

**LIFE AT THE CROSSROADS**  
**Matthew 7:13-14**

So what? The preacher has not done his job until he answers that question. The primary task of the preacher is biblical exposition. We are to explain the meaning of God's word faithfully and clearly. Our preaching should explain what the text means by what it says. But explanation of the text does not complete the task. Proper interpretation must be married to practical application. We must answer two questions about the text: What does it mean? And, what difference does it make? Preaching is not about filling up a bucket as much as it is about lighting a torch. Preaching is more political than it is intellectual. Preaching does not merely convince the hearer to agree with a point of doctrine. It persuades the hearer to follow a way of life. This is the way Jesus preached.

In **Matthew 5:20**, Jesus says, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." This is the theme of THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT. The discourse of Jesus recorded in **Matthew 5-7** explains the righteous standard for kingdom citizenship. Jesus presents this message so that every hearer – from his small band of disciples to the multitude of curious listeners to the cynical religious leaders – would face the personal and practical implications of the message. At the conclusion of this discourse, Jesus drives home the point that truth must be lived and not just learned.

In **Matthew 7:13-27**, Jesus concludes THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT by presenting a series of alternatives for the hearer to choose. Verses 13-14 present the narrow gate versus the wide gate. Verses 15-20 present a healthy tree that bears good fruit versus a diseased tree that bears bad fruit. Verses 21-23 present the profession of faith versus the possession of faith. Verses 24-27 present building on a rock versus building on the sand. What's your choice? WILLIAM BARCLAY wrote: "In every action of life man is confronted with a choice; and he can never evade the choice, because he can never stand still. He must always take one way or the other." We live at the crossroads. Everyone must choose which way to go. In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus challenges us to choose the way of life at all costs. The text presents this inescapable choice in four parallel realities.

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**I. THERE ARE TWO GATES.**

The point Jesus makes in this text is clear: Choose the way of life at all costs. The picture he uses to make this point is somewhat ambiguous. Jesus envisions two gates and two paths. It is not clear which comes first, the gates or the paths. Although it is somewhat counterintuitive, it seems Jesus describes a crossroads where one must first decide between two gates to enter. Beyond these gates there is a way or path or road to travel. The assumption is that either choice will result in eternal life. But that is a fatal assumption. Only one way leads to life. This way of life begins with two gates.

## A. ONE GATE IS WIDE.

Verse 13 begins with a direct command: “Enter by the narrow gate.” The rest of the text gives two reasons why you should obey this command. Verse 13b states the first reason: “For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter by it are many.” The word “wide” refers to a large field with no boundaries. It is spacious in length and width. Jesus uses the term to describe that which is virtually no gate at all. It is a gate so wide that it serves no real purpose. It is so wide that nothing and no one is restricted, excluded, or forbidden. The one who goes through this gate need not worry about wandering off course. He cannot. But Jesus is emphatic that this gate does not lead to God.

- How can I be saved?
- How can I become a citizen of the kingdom of heaven?
- How can I know that I am on my way to heaven?

Jesus says you must go through a gate. This “gate” represents the way of salvation. Some people think they can be saved by going through the wide gate. They believe there are many ways to God. They are convinced it does not matter what you believe if you are sincere. In the ancient world, it was said all roads led to Rome. Is that true of the Father’s house? Do all roads lead to God? Many people believe so.

America is not a Christian nation. There is no such thing. The United States was founded on the principle of religious pluralism. Every citizen has the right to worship God according to the dictates of his own heart. The glue that holds this democratic experiment together is tolerance. I believe what I believe and you have the right to believe what you believe. That’s a good thing. The problem is that we have confused mutual tolerance with equal truth. People assume all religions basically teach the same thing. Jesus describes this mindset in verse 13: “For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.”

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## B. ONE GATE IS NARROW.

Verse 14 says, “For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” You cannot choose any way and find your way to God. The gate is narrow. It is like a turnstile, only one person can go through at a time. You must go through the narrow way to get to God. The Greek word translated “narrow” is the same word used for persecution, affliction, and distress. The gate is not just narrow, it’s tight. There is only one way to God. In **John 10:9** Jesus says, “I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. In **John 14:6**, Jesus says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” In verse 13, Jesus say, “Enter by the narrow gate.” The door is open. Salvation is available. God is waiting to receive you. But you must enter by the narrow gate.

- It is not enough to study the gate.
- It is not enough to affirm the gate as the true way of salvation.
- It is not enough to speak well of the gate to others.

You must enter by the narrow gate.

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## II. THERE ARE TWO PATHS.

Jesus envisions those who hear his teachings to be at a crossroads where several life-changing decisions must be made. First, one must choose between the wide and narrow gate. Another decision must be made between two different paths.

### A. THERE IS THE EASY WAY.

Verse 13 says, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction.” At the heart of the “American Dream” is the desire for a good life. We study and work and spend to accumulate things that will make life easier. But many fail to reach that place of ease they desire. And many who get there would admit it is not all it is cracked up to be. The more you have, the more difficult things become. Yet the quest for the “good life” continues. Unfortunately, the church is aiding and abetting the spirit of the age. We invite people to Christ in the name of the good life, rather than showing people the way of Christ. We are making the far country look more inviting rather than pleading with the prodigal to come home. But the easy way is not the way to life. **Proverbs 14:12** says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”

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### B. THERE IS THE HARD WAY.

Verse 14 says, “For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life.” The devil sells false promises and offers benefits up front. When he has you hooked, you are forced to face the consequences of your choice. But Jesus does not put the costs of discipleship in fine print. He puts his demands in large and bold and highlighted font at the top of the contract. In verse 14, Jesus declares that his way is hard. Following Christ does not guarantee an uninterrupted life of health and wealth and success. To follow Jesus is to travel a hard way. False prophets, whom Jesus calls wolves in sheep clothing in verses 15-20, would have you think the way of the kingdom is easy.

**John 16:33** says, “In the world you will have tribulation.” **Acts 14:22** says, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” **2 Timothy 3:12** says, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” The way of Christ is a hard way. Yet in **Matthew 11:29**, Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find

rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” The way of Christ is hard. But the Lord knows how much you can bear. You will never carry the heavy burden of Christian disciples by yourself. If you will get in the yoke with Christ, he will carry the heavy part. WARREN WIERSBE writes that the question of this text is this: “Did your profession of faith in Christ cost you anything?” A faith that does not cost does not count. **Matthew 16:24** says, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” It will cost you everything to follow Jesus. But it is worth what it costs.

THE SERVICE OF JESUS TRUE PLEASURE AFFORDS  
IN HIM THERE IS JOY, WITHOUT AN ALLOY  
TIS HEAVEN TO TRUST HIM AND REST ON HIS WORD  
IT PAYS TO SERVE JESUS EACH DAY

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### III. THERE ARE TWO DESTINATIONS.

The pilot came on the intercom with the announcement: “Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. I have some bad news and good news. The bad news is that the navigational system in the cockpit has malfunctioned. And we are lost. The good news is that we are making good time.”

If you do not know where you are going, any direction you choose is fine. Life is a journey that is only successful if your destination is God. THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM teaches: “The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” In our text, the path you choose will lead to one of two destinations.

#### A. ONE PATH LEADS TO DESTRUCTION.

Verse 13 says, “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.” The word “destruction” means ruin or loss of wellbeing. It is used in the New Testament for eternal separation from God. It is the word used in **John 17:12**, where Jesus calls Judas “the son of destruction.” Some teach the word “destruction” affirms the theory of annihilationism. They believe God is too good and holy and loving to eternally punish anyone. They contend the wicked will ultimately cease to exist. But the bible is clear that everyone will spend eternity somewhere. Only those who come to God through faith in Christ will enter the kingdom. Unbelievers will go to hell forever.

**Matthew 25:46** says, “And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” The word “eternal” is used twice in this verse. And eternal punishment is as long as eternal life. This is the destiny of those who choose the wide gate and the easy path. The way of sin may be fun. But the pleasures of sin do not last. Things will not end well for those who have chosen their own way.

**Galatians 6:7-8** says, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap

eternal life.”

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#### **B. ONE PATH LEADS TO LIFE.**

Verse 14 says, “For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” “Life” refers to eternal life. Eternal life does not begin when you die. It begins the moment you receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord by faith in his finished work at the cross. **John 17:3** says, “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Eternal life is to know God the Father and his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This life shapes your earthly journey. This life prepares us to face death. This life guarantees unending fellowship with God in glory. Only Jesus Christ can provide this life. **John 10:10** says, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

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### **IV. THERE ARE TWO CROWDS.**

Do you want to be saved? Enter through the narrow gate. Do you want to be like Christ? Follow Christ on the hard way. Do you want to live in hope? Focus on the eternal life at the end of the journey. The text answers one more question. Do you want assurance you are going the right way? Examine the crowd around you. There are two crowds.

#### **A. THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE ON THE WAY OF DESTRUCTION.**

Verse 13 says, “For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.” If you want to know if you are going in the right direction, check who is on the path with you. If you are going in the same direction as the majority, you are going in the wrong direction. The wide gate and the easy way are densely populated. Do you remember your parents chastising you about following the crowd by asking, “If everyone goes and jumps off a bridge, would you do that too?” As a child, that logic made sense to you.

Sadly, many people base their convictions on what society thinks. They determine truth based on popular opinion, not biblical truth. They think, “Surely so many people cannot be mistaken. They must be on the right road.” But the fact that “everybody is doing it” does not make it right. To the contrary, the sign that you are going in the right direction is that you are not following the direction of those who do not know God. **Psalms 1:1-3** says, “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; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by the streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”

In **Matthew 7:21-23**, Jesus says it this way: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you, depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" Jesus prophecies there will be many who stand in a false presumption of salvation on the day of judgment. Many who claim to prophesy and do exorcisms and perform mighty works in the Lord's name will need to introduce themselves to him. You cannot get to God by following the crowd. You must follow God no matter what the crowd does. **Romans 3:4** says, "Let God be true though every one were a liar."

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#### **B. THERE ARE FEW PEOPLE ON THE WAY OF LIFE.**

Verse 14 says, "For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." While many are on the wide, easy way, there are few who even find the way that leads to life. The way to life is not just difficult to travel. It is also difficult to find. Why is that? **Matthew 13:44-46** says, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it." To find the kingdom of heaven is to be willing to give up all that you have to receive it. **R.T. FRANCE** was right: "True discipleship is a minority religion." This truth refutes the heresy of Universalism, which teaches the finished work of Christ applies to all and that everyone will ultimately be saved and go to heaven. Jesus says there are few who find the way of life.

Since these words fell from the lips of Jesus, untold millions have been saved. Only God knows how many more will be saved. In the Apocalypse, John saw a number that no one could number, from every nation and tribe and people and language standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, singing praises to God. One of the elders asked John if he knew who these were in those white robes. John did not. In **Revelation 7:14**, the elder said, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Yet it is still true that few will get into the kingdom. May the Lord use us to make that "few" as many as possible!

Francis D'Assisi invited a young monk to go to town with him to preach. The novice was delighted to accompany him. They passed through the principle streets, turned down many of the by-ways and alleys, made their way through the suburbs, then returned to the monastery gate. The young monk stated, "You have forgotten, Father, that we went down to the town to preach." "My Son," Francis replied, "we have preached. We were preaching while we were walking. We have been seen by many; our behavior has been closely watched; it was thus that we preached our morning sermon. It is of no use, my son, to walk anywhere to preach unless we preach everywhere we walk."