

Sermon preached at Woodbury Community Church, Woodbury, MN on Sunday, October 2, 2011, by Rev. Brian D. Schulenburg

**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.

**THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LIVING AS CITIZENS OF GOD’S KINGDOM #31**  
**TWO ROADS**

Some of my favorite films of all time include “the talk.” It’s that moment in the film where a father, or a mother, or a mentor, or a coach or a teacher gives someone younger advice for living. In the film *Secondhand Lions*, it’s where Uncle Hub gives young Walter the talk that he gives to all young men before they become a man, full of Hub’s advice for living. In *Hoosiers*, it’s the talk that Coach Norman Dale gives his team before facing their opponents. In *Rocky Balboa* it’s the talk that Rocky gives his son, Robert Balboa, Jr. about how to live when life doesn’t go quite as planned. Check out this clip from *Rocky Balboa*. (*Rocky Balboa* Clip 2:00)

Sometimes we need a “good ‘ole talking to.”

I bet that some of you can remember getting one of those talks. Maybe it was your Dad or Mom that delivered it. Maybe it was a boss who was trying to motivate you. Maybe it was a teacher or a mentor. Maybe it was God!

In His Word, God gives us many exhortations. He tells it like it is. He forces us to make a decision. We can either choose to go on living the way that we have been living up to that point, or we can embrace the life that Christ has for us, and walk in a different direction.

As He was drawing the Sermon on the Mount to a close, Jesus gave His listeners a choice. It’s a choice that He continues to give to us in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America. It’s found in 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.

It’s one of the harder sayings of Jesus. There are lots of people who don’t like it. From the outset, it looks exclusive and difficult to attain. In order to understand this passage, we must look at it in its overall context. Jesus is concluding the Sermon on the Mount. He has taught those gathered all about what it means to be a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. The demands of citizenry have been spelled out in the Beatitudes, demonstrated

in Christ's teaching on being salt and light and shown in very specific examples of how a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ responds to life this side of heaven.

I want to dissect Jesus' words with you this morning, and take a look at parallel passages in Scripture that teach us about Christ's holy demands.

Jesus begins his conclusion to the sermon with a command.

13 "Enter through the narrow gate.

I picture Jesus pausing in His sermon, before He delivers these words. It's speculation on my part. But, I think Jesus looked people in the eye when He said these words. "Enter through the narrow gate." There is pleading in these words. There is power. There is wisdom. There is love. And, there is command. If we want to call ourselves children of God, we must make the choice to enter through the narrow gate.

God's call is and always has been an exclusive one. Those who lived in Jesus' day were very familiar with gates. If you visit the Old City of Jerusalem today, you can still walk through seven gates that date back to the time of Jesus. Some of the gates in Jesus' day were narrow, so narrow, in fact that a camel would have to be unloaded of all of its wares before he could be taken through the gate. It was a pain, and merchants didn't enjoy it. Some of Jerusalem's gates are so narrow that a big guy like me has trouble fitting through them. There are also wide gates that throngs of people would have no trouble passing through.

When Jesus calls us to enter through the narrow gate He is speaking about the life described in the entirety of the Sermon on the Mount. We have a choice. Will we live the life God is calling us to, in all of its exclusivity, or will we walk the way of the world?

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.

The choice reminds me of Proverbs 14:12, which says, "12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."

I wonder how many of us in the sanctuary today can attest to the truth of these verses. So many of us have been on the road that leads to destruction – we have been on a path that leads to death.

Every year the Barna Research Group takes a poll of "Born-again Christians," to determine the spiritual pulse of the church. In 2008 the poll found that

- ... Christians spend seven times as much time on entertainment as they do on spiritual activities.

- *Although 2/3 of all teenagers say they know all the basic teachings of the Christian faith, 2/3 reject the existence of Satan, 3/5 reject the existence of the Holy Spirit, and 1/2 believe that Jesus sinned...*
- *Desiring to have a close, personal relationship with God ranks just sixth among the 21 life goals tested, trailing such desires as "living a comfortable lifestyle".*
- *A minority of born again adults (44%) and an even smaller proportion of born again teenagers (9%) are certain of the existence of absolute moral truth.*
- *In a representative nationwide survey among born again adults, none of the individuals interviewed said that the single, most important goal in their life is to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ.*
- *Large proportions of the lay leaders in Christian churches hold a range of unbiblical religious views regarding the holiness of Christ, the reality of Satan, the existence of the Holy Spirit, the reality of the resurrection, and the means to salvation.<sup>1</sup>*

12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. (Proverbs 14:12).

God's call is absolutely exclusive. To His disciples in John 14:6: 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

We don't get to pick and choose that parts of discipleship that we like. We don't get to pick and choose the sayings of Jesus that we like and the sayings of Jesus that we don't like. God's call is exclusive. Jesus is giving His listeners the eternal choice . . . walk the wide road that looks easy, but in the end leads to destruction, or walk the narrow road which begins with recognizing our spiritual poverty and need of the Savior and experience earthly trials on the road to everlasting reward.

Everyone on planet earth chooses a road. Choose wisely.

Jesus wasn't the first person in the Bible to introduce the idea of two roads. It's an Old Testament teaching as well. In Psalm 119, the longest chapter in all of Scripture, the writer uses the vivid imagery of two paths to describe the life that pleases God.

Listen to verses 97-112.

97 Oh, how I love your law!

I meditate on it all day long.

98 Your commands make me wiser than my enemies,  
for they are ever with me.

99 I have more insight than all my teachers,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://thebaresoul.blogspot.com/2011/04/marked-by-god-april-3-2011.html>

for I meditate on your statutes.  
100 I have more understanding than the elders,  
for I obey your precepts.  
101 I have kept my feet from every evil path  
so that I might obey your word.  
102 I have not departed from your laws,  
for you yourself have taught me.  
103 How sweet are your words to my taste,  
sweeter than honey to my mouth!  
104 I gain understanding from your precepts;  
therefore I hate every wrong path.  
105 Your word is a lamp to my feet  
and a light for my path.  
106 I have taken an oath and confirmed it,  
that I will follow your righteous laws.  
107 I have suffered much;  
preserve my life, O LORD, according to your word.  
108 Accept, O LORD, the willing praise of my mouth,  
and teach me your laws.  
109 Though I constantly take my life in my hands,  
I will not forget your law.  
110 The wicked have set a snare for me,  
but I have not strayed from your precepts.  
111 Your statutes are my heritage forever;  
they are the joy of my heart.  
112 My heart is set on keeping your decrees  
to the very end.

Can you see the imagery of the paths described by the Psalmist? We need God's Word to be a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. Why? Because the narrow road requires Him! We are incapable of finding our way to the life that God demands apart from His intervention and power.

Martyn Lloyd Jones, in his book *Studies on the Sermon on the Mount*, gave a marvelous commentary to this passage. He wrote, "He (Jesus) tells us that the first thing we must do after we have read this Sermon is to look at the type and kind of life to which He calls us, and realize what it is. We have seen time and again the danger in dealing with the Sermon on the Mount is to become lost in details, or to be sidetracked by particular things that interest us. That is the false approach. So our Lord exhorts us to wait a moment and to look at the Sermon as a whole and to reflect upon it. What would we say is its outstanding characteristic? What is the thing that emerges as being of supreme importance? What is the one thing above all others that we have to grasp as a principle? He answers His own question by saying that the outstanding characteristic of the life to which He calls us is 'narrowness.' It is a narrow life, it is a 'narrow way'. He puts it dramatically before us by

saying: 'Enter ye in at the straight gate.' The gate is narrow; and we must also walk along in a narrow way."<sup>2</sup>

We don't like narrow ways. They are difficult. In his outline, Jones wrote, that walking through the narrow gate requires us to leave certain things behind. Like the camel that had to be unloaded before going through a certain gate, we need to let go of certain things in order to enter in the narrow gate. We first, need to leave behind worldliness. He writes, "You are making a break with the world, and with the crowd, and with the vast majority of people. It is inevitable; and it is important that we should know it. The Christian way is not popular. It never has been popular, and it is not popular today. It is unusual, exceptional, strange, and it is different. On the other hand, crowding through the wide gate and travelling along the broad way is the thing that everybody else seems to be doing. You deliberately get out of that crowd and you start making your way towards this strait and narrow gate, alone. You cannot take the crowd with you into the Christian life: in inevitably involves a break."<sup>3</sup>

That is one of the most difficult lessons of the Christian life, isn't it? I remember times in my high school years where I felt so lonely as a Christian. I felt like I was the only one at my school. I wasn't. But, it can feel lonely. Do you remember our Elijah series? Elijah thought he was the only follower of Jehovah left in all of Israel, not realizing that there were over 7,000 others who had not bowed their knees to Baal. Sometimes following the narrow path can feel lonely. But, it's worth it.

Jones also said that we needed to leave the way of the world behind when we enter the narrow gate. He writes, "It is one thing to leave the crowd, but it is a very different thing to leave the *way* of the crowd. That, of course, is the ultimate and final fallacy of monasticism. Monasticism is really based upon the idea that if you leave people, you leave the spirit of the world. But you do not. You can leave the world in a physical sense, you can leave the crowd and the people; but there in your lonely cell the spirit of the world may still be with you. That is something that is equally true in connection with the Christian life and living. There are people who have segregated themselves from the group to which they belonged, and yet you find the spirit of worldliness left in them still, perhaps even evident in their deportment. They have not left the spirit of the world and the way of the world. But we must. Living the way of the world and the life of the world in a different setting does not make us Christian. In other words, we must leave outside the gate the things that please the world. This cannot be evaded. We have only to read the Sermon on the Mount to come to the conclusion that the things that belong to and that please our unregenerate nature must be left outside that strait gate."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount: Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 478, 479.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 480.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 481.

I believe that one of the great weaknesses of the modern day church is that we say, “I want enough of Jesus to get me into heaven, but enough of the world in me to keep life interesting.”

Jesus doesn't give us that option. He doesn't say, “I want some of you.” He demands all of us.

In Luke 9:22-24 Jesus addressed his disciples. In that passage we read another of Jesus' hard sayings.

22 And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”

23 Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.

Folks, we're called to daily take up our cross and follow Jesus. The cross was an instrument of execution. Christ is calling us to die to ourselves and live for Him.

Jones writes, “So we leave not only the world, but also the way of the world outside. Yes, but still narrower and still straiter; if we really want to come into this way of life, we have to leave our ‘self’ outside. And it is there of course that we come to the greatest stumbling block of all. It is one thing to leave the world, and the way of the world; but the most important thing in a sense is to leave our self outside. Yes it is obvious, is it not? We are not to take our self with us on this way.”<sup>5</sup>

Who lives this way? It's the one who is convinced that Jesus is worth pursuing with everything he or she is. As He nears His conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount, I think Jesus wants us to remember that it's always been about the heart!

37 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38This is the first and greatest commandment. (Matthew 22:37, 38)

What have you left behind to follow Jesus?

In Matthew 7:14, Jesus concludes His teaching about the two roads.

14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

It is so important that we ask God to examine our hearts and expose us to who we really are. In Psalm 139, David wrote, “23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 482.

know my anxious thoughts. 24 See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psalm 139:23-24)

It’s so important to allow God to speak to us. It’s so important to allow Him to take His surgeon’s tools and work on our heart. Have you allowed God to speak to you about the way that you are living your life?

Just recently God revealed some things in my life that need to change. It’s been so difficult to institute the changes. It seems like there is kickback at every turn. But, it’s worth it. When Christ tells us to do something, we do it. No matter the cost.

Oh, and there is a cost. Walking the narrow way is difficult this side of heaven. But, we know that. Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said:

11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:11, 12)

The Apostle Paul wrote Timothy these words: “12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” (2 Timothy 3:12-13)

The Apostle John wrote, “6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.” (1 John 2:6)

These verses reveal the radical demands of being a follower of Jesus. There is a cost to discipleship. In two weeks I’m going to preach a sermon entitled, *Discipleship Isn’t a Game*, where I’ll cover Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:21-23. But, I wanted you to hear the words today, because they are important to our text.

21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ 23 Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

At the end of the film, *Cast Away*, Tom Hanks’ character is faced with a choice. His life hasn’t gone quite as expected. Being marooned on an island for 1,500 nights will do that to a person. While on the island he is presumed dead, and those he loves move on with their lives; without him. It’s kind of a sad movie. As the film ends, Hanks stands at a crossroads deciding which route to take. Check it out. (Cast Away Crossroads: 0:39)

When Jesus addressed those gathered to listen to Him, they too were at a crossroads. Follow the narrow way, which leads to life, or the broad road that leads to destruction.

Which will you choose? Dr. Bob Moorehead preached a sermon years ago in which he declared himself a part of the Fellowship of the Unashamed. I want to invite you to join that Fellowship. Listen to his words:

"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.

I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by presence, learn by faith, love by patience, lift by prayer, and labor by power.

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 cannot be bought, compromised, deterred, lured away, turned back, diluted, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of adversity, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

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 Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ. I must go until He returns, give until I drop, preach until all know, and work until He comes.

And when He comes to get His own, He will have no problem recognizing me. My colors will be clear for "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes . . ." <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.gospeltruth.net/unashamed.htm>