

# The Narrow Gate and The Narrow Way

MATTHEW 7:13-14

Scripture Readings:

LUKE 9:57-62; MATTHEW 16:24, 10:38; 1 PETER 2:21

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**W**E HAVE BEEN STUDYING THE SERMON DELIVERED BY JESUS Christ recorded in MATTHEW 5-7. And, we have now come to the final section of the sermon. This final section deals with the application of truths found in the Sermon on the Mount. It is the application part of the sermon.

The object of our Lord's sermon is to cause Christian people to realize, first of all, their nature; and then, second, to show them how they are to manifest that nature in their daily lives. We say that being is more important than doing, and this is true. But once you possess the character, that is once you have the life that produces the character, then the doing becomes very important. Our whole goal is to be a witness to the life that we have. When Jesus preached this sermon, He used the Beatitudes to describe what it means to be a Christian and to emphasize the importance of being. After the Beatitudes Jesus began to emphasize doing. He then used the Golden Rule to sum up everything He had to say about doing. So, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us 'This is the nature (or this is the character) of the life I want you to have and this is how I want you to live out that life.'

Now the application part of the message is only going make sense to those people who have been touched by the truths about being and the truths about doing that we find in the sermon. We first become convinced that these truths mean everything to us, and then we begin to ask ourselves the question, "How am I doing at applying these truths to my life?"

**T**HE WORST THING WE CAN DO WITH THE SERMON ON THE Mount is to study it and then do nothing about it. It would almost be better not to study it at all than to study it and fail to apply it. Jesus said, **"If then the light within you is darkness, how great is the darkness."** (MATTHEW 6:23) When we study the Sermon on the Mount, we are allowing the light to shine on our hearts and on our minds. But, if we fail to embrace the light by applying the truth we have received, then we will loose the light and the darkness will be even darker than what it was before we did the study.

*Because the application of this sermon is so important, Jesus ends the sermon by giving us some tests that will help us determine whether or not we are making the application. (Matthew 7:13-28).*

The **first** test is a test of difference. How does one who applies the truth of this sermon to his life differ from the majority of people who do not apply this truth to their lives? The **second** test is a test of fruit. When a person applies this truth to his life, what kind of fruit will he produce? The

**third** is a test of circumstances. When a person applies this truth to his life, what will happen to him when the wind begins to blow and the rain begins to fall and the floods come and beat on the house of that man's life?

We can all too easily fool other people and even fool ourselves into thinking that we are true Christians who faithfully apply everything taught in this sermon to our lives. But, we can't fool God. And, if we apply these three tests to our lives, then it will be much more difficult for us to fool ourselves. Jesus doesn't want us to be self-deceived, and that is why He gives us these tests.

During this past week two men were shot to death right in City Hall, a place known for its tight security. Some have said that the security system failed by allowing a man carrying a gun to enter into the building. Now everyone entering the building will have to go through more than one checkpoint before they are allowed to enter. There will be no exceptions to the rule. As security tightens in many places, people are now required to go through several checkpoints.

I think this image of going through checkpoints might help us understand what is happening at the end of MATTHEW 7. It's almost as if Jesus has set up for us three spiritual checkpoints to test us. However, the tests are not meant to discover if we are carrying a weapon; rather, they are meant to test whether or not we have truly entered the Kingdom of God and are applying the truths taught in the Sermon on the Mount.

As we look at each one of these tests, I want you to notice how they differ from the traditional tests used by many churches to determine whether or not someone is a Christian. *The tests we traditionally use to determine whether or not someone is a Christian are two. They are: Has the person prayed a certain prayer or has the person been baptized with water? If the answer is yes to one or both of these questions, then we say the person is a Christian.*

But, the tests Jesus gives us are different. They are more subjective in nature. In fact it is quite impossible for one person to use these tests to objectively pass judgment on another person. That is not their purpose. God makes the final judgment of who goes to heaven and who goes to hell. And, when God makes that judgment, He does not even need these tests. He already knows what is in the heart of a man. No, these tests are not given to be used by God or to be used by people to pass final judgment on other people. These tests are meant to help us face who we really are.

In airports and in government buildings we are forced to pass through checkpoints, but God will not force us to pass through any of checkpoints He has set up for us to use. We must willingly pass through them, because we care very much to know for sure whether or not we are real or we are counterfeit. The Holy Spirit is present at each checkpoint and will do everything in His power to help us see ourselves as we really are.

**L**ET US NOW VOLUNTARILY APPROACH THE FIRST CHECKPOINT which measures whether or not we are different from the majority of people who choose not to apply the truth of our Lord's sermon to their lives. **Are we different?** The Holy Spirit already knows the answer, and He wants to reveal the answer to us, and He does so by drawing our attention to the symbol of a gate, a very narrow gate.

So the very first question we must answer takes us back to the time when we decided to become Christians in the first place. It tells us that as soon as the decision is made to become what God wants us to become and do what God wants us to do—at that very moment—our lives become immediately different. Even though the process leading up to the decision may be gradual, once the decision is made the change is immediately noticeable.

The life of a true Christian is narrow and straight at the very beginning. It is not a life that at first is fairly broad, and then as you go on becomes narrower and narrower. No! The gate itself, the very way of entering this life, is a narrow one. It is like a very narrow turnstile. If you want to get through the turnstile, you have to leave things behind. You can't take them with you, because the gate is too narrow.

The things we must leave behind are the things that the world clings to for security and identity. They are the things we use to measure our own self-worth. They are things like power and prestige and admiration from other people. Have you noticed how much emphasis our society now places on becoming a hero? Many people these days now want to become somebody's hero, and that is the only way they will find their self-worth. Of course there many other things like education and health and wealth and pleasure of one sort or another that the crowds pursue to find their self-worth. In this world the majority of people rush after these kinds of things.

But, when we come to this first check point, we are told that **one of the first things that happens to a person who becomes alive with the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ is for that person who has been rushing along with the crowd pursuing one or more of these things to all of a sudden stop.** This person who had been madly rushing along with the crowd suddenly halts. That is how Christianity must begin. It is impossible to apply the Beatitudes and the demands found in our Lord's sermon to your life unless you are willing to leave the crowd and approach this narrow gate as an individual who seeks to know God and do His will and nothing more.

For those of us who call ourselves Christians, we must ask ourselves this question: Have we ever stopped rushing

along with the crowd? Have we really ever laid the burdens of the world down, those heavy cumbersome burdens that will never fit through the narrow turnstile that leads us into God's kingdom? One and only one burden will fit through that turnstile. It is the burden to know God and to do His will.

We go through the turnstile alone, one person at a time with only one burden. "Each man must carry his own burden." We must begin by entering the narrow gate. Those who have never done it do not pass the test of being a genuine Christian.

But, the test does not end at that point. Jesus not only said we must begin by entering the narrow gate, He also said that the road on the other side of the gate, that is the one we follow after we enter, is also narrow.

It is one thing to leave crowd, but it is yet another thing to leave the way of the crowd. The difficulty of living the Christian life is not just the initial decision to enter the narrow gate. **It is also the decision to walk in a way pleasing to God even if everyone else who calls himself a Christian is walking in another direction.**

I have attended fellowship groups within churches where people do everything that is expected of Christians. What I mean is they sing the songs and participate in the Biblical discussions and prayer times. But, outside of these structured activities, it is clearly evident that the group as a whole is going the way of the world. After they have put in their time doing the religious things expected of them, their conversations and interests go back to the very things pursued by the average person in the world. As a group, they are still walking the way of the world.

There is no such thing as a holiday when we are walking the narrow way. I know we are used to taking vacations. We take vacations from work and from studying. So it might seem natural that we should also take a vacation from walking the narrow path of doing God's will. But, it is a mistake to think we can take a vacation from seeking to know God and to please God in everything we do. We have to be careful all the time. **EPHESIANS 5:15** says, "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil."

We must go through a gate that is narrow, and we must walk a path that is narrow. It isn't a road that is narrow then wide then narrow and then wide again. It is always narrow.

And then, there is one more thing that our scripture lesson tells us about this road. **MATTHEW 7:14** says that only a few people enter the narrow gate and travel the narrow road. What is the practical implication of this?

**The practical implication is that we are going to look strange to the majority of people around us.** The narrow path is not a path that leads us away from the crowd in such a manner that the crowd cannot see us. Some people have tried to portray our scripture lesson by painting a narrow path leading up a mountain and traveled by only a few

people. And then, painting another path leading down a valley and traveled by many people. I think the more accurate picture is a narrow path winding its way through crowds of people and going in the exact opposite direction from the crowds.

I remember one time trying to reenter a football stadium after the game was over. Thousands of people were coming out of the stadium while I was trying to enter in. It was extremely difficult to go against the crowd.

When travel against the flow, we will not only look strange, we will also be misunderstood and ridiculed and even persecuted because we have chosen to walk the narrow way. Even our own family members will turn against us at times. Jesus told us that would happen.

**S**O, HERE IS THE FIRST TEST. IT IS THE FIRST CHECKPOINT THAT we need to visit from time to time to see whether or not we are applying the truth contained in the Sermon on the Mount to our lives. **Was there ever an initial breaking away from the crowd? And even after we broke away from the crowd, are we still attracted and even driven by the very things that attract and drive the world even though we hang out with other people who call themselves Christian?** And do we feel the struggle as we walk in a direction different from the crowd? Are people bumping up against us and even trying to resist us and persuade us to turn around because we are walking in a direction different from them? Do you sense that all of these things have and are happening in your life? **This is what the Holy Spirit wants each of us to ask ourselves.**

It is extremely difficult to live out the Sermon on the Mount. The Christian character talked about in the Beatitudes and the things Christians are commanded to do, such as the command to love one's enemy—these things make the Christian life a very difficult life to live. Why would anyone want to live such a life, especially when it means being so different from everyone else?

The reason is that there is only one other alternative, and that is to walk the road that leads to destruction. The things that seem to provide security and meaning to life that the world rushes after are not real. They provide no true security and no real meaning to life. They are empty and they will all be destroyed in the end. "Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction."

**If you voluntarily come to this checkpoint to see how you are doing at applying our Lord's sermon to your life, you will not find an armed officer. You will find the Holy Spirit.** He will be there as a comforter to remind you, as tough as it is to travel the narrow road it is a glorious road to travel. It is one that will lead to life. He will remind you that the other road traveled by the majority of people represents a life that is completely void of meaning.

I must conclude this message with a **warning**. It is a warning not to play the number game. Our scripture lesson talks about few people entering in through the narrow gate. Jesus said this to emphasize that there is a difference between the Christian and the crowd. He did not say it so as to encourage us to calculate how many people will go to heaven and how many people will go to hell.

After reading these words someone might ask, "Does that mean only a few shall be saved and the vast majority of mankind shall be damned?" We don't need to answer that question. In fact, we shouldn't answer it. Only God has the right to answer that question, and He has chosen not to answer it.

One day a person asked Jesus, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" LUKE 13:24 records our Lord's answer. He said, **"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to."** In other words, it is not our business to discover how many are going to be saved. Our business is to strive to enter, and to make certain that we are in. Once we are in we can be assured that the day will come when we shall know how many companions we have. By and by we will know. Until then, we must be patient.

**I** CLOSE WITH A QUOTE FROM GALATIANS 6:4. "EACH ONE should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own burden." I urge us all to come often to this first checkpoint and ask ourselves the question, "What is the one burden we are carrying?" Only one will fit through the turnstile. Only one can be carried along the narrow road. What is it? Each one of us must individually ask that question. If we fail to come to this checkpoint and ask this tough question, then it will be easy for us to deceive ourselves. May God help us to voluntarily submit ourselves to the test and to do it often.