



Matthew 7:13–14

13 “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Reflection

Yesterday Jesus summarised the vast body of the Sermon on the Mount, all of

its ethical teaching, in a handful of words filled with wisdom for the ages. 'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.' His summary given, the Sermon on the Mount is drawing to a close.

Now is decision time. The kingdom of God is here, and it's radically different to the kingdom of this world. The king is here, we know him by wisdom of his words and the power and authority of his actions. Jesus is here. It's decision time. Eternity hangs in the balance. Are you in or out? Are you with Jesus or are you against him. Now is the time to decide.

Jesus has been preaching firstly to his disciples, but he's also had his eye on the

vast crowds who have come out to hear him preach. He's invited them to enter the kingdom of God, and regularly warned both his disciples and the crowds about the Jewish religious establishment, especially the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law. Jesus now brings his sermon to a close with warnings directed to these three groups. Four warning passages conclude the Sermon on the Mount and Matthew chapter 7. Jesus warns firstly his disciples, then the crowds and finally the religious establishment. He warns his disciples in today's passage to examine themselves to be sure that they truly are members of the kingdom of God (7:13–14). He warns the vast crowds in the next two passages to carefully consider following him over following the Jewish religious leaders (7:15–20; 21–23). And in the final sec-

tion of chapter 7, he warns the Pharisees and teachers of the Law about their guilt in leading God's people astray (7:24 –29). Four warning passages; now is the time to decide, eternity hangs in the balance, are you a member of the kingdom of God or a member of the kingdom of this world – there's no middle ground, you can't have it both ways, and it's time to decide.

There's two paths, says Jesus to his disciples in today's passage. The path of the kingdom of heaven, and the path of the kingdom of this world. One is a narrow road with a small gate – it leads to heaven. The other is a broad road, the easy way through life. It has a wide gate – and it leads to destruction. There's two paths teaches Jesus. You're at a crossroads, which path will you choose? Which gate

will you enter through? The narrow gate that leads to eternal life? Or the wide and inviting gate of our culture which leads to destruction, which is a common word in the bible for eternal punishment. Jesus pleads with them,

13 “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Jesus ends his sermon with an impassioned call. ‘Enter through the narrow gate, and follow the narrow road that leads to eternal life. I am the gate. Enter through me.’ The narrow gate is Jesus Christ. And the narrow road is kingdom life, the diffi-

cult journey of a Christian over the course of their life. It's difficult because being a member of the kingdom of God, being a Christian, means living counter-culturally in our world, resisting the pull of the culture at almost every turn.

Two gates, two paths, two destinations. It's an evocative image isn't it? A wide gate and a broad road filled with people. The easy way, the popular way, the majority way. There's room for all, for all walks of life. You can find your own way along that broad road and it's so large that there's plenty of room to take all sorts of baggage with you, you don't need to leave anything behind, no sin, no matter how great or small, you can bring it all. Everyone's doing it, just follow the crowd, enter the wide gate and wander; carefree living

and an easy life journeying on the road that leads to destruction.

Or enter through the narrow gate, enter through Jesus, become a Christian. And journey the narrow path that leads to eternal life. Take the minority way, the narrow way, with clearly marked boundaries that you need to stay in between. It's easy to stray so you need to stay focussed. What's more the gate's small and the path is narrow so you're going to need to leave things behind, lots of things: sin, selfishness, many of the desires and pursuits of this world, even in some cases friends and family. Entrance comes at a cost, but great is the reward because the narrow path leads to eternal life.

It's a powerful image, and here's its pow-

er. According to Jesus there are only two ways, the hard way and the easy way – there’s no middle ground. They’re entered through two gates, broad and narrow – there’s no other gate. They’re walked by two crowds – there’s no neutral group. And they end in two destinations, destruction and eternal life (there is no third alternative.)¹ This is the message of the Sermon on the Mount. It’s the kingdom of God or the kingdom of this world – there’s no middle ground, there’s no fence sitting, there’s no having one foot in the church and one foot in this world. It’s time to choose says Jesus and the price of complacency is destruction.

It’s not a popular message is it? In our day and age people love the middle-ground,

¹ John R. W Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount: Christian Counter-Culture*. (Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 196.

keeping their options open, holding off to the last minute to commit. And we don't like black and white. Not one God but many religions, not one path to heaven, many paths, so choose the path that's right for you.

Think

Take some time now to meditate over the stark choice that Jesus presents in our passage today. Two gates. Two paths. Heaven or Hell. Eternity in the balance. Every single person you know is currently walking one path or the other. What is the response of your heart to this passage? What is the response of your mind? What are you going to do? Which path are you on? If you're a Christian how does the narrow path make sense of your life? Is yours the

minority position when it comes to what you do with your money? Is yours the minority position when it comes to how you treat your friends and family? Is yours the minority position when it comes to how you use your spare time? Is yours the minority position in the way you are planning for your future? Spend some time thinking along these lines and then finish this time with prayer.

Pray

Pray for clarity so that you might see this world as Jesus sees it. Pray for urgency and opportunities to commend the narrow gate. Pray for whatever the Lord has placed on your heart this morning as you've considered Jesus' powerful call. And pray that many might respond to Je-

sus' call through your life and ministry.