth it.

I would also add that Jesus, the same one who is calling us to this radical life of discipleship, is the one who says:

<sup>28</sup> "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> "Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> "For My yoke is easy, and My load is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

The reality is that from the outside of the gate this narrow path can look so restrictive and narrow, but the reality is that once on the other side, though it is narrow and can be hard, it is the path of joy and peace.

Two ways; one choice. What do you choose? If you'd like to choose to be a follower of Jesus I want to give you that opportunity today. I'm going to lead in a prayer and if you would like to receive Jesus as your Savior and commit to walking this narrow road of discipleship, you can simply pray it along with me in your heart to God.

Let's pray:

Dear Jesus, this morning, I express to you that I want to enter the narrow gate and follow You alone. I need You. I confess to You that I am sinful - my thoughts, my actions, my motives have been sinful. I have not lived in a way that pleases You. But I thank you that You died on the cross for me and paid the penalty for my sin that I rightly owe. I trust You and You alone to be my Savior. Thank you for forgiving my sin and for giving me Your very righteousness. Come and live in me. I also acknowledge my desire to follow You on this narrow path. In coming to you, I lay everything down - my plans, my future, my ambitions, my sin, everything. I lay it down at the gate and I simply choose to follow You, Jesus. I know that I cannot follow you on this path without Your gracious help and so please help me, I pray. Thank you for being my Savior. Thank you for being my Leader. Amen.