

## **Matthew 7:13-14:** A Tale of Two Roads

This morning we begin to look at the conclusion of Jesus's sermon. We've spent many months on exactly what Jesus is calling his followers to: A whole hearted devotion to him, obeying not simply the letter of the Law, but the spirit of the Law internally and externally. Jesus doesn't want followers who put on a show of religion, he wants followers who follow him from their heart.

And this passage here is basically where the rubber meets the road. Will the thousands of people listening to Jesus preach actually now follow him? He's laid out the terms, he's stated clearly his expectations, he's explained the benefits of the Kingdom. Now it's up to the people to decide: Will they enter the narrow gate?

And this is critical for us to understand: at some point people have to decide if they are with Jesus or against Jesus. Will they believe he is the divine Lord of all creation? Will they submit to him unconditionally as Lord and Savior? Will they count their lives as nothing so that in the end they gain eternal life?

Several years ago there was a book put out called Not a Fan by Kyle Idleman. And the gist is that many people are fans of Jesus. They like what he says, they like what he does. They're pro-Jesus as far as it goes. But his point was that a person can be a fan of Jesus and not a follower. You can like what Jesus is about, like some of his sayings, maybe not even mind coming to church, and yet not actually be saved because you have not committed your life to him as a follower.

It's the difference between the kid who likes watching their favorite basketball player play, but doesn't actually play basketball themselves and the kid who plays the game 3 hours a day because he wants to be just like his favorite player.

Jesus doesn't want people to simply like him or be impressed with his insightful teaching or respect him. No, Jesus demands a decision. Are you gonna suit up and play the game or are you on the sidelines? Will you follow him? Will you take up your cross and crucify yourself everyday as you follow him in obedience? You have to decide.

And if you don't decide, you have decided. "Well, I like Jesus and I want to clean up my life a little, but I'm just not sure I'm ready to commit my whole life to him. I just don't know if I really want to commit just yet." Well, that's actually a decision. To not decide is to decide.

Some people try to deceive themselves into thinking Jesus can be their Savior but not their Lord. They think they can pray a prayer or have a simple faith in Jesus yet still going on with life as usual. There's no such thing as having Jesus as your Savior and not as your Lord. It's all or nothing. Jesus will only save you if he is your Lord.

**Rom. 1:5** says the preaching of the gospel is to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name to all nations.

**Rom 6:17:** speaking of salvation Paul says you became obedient to the heart to that standard of teaching into which you were delivered.

Jesus isn't looking for fans who sit on the sidelines and cheer. He's looking for followers who take up his call to live a wholehearted life of obedient faith that is pleasing to God.

And notice that Jesus frames the decision in polar opposites. These options could not be more diametrically opposed. There's the narrow and the wide, the hard and the easy, the many and the few, eternal destruction and eternal life. That's what's on the line here as Jesus calls people to follow him.

And let me be clear: this message isn't just for the people who were listening to Jesus way back then. This is message is for us this morning. Maybe this message is specifically for you this morning. Maybe you've been just a fan of Jesus or on the fence about Jesus. It's time to decide.

So let's dive in here this morning.

1) Entering the Kingdom requires a decision. **Read 13a**

So entering the Kingdom requires a decision. You have to enter in. No one is in the Kingdom by default.

We believe in the doctrine of total depravity. That is that all men are sinful by nature and by choice.

**Rom. 3:23:** All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

**Rom. 6:23:** The wages of sin is death.

All people actually start on the broad road that leads to destruction.

So even before we tell someone the message of salvation they're already walking down a road. Ten minutes before we talk to them about the fact that their sin deserves judgement in hell, that God sent his Son to die on the cross for the sins of every believer, that through faith in Jesus God credits to their account all the righteousness and goodness of Jesus, that Jesus rose and ascended into heaven - before we even tell them that they're on the broad path to destruction.

Even after we tell them that they're on the broad path to destruction. There comes a point where someone has to decide to follow Jesus.

"But Jason, we're reformed, we don't choose, God chooses; we can't do anything." Listen, the Bible doesn't care about trying to neatly package the truths of God's sovereignty and human responsibility.

**Look** over at **11:25-30**. God doesn't even try to balance out the reality of his work and human responsibility. They simply exist. **Read 25-27**

So Jesus praises the Father who hides truth and reveals truth to whoever he wants. No one can know Jesus except if Jesus wants them to know him. It's all in his hands; it's all his choice. But then look. **Read 28-30**

Come! Take up! Find rest! Which is it, Jesus? And there's no footnote here saying: "Well, if God has chosen to reveal these truths to you that's why you'll come by it's not by your own free will." No Jesus just says come! Take up! Find rest! The Bible never tries to reconcile divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Charles Spurgeon was once asked to reconcile God's sovereignty and human responsibility and he said "I have no need to reconcile friends."

If your theology has no space for calling people to repent and believe then it's not a biblical theology. Because what Jesus does, what the apostles do, every disciple does is call people to follow Jesus. To make a decision.

**Back** in **Matt 7:13:** Enter by the narrow gate. That's a command in the Greek. A command one can choose to obey or ignore.

No one is born into the Kingdom. Even if, as long as you can remember, you've believed in Jesus, it happened at some point. And by the mercy of God it happened early. But it's still a conscious choice. And - to bring it full circle - if you've made that choice, you have only God to praise because he revealed his Son to you. But the call - the command here - is to enter.

One other note here: Jesus actually desires people to be saved. Jesus is not indifferent here. The command he gives isn't a command to simply decide. He's not stoic or indifferent. "Take it or leave it." No, the command is to enter! Get in here!

Jesus says in **John 3:17** that God didn't send him into the world to condemn the world but to what? Save it. The world is already condemned.

Jesus's mission is to save people from their sins so that they might escape eternal condemnation. So that they might escape God's wrath. When a person is saved - or we could say enters into the Kingdom - Jesus rejoices because that was his mission.

Okay, let's break this down. Jesus makes a series of contrasts and those contrasts will be the points of the sermon. So there are 2 roads, 2 gates, 2 difficulty levels, 2 groups of people, and 2 destinations. These are obviously all connected but I think it's worth considering each part.

## 2) There are 2 roads. **Read 13-14**

Now, here's something I didn't really know until studying this passage but there's some disagreement between scholars as to whether the road comes first and then the gate or if you go through the gate to get on the road. This is the theological "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" This is a small point, but I guess I've always just assumed you go through the gate of salvation to get to the road of the Christian life. Very similar to John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress.

But actually I've become convinced it's the other way. The road you choose to go down in life will lead you to one of 2 gates. So that's the premise I'm going with and here's a quick reason why: The Bible often presents our lives as walking on a path. And specifically walking a road.

**Judges 2:22:** God stopped driving out the nations in the Promised Land because of Israel's sin because he wanted to test Israel to see if they would take care to walk in the way of the Lord.

**Psalms 1:1:** Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.

**Prov. 2:9:** The Lord...guards the paths of justice and watches over the footpath of his saints.

**Prov. 4:14:** Do not enter the path of the wicked, do not walk in the way of evil.

**Prov. 4:18:** But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter until full day.

And notice this one, because it makes 2 points. Not only does the Bible present all people on one of 2 paths, but usually the end of that path is the real issue:

**Prov. 5:5:** The steps of the adulterous woman follow the path to Sheol.

That's what God is really worried about: the destination. And both destinations - heaven and hell - in the Bible are closed off by a gates.

**Matt. 16:18:** I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

In heaven there are gates of pearl. When Jacob has his dream in Genesis of the ladder he says "This is the house of God, this is the gate of heaven."

There's a reason the Temple in the OT has gates, because it's made after the pattern of the true Temple in heaven that has gates.

Even down in **Vs. 21** notice the entering into the Kingdom is actually at the judgement. **Read**

So what concerns Jesus is that you enter in. But in order to enter in, first you must be on the right road. And there are 2 roads and only 2 roads.

There is the broad way that is easy. What does that mean? Does it mean that life is just peachy if you're an unbeliever? Well, in one sense yes. It's easy in the sense that those who are on it think that they can do whatever they want to do and in the end they get heaven. What most people believe is that the only thing you have to do to get to heaven is die.

"They're in a better place now, "they're with their loved ones." The biker guy who swore like a sailor and drank like a fish? That guy is in a better place? "Well, God forgives," "No one is perfect."

See, the people that are on the broad road to destruction often don't know they're on the broad road to destruction. Or they deny they're on it. Or they believe that they end up in heaven with all the masses that are around them. It's easy to be on that road because that road doesn't require any change. It requires no repentance from sin. It requires no confession of guilt. It requires no commitment to God. It requires no sacrifice of self. It requires no learning of God's commands. It requires no humility. It requires no potential rejection by others.

You literally have to do nothing to be on this road.

Conversely, the way of following Jesus is hard. You've heard of walking the "straight and narrow?" This is essentially where that comes from. It's not a completely accurate read of the text. The way is not straight or narrow here. Actually the only thing we know about the way is that it's hard. We assume that the way is also narrow, but we only assume that because the gate is narrow.

All Jesus says about the life of following him is that it's hard. And it is in fact hard. It requires sacrifice - Jesus says what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but forfeits his soul? If you follow Jesus just understand you're sacrificing popularity, job opportunities, friendships, potential spouses. "She's really cute!" "She not a believer - you're not on the same road!" Men you'll pass up jobs that would take you away from your family. Women you'll pass up what the world defines as success and equality to follow your husband.

It requires change. Billy Graham was famous for playing the song "Come just as I am" at his crusades. That song is okay - and God will accept our plea for forgiveness just where we are. We don't have to go clean ourselves up to ask God to forgive our sins. But let's be very clear: the call to follow Jesus is a call to die to yourself and become more like Jesus.

**Rom. 8:29:** We were predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son. What does that mean? It means to be like him in holiness and righteousness. The way is hard because we give up sin - we murder our sin in fact. And we put on the new man day by day.

Following Jesus is hard because it requires humility. Admitting we are wrong. Taking rebuke well. Genuine striving for godliness. Considering others more significant than ourselves just like Jesus did when he took on flesh and died on a cross for us filthy sinners.

The road Jesus calls us to go down is hard. If it's hard for you right now know that that is normal. That's what Jesus promised. If you think following Jesus is a cinch, you're doing it wrong. You might not be doing it at all.

And listen, when we're calling people to follow Jesus we need to be upfront with them about how hard it is to follow Jesus. They need to count the cost. We do them no favors to talk about how great things are only for them to be blindsided later about how hard it was. Even if all we say is: Look, following Jesus is the best thing ever but it's also the hardest thing ever. But in the end it's worth it a million times over.

There are 2 roads, and the road of following Jesus is hard.

### 3) There are 2 gates. **Read 13-14**

What are the 2 gates? The gates of heaven and the gates of hell. The hard road of following Jesus is rewarded by the arrival at the narrow gate of heaven. Those who are on the wide, easy road eventually end up at the gate of hell. The path we're on decides our destination.

The first destination is hell. Nobody likes to talk about hell and if you do like talking about hell there's probably something wrong with you. A lot of people avoid even saying the word hell by saying people are separated from God, enter a Christ-less eternity, they are suffering. We say everything we can possibly say without mentioning hell.

But hell is real and we need to be upfront about it. I don't know about you but I almost cringe even saying hell. I don't want people to think I'm *that* Christian - the hellfire and brimstone guy. I don't want to be negative. Hell seems so harsh which is probably why it's the first doctrine to go when people become liberal. "A loving God

wouldn't punish someone in fire forever. That's not a God of love." God says he's love and God also says hell is forever for those who do not believe and obey Jesus.

**John 3:36:** Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, whoever does not obey the Son does not have life but the wrath of God remains on him.

Listen, no one talked about hell more than Jesus. There is a real hell.

Described:

- Weeping and gnashing of teeth
- The worm doesn't die as people deteriorate over and over forever
- Burning garbage dump Gehenna
- Lake filled with fire / dark pit / eternal torment / outer darkness where smoke goes up forever and ever.

Here, Jesus calls it destruction. Not destruction in the sense that people cease to exist. But destruction in the sense that people are destroyed over and over forever. It is the opposite of eternal life - it is an eternity of continually being destroyed.

This is the destination for all those who who are not on the hard way of following Jesus. This is where they will go.

And the gate into hell is wide. It's massive. Why? Because of how many people are going through it. The gate is massive because the sheer volume of people who have rejected God and love their sin and hate the Lord is staggering. 155k people die every day. 6,500 every minute. In the last 60 seconds 108 people have died around the world. The vast majority of those were on the easy path and they are now at the gates of hell. 108 every minute. Half of Spokane every day. You need a big gate to get those kinds of numbers through.

The hard way of following Jesus leads to a narrow gate. Think of a turn style at a baseball game or the county fair. One at a time. Click-click-click.

In ancient times many cities had secret entrances. Secret gates into and out of the city. We see that about Jerusalem throughout its history. At one point there was a tunnel dug by Hezekiah to bring water into Jerusalem. This tunnel went under the wall of Jerusalem and out about a quarter mile. It was a secret gate that only a few knew about. It allowed kings to escape in times of war and it allowed secret entrance when the main gate was shut. The gate doesn't need to be big because, let's be honest, not a lot of people are using it.

But the gate leads to life. Eternal life. Jesus said this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent.

There's a sense in which we have eternal life the moment we believe in Jesus. But there's a sense in which that eternal life is perfected when we go home to be with Jesus. When our hard road reaches its end, and the narrow gate is opened to us, and our Lord who we've followed by faith stands before our very eyes and we hear "well done good and faithful servant." Life begins.

As CS Lewis says: This life we know is only the cover and title page. When we see Jesus it begins chapter one of the Great Story which no one on earth has read; which goes on forever; in which every chapter is better than the one before.

Whatever hardship this life has given you, whatever complications and persecutions you endure on the hard road to the narrow gate of heaven, is nothing to be compared with what awaits you on the other side. And I wish I could describe it for you. But the Bible says it is indescribable. We hear of streets of gold and walls of crystal and Jesus in full blazing glory like the sun. But those are just the biblical attempt to give us some idea of how great it is.

**2 Cor. 4:17** These light and momentary afflictions are preparing us for an eternal weight of glory - listen - beyond all comparison.

What awaits us at the end of this dirt road is in the truest sense incomparable.

When I talk to kids of heaven I tell them to describe their best day. Disneyland and movies and camping and Christmas and birthday all rolled into 1. Times that joy by a billion and it doesn't even come close to the life we will experience on the other side of the narrow gate. The joy we will have in the presence of Jesus is incomparable.

**Psalm 16:11:** In your presence there is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Two roads, two difficulty levels, two gates, two destinations.

Finally, 2 groups. Read 13-14

There's the many and there's the what? The few. There's not a lot of people on the hard road. Maybe a lot of the people you know are. We pray for a lot of churches in our area that are filled with a lot of believers. But let's be clear: percentage wise it's pretty low.

We shouldn't be surprised that the world hates us. We shouldn't be surprised that our view of marriage and family and ethics are at odds with the world.

Can I be really honest? We shouldn't be surprised when other people who claim to be Christian attack us.

**Read 21**

Lots of people call Jesus "Lord" - but they aren't really his servants. This means the road we walk is often lonely. It's often misunderstood. It's often at odds with everyone around us. We are the minority. We are the radicals. We are "outcasts and crazies who believe in fairy tales." We are the ones continually on the "wrong side of history" - we've always been on the wrong side of history. We're strangers and exiles in Babylon. We want our place here to be blessed but this isn't our home.

So let me ask you: What road are you on? Are you on the hard road to heaven or the easy road to hell? "Well, I'm here aren't I?" I'm giving up my Sunday, I'm giving, I'm singing the songs." There are a lot of people who go to church regularly who are on the easy road to hell. And they'd point to their being at church as proof they're on the hard road to heaven when it's really just proof that they're sitting in a church.

Have you surrendered everything to Jesus? Submitted to him completely as your Lord - your Master - everything he says goes? Have you stopped thinking that the way you get into heaven is by being good and moral and trusting every day that the only hope you have, the only possibility of you getting in to heaven is trusting that Jesus took the punishment for sin you deserve? And trusting that the only goodness you have isn't even your goodness, it's the goodness Jesus has credited to your account?

That's the only way to get on the hard road that leads to life. Trust in Christ only for everything. And living out that faith by obeying Christ only in everything.

Which road are you on? And will you enter in at the narrow gate?

**Pray**