

Matthew 7:13-20, Enter the narrow Gate

Good morning, my name is Matthew, one of the pastors here, its a joy to gather and a joy to sit under the Word of Christ with you today. If you would open in your Bibles to Matthew 7:13-20, that's where we will be today.

On Friday I had come home to have lunch with my family, and on my way back I was on Kildaire and a girl pulled out in front of me and a truck coming in the opposite direction smashes into her and pushes her car nearly into mine. Air bags go out, the glass explodes. I had a front row seat to it all. Thankfully the girl in the car was okay. When I got up to the building I called my wife to tell her I loved her. Why?

Because I received a quick and sharp reminder that life is fragile, that my life, all of our lives, could be taken at any moments notice. We do not know the number of our days, only the Lord knows.

Yes, we are starting on a sobering note, and the reason for that is where we find ourselves in the sermon on the mount, beginning here in v.13, is a sobering and terrifying passage. Dealing with eternal realities that we would rather not grapple with. Jesus is not beating around the bush, He's telling it like it is. He's just finished the body of His sermon, and beginning here in v.13 to the end of the chapter He is commanding a response from His people in light of eternity, to pass through the judgment of God and enter into the kingdom of heaven.

13 "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. 14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Jesus shows us this morning that we are on one of two paths, to one of two destinations, either of eternal life or eternal death.

So I ask one of the most sobering questions imaginable, "If you were to die in the next 24 hours, do you know where you would spend eternity?" Do you know where you are headed? My prayer and hope this morning is that we would all find ourselves assured of eternal life. I do assume at least that we all want life.

This morning in our text we are going to see that that path to life is not easy, but rather very difficult, and we will see difficulty in four places in our text. The gate itself is narrow, the path is hard, the path is unpopular, and the path requires discernment.

Let's pray

1. The gate is narrow

The first thing Jesus asks us to, and most important thing, to do is to enter into the narrow gate. Why I say it is most important is because it comes first, and because all the reasons which He will then lay out to us are supportive of this great aim, that we, as a people, into through the narrow gate. Now this is a metaphor, we need to define our terms a bit.

Scholars debate whether this gate comes first before the path or comes after the path. If you see the gate before the path, see the gate is a critical moment of decision that leads to the path of discipleship. If you see the gate at the end of the path, the gate is the very entrance into the Kingdom of God, and therefore, the gate, symbolizes the judgment of God, where only the righteous may enter. I believe most the evidence places this gate at the end of the journey.

For one, the word order does not necessitate order of sequence, but order of importance. Entering the narrow gate is what is most important to Jesus.

Secondly, the word choices, Matthew has in his vocabulary words that he uses elsewhere to talk about streets in the city which are different than roads outside the city. These are outside the city road language. The specific word here is a gate that leads into the city. Commonly has an end-time focus—gates of heaven. And in combination with that, the word "enter" is used almost exclusively in an end-times sense. **Matthew 5:20,**

unless your righteousness exceeds the pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Enter kingdom and enter life, which is used in our text, is always end-times focused.

Third, the theme of judgment is prominent in the sermon on the mount, and especially here in chapter 7.

Why that matters is that Jesus is making it very clear to us what is most important. He's putting it front and center. There's a judgment coming where we will be laid bare, fully exposed, and fully accountable. Passing the judgment is the most difficult and most important thing in the universe for you to do.

Entering is emphatic here. Like, do all you can to enter. Use all your resources towards that aim. You are not to spend your time and energy doing and thinking about anything else. It's that important. What good is it if you gain the whole world and forfeit your soul. (Illustration)

The gate is narrow. Judgment is strict, righteousness is required.

So if we get our pieces together as I understand it, we got a picture of a path that leads up to a gate, and at that gate is a judgment that determines if you can get through or not. Or consider it the gate of the righteous.

What is the judgment? It's actually tied to the path. You can't get to the gate without walking the path, that's important to see here. you can't get to the gate any other way but by the path. These are connected. It's a metaphor so you can't press it too hard. If you walk the hard path you make it through the narrow gate. Let's look at what makes getting to the gate so difficult.

2. The path is hard

In biblical imagery, the way, or the path, is one's ethical lifestyle. It is classic proverbial language, the way of the wicked compared to the way of the righteous. The way, that which characterizes the way you live. The call here from Jesus is tied directly to the entirety of the Sermon on the Mount., which has just outlined to us the way we should live.

We are to be poor in Spirit, to mourn our sin, to be humble, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to be merciful to others, pure in heart, seeking peace, letting our light shine, having a righteousness that exceeds the pharisees, not becoming angry, not lusting, keeping our marital vows, speaking truthfully to one another, forgiving others, loving our enemies, giving and praying and fasting with the right motives, living for God and not money, trusting God and not becoming anxious, not judging, loving others as we'd like them to love us.

That's a hard road. And this is exactly what Jesus commands of His people.

Matthew 16:24, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. for whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

No wonder there are few on this path. It'd be a lot easier to eat, drink, and be merry. Forget all this living godly and on mission stuff. Let me live for myself—that'd be a lot easier. And it would be easier, and it would lead you right off a cliff.

The disciple of Christ realizes that Jesus is Lord and that all of life must be lived in submission to His will. That's not Sunday morning for an hour or at small group, that's everywhere and all the time, when people are looking and when I am alone, public and private life, how I relate to my spouse, to my children, to my boss, coworkers and friends, how i spend my free time, is all under the Lordship of Christ.

Godliness has almost gone out of style. It's not cool. Maybe because its not flashy enough. Jesus is not after flashy. He wants godliness. It's easy for us to become fascinated with talk. Look at the sermon on the mount, put it up on the exam table, dissect it. Have a conference about it, put up banners about it, make cool videos about it, and yet not do it.

The book of James calls us to action, that if our faith is not accompanied by works, we show that our faith is dead. We deceive ourselves if we read the Word and do not do what it says.

The broad road is easy because, as Don Carson pointed out, you don't have to try, it doesn't require any effort. That's default mankind—broad road. Ungodliness. Godliness requires effort. Pursuing God requires going against the flesh, against the world, and against the Devil.

In that vein, there's never a time when we cannot let our guard down. We must be ready in season and out of season.

3. The path is unpopular

Jesus describes a further difficulty with the way of the righteous in that it is the unpopular route. The path is easy and wide that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. The narrow path has few travelers.

What we see here is that we cannot look around to others to find out where the way is. Popular opinion is not going to get us there. The world is running headlong over this cliff and we must not run with them. The Christian life is a life lived against the grain. We are swimming upstream in current of immorality and wickedness.

Instead our gaze must be fixed securely on God, living for God alone, no matter what anyone else says or does. We are too easily swayed to the left and to the right depending on what our neighbor does, what our friends do, our relatives, what the blogs and newspapers are saying. We can't live by that voice, we can't listen to those voices. We must seek the voice of God alone in the Scriptures, and if that leaves us alone, so be it. We have counted the world as loss for the sake of knowing Christ Jesus.

This is not new to the people of God. Like Noah in his generation, and Joseph among his brothers, and Israel in the midst of all the wicked nations of the world.

Even in the church age, this same pattern continues. The early disciples were persecuted and put to death for bearing the name of Christ.

Athanasius, 4-th century theologian, stood alone defending the deity of Christ. People tried to convince him to give it up... nobody thinks like you Athanasius! well then its "Athanasius against the world."

And Martin Luther in the early 1500's, standing in the far minority against the great and powerful Roman Catholic Church, fights for a salvation that is by faith alone in Christ alone on the basis of Scripture alone. "I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God."

Christian beliefs were unpopular then, and they are unpopular now. God is the Creator, Judge of all, sending eternal wrath on the wicked and eternal blessing on the righteous. Jesus is Lord and Savior. The sanctity of life. Biblical views on marriage and homosexuality.

We might have a popular christianity, but we do not have a christianity that is popular. The christianity we see on most book shelves is not the christianity of the Bible. The christianity that our culture accepts is not the christianity of the Bible. How do you know? You actually start trying to live it out and see how the friction comes. Gospel. Community. Mission, according to the Bible is not popular. And certainly we are seeing a decline in the US.

We have a nominal christianity. A popular christianity bearing Christ in name only.

Are you willing to travel upstream from the culture. You got to make a decision and determine to stay committed at all costs.

I don't know where that pain point is, but its somewhere. Somewhere we have to be willing to stand out and be weird, be confusing, and yes, maybe a little awkward. Maybe its with your coworkers, social circle, moms group, something as simple as not using foul language, not gossiping. Where must you be taking a stand for Christ? And in those moments if you are not, than in those moments you are walking on a different path. Christ

is not your Lord, He's not that valuable to you. If we are ashamed of Christ, He will be ashamed of us when He comes.

4. The path requires discernment

15 “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

First there is the reality of false prophets. They are real. They exist. They come from the devil. They aren't coming from outside, they often come from within. False prophets are not a thing of the past. Prophets are those who speak on behalf of another, so false prophets are those that falsely speak on behalf of God.

Secondly, they are deceptive. They come in sheep's clothing, but they are not sheep. They are inwardly ravenous wolves. You don't see them because they look like everyone else. That's what's a bit unnerving and challenging about this. False prophets aren't going to come in guns blazing denouncing Christ and causing an uproar due to their immorality. No, they aren't going to do that, that will get them caught. That would be a wolf jumping into the sheep pen as a wolf, not a sheep. Instead, they are going a far more subtle and strategic approach. Look like, talk like, smell like, the sheep, so no one will recognize them. This is the person who may have all the right answers, the person you might even feel tempted to put forward in leadership. There's a certain dazzling quality to these people, they might even perform signs and wonders. Satan himself is even said to come in the last day as an angel of light.

And third, they are dangerous. What are wolves doing in the sheep pen? They are not there to play games. They are there to eat. Ravenous wolves are very hungry wolves. To them, it's meal-time. To the sheep, it means death.

Acts 20:29, “29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Beware Jesus says! Watch out! Be on guard! But to avoid causing his disciples, and us, undue anxiety and suspicion inside the camp, Jesus tells us what we are to do—Discern. How? By a fruit test.

16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

Jesus draws a direct correlation, and its emphatic in the way he states in two ways, positively and negatively. You have tree and fruit. Root and fruit. We still need help, what does this mean, to recognize them as a tree and look for their fruit.

We get some help from Matthew 12:33 “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.”

The tree is the heart of the person. The fruit is their behavior. Jesus says, give it time. Wait and watch, be patient and observe with diligence, a diseased tree cannot help but to show itself over time.

In the context of our text, its very interesting, false prophets are generally against the narrow road of godliness, against the narrow gate of judgment and the need for Christ, and generally going to be for popular opinion. They want to tell you what you want to hear.

We see this in the OT when false prophets are called out for their message of “peace, peace” when there was no peace, leading people astray. Not calling anyone to repentance. Not warning anyone of judgment.

As I've thought about this in our day and the particular struggles that we face as a church, here or church at large. Three false teachings that I believe are relevant.

1. Pluralism- There are many ways for you to be saved (That is false, there is only one way to be saved and that is through Christ.)

2. Moralism- You are saved by trying harder and being a better christian (That is false, you are saved by grace and grace alone) We preach Christ crucified, not man improved.

3. Super Spiritualism- You are saved by experiencing the Holy Spirit (That is false, you are saved by grace through faith in what Christ has experienced on your behalf). If the Holy Spirit is the main focus, be on guard because the Scriptures show the Holy Spirit is about Jesus, not Himself.

4. Prosperity Gospel - God wants you healthy and wealthy in this life, all you need is to apply faith. That's false, God is for prosperity, but of a spiritual kind. Evidence of faith is the fruit of godliness, not having more stuff. Name it and claim it, sow your seed religion puts man at the center and makes a mockery of the cross.

And what happens, little by little as we hear their message, we begin to believe it. We stop believing in an urgency to repent, stop believing God is going to judge the world, stop believing in the deity and Lordship and salvation in Christ. The bad tree is eventually burned.. doesn't matter how great it looked. Teaching, ministry, power.

we must be on guard against these teachers, salvation is at stake. Staying on the path and passing through the narrow gate to life is at stake.

All our hope is in Jesus

Hopefully what we have seen today is that Jesus has raised the bar higher than any of us can reach. If you hear the sermon on the Mount, and hear Jesus talk about how difficult this road is going to be, and you begin to despair thinking of your own ability to make it on this path, than you are hearing it correctly. It is the poor in Spirit who will inherit the kingdom. To enter life we must first realize that we are completely unable.

None of us can stay the narrow road, none of us will pass the righteous judgment. But when we look to Christ, we see in the gospel that He bore our penalty on the cross. He went through the broad gate of destruction so that we don't have to. In Christ alone is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the path, and He is the gate. The definite article the in front of gate makes this gate exclusive, it is the only one of its kind, and that gate is a person, it is Jesus. And eternal life through that gate is Jesus. He is our destination.

Jesus is the righteous one, who walk the narrow path in our place. He represents to the Father, His perfect record, on our behalf. When you get to the judgment and God looks at your path, He sees the path that Christ traveled, perfect righteousness.

Jesus withstood temptation to get off the road, even when it was the most unpopular thing to do. In fact, His road was perfectly unpopular because He is the only one who could travel it. Noah, Joseph, Israel, David, all these guys point toward the Truly Faithful One, Jesus. There on the cross as the crowds mocked him and the soldiers crucified him, He entrusted Himself to God.

We see even in John 10:27, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand." That Jesus is the good shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep. Wolves have come in, but Jesus sacrificed His own life to protect us.

We press on, knowing that Christ has purchased us by His blood, and His blood will not fail to usher us into eternal life. We've been sealed by the Holy Spirit, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to walk the narrow road.

Though the path is hard, Jesus says come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Then we look to Christ. He becomes our all in all.

What path are you on? Now is the time. Believe in Christ and enter the gate to eternal life.