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**The  
Narrow  
Gate**

Matthew 7:13-14



**“The Narrow Gate”** (Matthew 7:13-14)(10.1.23)

Matthew 7:13-14 (AMP)

<sup>13</sup> “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and

broad *and* easy to travel is the path that leads the way to destruction *and* eternal loss, and there are many who enter through it. <sup>14</sup> But small is the gate and narrow *and* difficult to travel is the path that leads the way to [everlasting] life, and there are few who find it.

**The word of God for the people of God.**

LET US PRAY.

Title: **“The Narrow Gate”**

INTRODUCTION:

There was a newspaper article many years ago in Melbourne, Australia from someone who had heard Billy Graham preach. This is what he wrote to the newspaper. “After hearing Dr. Billy Graham on the air, viewing him on television, and reading reports and letters concerning him and his mission, I am heartily sick of the type of religion that insists my soul needs saving ... whatever that means. I have never felt that I was lost, nor do I feel that I daily wallow in the mire of sin, although repetitive preaching insists that I do.

Give me a practical religion that teaches gentleness and tolerance, that acknowledges no barriers of color or creed, that remembers the aged and teaches children of

goodness and not sin. If in order to save my soul I must accept such a philosophy as I have recently heard preached, I prefer to remain forever damned, thank you.”<sup>1</sup>

Does that sound like an unreasonable position to you? Have you ever heard someone joke about going to hell like this? “At least all my friends will be there.” Maybe most people would not be so bold as to say their preference is to be damned rather than hear about their sin, but they trumpet it loudly in the way that they live.

BODY:

Today’s scripture is part of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has been preaching to His followers for more than two chapters. Here, He is nearing the conclusion. So, Jesus is calling for them to come to a conclusion, that is, to make a choice. AND, every human being must make the same choice. AND, not making a deliberate choice is making a choice by default; a dangerous default indeed.

We are constantly called upon to make choices. Most of them are inconsequential like what should I have for breakfast. Other choices are monumental like should I marry this person. Those bigger choices will always frame the choices that follow.

When my parents chose to move to Winthrop, MA in 1973, it put me in my senior year English class sitting next to a pretty young girl named Carol. Well, we know how that turned out.

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2014). [John MacArthur Sermon Archive](#). Grace to You.

When Carol and I were offered a choice by the Coast Guard to get transferred to Corpus Christi, TX or come to Atlantic City to open a new Air Station, we chose South Jersey. And, our younger son met the woman of his dreams here. Many choices followed that choice.

When we chose to stay here after retiring from the Coast Guard, we decided to move to our retirement house. That was right across the street from Highland Community Church and Pastor Tom Douglass. Pastor Tom was critical in helping me find the narrow gate and to enter in.

There is a narrow gate and a wide gate. Well...aren't there other gates? I almost wrote here, unfortunately not, but the truth is that we are fortunate that there are only two possibilities. Otherwise, it would be difficult to know if we were choosing in the right place or if we had to make correct successive choices. Make the right choice and the path will be clear; not easy, but clear. This way our choice is always to stay on the right path that leads to everlasting life. Jesus defines the critical choice of our existence. **Choose Him or choose hell.**



And here is the thing, everyone starts on the broad way. We all enter by the wide gate at first. All normal human life is headed to the same destination, destruction and eternal loss. Yes, we need saving because the alternative is condemnation and the wrath of God.

It may seem otherwise. Yes, it is kind of like an Interstate highway – it is a road that determines our eternal **state**. We think we are making individual choices that will determine our destiny. After all, we get off at certain exits and get on at other exits. That is because the Interstate System is so vast, BUT it is still part of the same broad way.

One way you can know it is the broad way is because it so heavily travelled. There are so many others who are all going in the same direction as you. It would be logical to conclude that it must be the right way. And look at that; they even provide rest areas for you to refuel your cars and to feed you.

You can watch the Weather Channel and listen to the local radio stations to get the latest traffic updates and news on the road conditions. This way is the normal way. This way has the big signs and the bright lights. This way hits all the big cities where most people live.

People in the know promote the broad way. Many parts of government control, tax, and maintain the broad way. The TV talking heads advise the mass of travelers. Famous celebrities endorse celebratory cruises along this broad channel. The highly educated experts validate your choice of the broad way. After all, everyone is going their way and it feels good to go with the majority.

If by some chance, you get weary of this broad way, don't worry. Take a break. There are plenty of things to occupy your mind, to amuse you, to anesthetize you. The entertainment opportunities are literally endless. There

are hundreds of television networks, all with 24 hour programming. Then there is the ever-expanding universe of the Internet with no limits, censors, rules, or restraints. And amazingly we always have instant access via our so-called smartphones.

Our restaurants consume large portions of our paychecks. Our tastebuds can experience flavors of the whole world. Exotic mixed drinks, sweet liqueurs, beers, ales, wine, and hard lemonades or seltzers are readily available when we choose to chill. Cannabis, pharmaceuticals, and easily accessible illegal drugs can make the broad way better.

People no longer need to make a special trip to Las Vegas, which was once called "sin city." Nowadays, there are sin cities all across our nation, part of the broad way to destruction. Even the government legalizes, endorses, and promotes these activities which all help keep the travelers on that broad way.

None of this should bother atheists though, right? Like the writer of the letter to the Australian newspaper, for some reason, atheists are bothered by God-talk. Maybe they think they are performing a public service by dismantling the figment of faith.

Psalm 14:1 (NIV84)

<sup>1</sup> The fool (one who is immoral) says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good.

If you read the rest of Psalm 14, you will see the proof of the connection between being a fool and immorality. And not incidentally, immorality is the broad way of destruction.

Proverbs 12:15 (NIV84) The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.

Maybe you are thinking, "Come-on pastor, that's all pretty cynical. What about all the religious people out there?" I remind you that Jesus' harshest criticism was levied at the Pharisees. The Pharisees were among the most religious people ever. They were legalistic about their religion.

They promoted a work-based religion. In fact, if you examine all the religions of the world, of the broad way to destruction, you will find that they promote works-based religion. Somehow, though in different ways, each person can save themselves. They can achieve a higher consciousness or a state of enlightenment. They can do more good than bad. This makes sense to the human mind. We can get behind this logical way of thinking.

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**The  
Narrow  
Way**



Orthodox Christianity teaches that no one is good, no not one. Only God is good. We can never do enough to earn our salvation. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus who paid our sin debt. Not by works, so that no one may boast. And this is a free gift of God. People find this gift hard to receive because it requires humility. It requires coming to Jesus as little children.

So then, are not all people who say they are Christians on the narrow path? After all, haven't I quoted to you on several occasions Romans 10:9–10 (NIV84)

<sup>9</sup> That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

As we learned from the first chapter of James the last two weeks, what we do must match what we say. Our faith must result in actions that demonstrate the truth of our faith. It includes living pure lives and ridding ourselves of ALL uncleanness.

The author of Romans, the Apostle Paul, also said Romans 6:11–14 (NIV84)

<sup>11</sup> In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. <sup>12</sup> Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. <sup>13</sup> Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. <sup>14</sup> For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

Unfortunately, many that profess the name of Christ have not found the narrow gate. They have not entered the narrow gate, which is a required action of faith. They are still on the broad way. The evidence of this claim is that they have brought the way of the world, the broad

way, into the Church of Jesus Christ. They argue that we must be more inclusive to fill our churches again.



Let me respond to that with a passage from Luke 13:22–30 (NIV84) *The Narrow Door*

<sup>22</sup> Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. <sup>23</sup>

Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”

He said to them, <sup>24</sup> “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. <sup>25</sup> Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’

“But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’

<sup>26</sup> “Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’

<sup>27</sup> “But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’

<sup>28</sup> “There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. <sup>29</sup> People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. <sup>30</sup> Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”

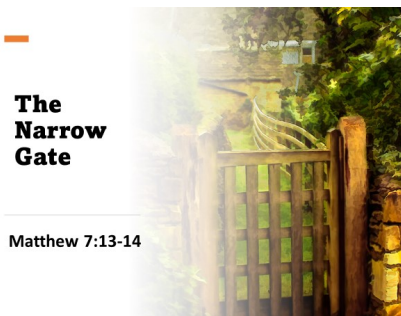


In today's passage, Jesus says, "Few will find the small and narrow gate." First note, we MUST find it. We must be looking for it. We must be searching for it to find it. Most people do not even think it exists. Or, they have no desire to look for it.

Today, when one, two or three generations in a family are unchurched it shouldn't surprise us. Prayer and the Bible are banned from the schools. True Christianity is an anathema in the public discourse. Tragically, a different gospel is proclaimed in too many American churches.

The Apostle Paul warns in Galatians 1:8-9 (NIV84)

<sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! <sup>9</sup> As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!



On top of all that, Jesus tells us the cold hard facts. The narrow gate is tough to navigate. Even when some find it they either change their mind; mingle about, procrastinating; or come to the realization that they do not wish to release their hold on the world. They are like the rich young ruler who would not follow Jesus at the expense of selling his worldly goods. Or, they realize it is too **difficult** a path for them to navigate.

Here, let me quote one of my favorite preachers, Alexandar Maclaren:

“Now, people generally read these words as if our Lord was saying, '*Though* the one path is narrow and rugged and steep and unfrequented, yet walk on it, because it leads to life; and *though* the other presents the opposite of all these characteristics, yet avoid it, because pleasant and popular as it is, its end is destruction.'

**But that is not what He says.** All four things are reasons for avoiding the one and following the other; which, being turned into plain English, is just this, that we ought to be Christian people **precisely because there are difficulties and pains and sacrifices in being so**, which we may ignobly shirk if we like. It is not, *Though* the road be narrow it leads to life, therefore enter it; but **Because** it is narrow, and leads to life, therefore blessed are the feet that are set upon it.”

We heard a parallel message from James the last two weeks. It is in the trials, testings, and temptings that we are purified by fire into the image of God. The Apostle Peter agrees: 1 Peter 4:12–16 (NIV84)

<sup>12</sup> Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. <sup>15</sup> If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of

criminal, or even as a meddler. <sup>16</sup> However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

The Apostle Paul makes a third witness to Maclaren's preaching and the words of Jesus: Romans 5:3-5 (NIV84)

<sup>3</sup> Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup> And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

No, the narrow gate, the small gate, the narrow and difficult path that leads to everlasting life is **NOT** easy. But Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow Him. Jesus calls us to take His yoke upon on us. Jesus calls us to make a choice. Find the narrow gate, enter it, and continue to follow Jesus.

CONCLUSION:

Does it bother you that only a few will find it? It should. It certainly bothers me...a lot.

A few years ago there was a young African; he was martyred for the cause of Christ, but before he died, he wrote these words. They were found in his room. It said this: "I am a part of the fellowship of the Unashamed. I have the Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. **The decision has been made. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ.**

I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, and my future is secure. I am finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tame visions, mundane talking, chintzy giving, and dwarfed goals....My pace is set, my gait is fast, my goal is Heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions few, my Guide is reliable, my mission is clear....

I won't give up, back up, let up, or shut up until I've preached up, prayed up, paid up, stored up, and stayed up for the cause of Jesus Christ ... I must go until He returns, give until I drop, preach until all know, and work until he comes [again]. And when He comes to get His own, He will have no problem recognizing me. My colors will be clear."

Pastor Adrian Rogers preached, "Compare that with the Christianity we see today. We are looking for a cheap way, an easy way, a lazy way to serve the Lord Jesus. But Jesus said, "*Strait is the gate.*" It is a disciplined way."

My brothers and sisters, let us prepare our hearts for Holy Communion with Jesus, who said, "**I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**" Jesus is **the way, the ONLY way.**

Amen and amen. Let us pray.