

The NARROW WAY

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“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matt. 7:13-14).

The second half of Matt. 7 forms the applicatory part of that most important discourse of our Lord’s, known as “the Sermon on the Mount.” One leading design of the Sermon was to show the spiritual nature and wide extent of that obedience which characterizes the true subjects of Christ’s kingdom, and which obedience is absolutely necessary for the enjoyment of that ultimate state of blessedness which Divine grace has provided for them. As the Prophet of God, Christ made known that the righteousness which obtains in His kingdom greatly exceeds the “righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees.”

Now the Jews imagined that they were all of them the subjects of the Messiah’s kingdom; that by virtue of their descent from Abraham, they were the rightful heirs of it; that the “righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees” (that system of religious and moral duty taught by them) met all the requirements of God’s law. But this delusion the Lord Jesus here exposed. Fleshly descent from Abraham could not give title unto a spiritual kingdom: that which was merely natural was no qualification for the supernatural realm: only they were accounted the true children of Abraham who had his faith (Rom. 4:16), who did his works (John 8:39), and who were united to Christ (Gal. 3:29).

In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord delineated the inward state of those who belonged to His spiritual kingdom (5:4-11); described the outward conduct by which they might be identified (5:13-16); expounded the personal righteousness which God’s justice demanded (5:17-28); and defined that utter repudiation of sin which he required from His people (5:29-30). So high are the demands of the thrice holy One, so uncompromising are the requirements of His ineffable character, that none can dwell with him eternally who do not in time, loathe, resist, and turn from all that is repulsive to His pure eye. Nothing short of the complete denying of self, the abandoning of the dearest idol, the forsaking of the most cherished sinful course—figuratively represented under the cutting off of a right hand and the plucking out of a right eye—is what He claims from every one who would have communion with Himself.

Such plain and pointed declarations of Christ must have seemed “hard sayings” to the multitudes who listened to Him; such piercing and flesh-withering demands would probably cause many of his Jewish hearers to think within themselves, “Who then can be saved? This is indeed a strait gate and a narrow way.” Anticipating their secret objections, the Lord plainly declared that the Gate unto salvation is “Strait” and the Way which leadeth unto life is “Narrow;” yet, He went on to point out, it is your wisdom, your interest, your duty to enter that “Gate” and walk that “Way.” He acknowledged and faithfully warned them that there was a “Wide gate” soliciting their entrance, and a “Broad road” inviting them to walk therein; but that gate leads to perdition, that road ends in Hell.

The “Strait Gate” is the only gate to “life,” the “Narrow Way” is the only one which conducts to Heaven. Few indeed find it, few have the least inclination for it; but that very fact ought only to provide an additional incentive to my giving all diligence to enter therein. In the verses which are now to be before us, Christ defined and described the Way of salvation, though we (sorrowfully) admit that modern evangelists (?) rarely expound it. What we shall now endeavor to set forth is very different from what most have been taught, but you reject it at your peril. We repeat, that in that passage we are about to consider, He who was Truth incarnate made known the only way of escaping Perdition and securing Heaven, namely, by entering the “Strait Gate” and treading the “Narrow Way.”

The Strait Gate

The Greek word for “Strait” signifies restrained or “Narrow” and is so rendered in the R.V. Now a “Gate” serves two purposes: it lets in and it shuts out. All who enter this Narrow Gate gain admittance to that “Way” which “leadeth unto life;” but all who enter not by this Narrow Gate, are eternally barred from God’s presence. The second use of this Gate is solemnly illustrated at the close of the parable of the virgins. There, our Lord pictures the foolish ones as being without the necessary “oil” (the work of the Spirit in the heart), and while they went to buy it, the Bridegroom came, and “the door was shut” (Matt. 25:10); and though they then besought him to open it to them, He answered “I know you not.”

1. *What is denoted by this figure of the “Narrow Gate?”* We believe the reference is to the searching and solemn teaching of Him who is Truth incarnate. It is only as the heart bows to the righteousness of God’s claims and demands upon us as set forth by His Son, that any soul can enter that path which alone leads to Him. While the heart is rebellious against Him there can be no approach to Him, for—“Can two walk together except they be agreed?” It is true, blessedly and gloriously true, that Christ Himself is “the Door” (John 10:9), and He is so in a threefold way, according to the three principal functions of His mediatorial office. He is “the Door” into God’s presence as the Prophet, the Priest, and the King.

Now it is only as Christ is truly received as God’s authoritative Prophet, only as His holy teachings are really accepted by a contrite heart, that any one is prepared to savingly welcome Him as Priest. Christ is the “Way” and “the Truth” before he is the “Life” (John 14:6), as he is “first King of righteousness, and after that, also King of peace” (Heb. 7:2). In other words, His cleansing blood is only available for those who are willing to throw down the weapons of their warfare against God, and surrender themselves to his holy rule. The wicked must forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, if he is to be pardoned by God (Isa. 55:7); and this is only another way of saying that Christ must be received as Prophet, before he is embraced as Priest.

2. *Why is this Gate a “Narrow” one?* For at least three reasons. *First*, because of sin. “The wicked shall be turned into Hell, all the nations that forget God” (Psa. 9:17)—the gate of heaven is far too narrow to admit such characters. The New Testament plainly affirms the same fact: “For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man who is an idolator, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them” (Eph. 5:5-7). *Second*, because of the Law. There are two principal errors about the Law, and I know not which is the more dangerous and disastrous: that one can earn heaven by obeying it; that one may enter heaven without that personal and practical godliness which the Law requires. “Follow peace with all, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14): where there is not this personal conformity to the will of God, the strong hand of the Law will close the door of heaven. *Third*, because none can take the world along with him: this Gate is far too “Narrow” to admit those who love the world.

3. *What is meant by “entering” this Narrow Gate?* *First*, the acceptance of those teachings of truth, of duty, of happiness, which were unfolded by Christ; the honest and actual receiving into the heart of His holy, searching, flesh-withering instructions. Such acceptance as a person, with great difficulty, forcing his way through a circumscribed entrance. I say “with great difficulty,” for Christ’s precepts and commandments are, to the last degree, unpalatable to an unrenewed heart, and cannot be willingly and gladly received without a rigid denial of self and relinquishment of sinful pleasures, pursuits, and interests. Christ has plainly warned us that it is impossible for a man to serve two masters. Self, must be repudiated, and Christ received as “the Lord” (Col. 2:6), or He will not save us.

What is meant by “entering” this Narrow Gate? *Second*, a deliberate abandoning of the Broad Road, or the flesh-pleasing mode of life. Until this has been done, there is no salvation possible for any sinner. Christ Himself taught this plainly in Luke 15: the “prodigal” must leave the “far country” before he could journey to the Father’s House! The same pointed truth is taught again in James 4:8-10, “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be

afflicted and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up.”

Ah, my friend, to really and actually enter this “Narrow Gate” is no easy matter. For that reason the Lord bade the people “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you” (John 6:27). Those words do not picture salvation as a thing of simple and easy attainment. Ponder also Christ’s emphatic exhortation in Luke 13:24 “Strive to enter in at the Strait Gate.” That He should utter such a word, clearly implies the great idleness and sloth which characterizes nominal professors, as it also intimates there are formidable difficulties and obstacles to be overcome. Let it be carefully noted that the Greek word for “strive” (viz. “agonizomai”) in Luke 13:24 is the same one that is used in 1 Cor. 9:25—“And every one that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things;” and is also rendered “labouring fervently” in Col. 4:12, and “fight” in 1 Tim. 6:12!

And how are we to “strive” so as to “enter” the Narrow Gate? The general answer is, “lawfully” (2 Tim. 2:5); but to particularize. We are to strive by prayer and supplication, diligently seeking deliverance from those things which would bar our entrance. We are to earnestly cry to Christ for help from those foes which are seeking to overcome us. We are to come constantly to the Throne of Grace, that we may there find grace to help us repudiate and turn away with loathing from everything which is abhorred by God, even though it involves our cutting off of a right hand and plucking out of a right eye; and grace to help us do those things which He has commanded. We must be “temperate in all things,” especially those things which the flesh craves and the world loves.

But why is such “striving” necessary? *First*, because Satan is striving to destroy thy soul. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8); therefore must he be resisted “steadfast in the faith.” *Second*, because natural appetites are striving to destroy thee: “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). *Third*, because the whole world is arrayed against thee, and if it cannot burn, it will seek to turn thee by alluring promises, Delilah-like guiles, fatal enticements. Unless you overcome the world, the world will overcome you to the eternal destruction of thy soul.

From what has been before us, we may plainly discover why it is that the vast majority of our fellow-men and women, yea, and of professing Christians also, will fail to reach Heaven: it is because they prefer sin to holiness, indulging the lusts of the flesh to walking according to the scriptures, self to Christ, the world to God. It is as the Lord Jesus declared—“Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19): men refuse to deny self, abandon their idols, and submit to Christ as Lord; and without this, none can take the first step toward Heaven!

The Narrow Way

Just as entering the “Narrow Gate” signifies the heart’s acceptance of Christ’s holy teaching, so to walk along the “Narrow Way” means for the heart and life to be constantly regulated thereby. Walking along the Narrow Way denotes a steady perseverance in faith and obedience to the Lord Jesus; overcoming all opposition, rejecting every temptation to forsake the path of fidelity to Him. It is called the “Narrow Way” because all self-pleasing and self-seeking is shut out. In Gen. 18:19 it is called “the Way of the Lord;” in Exo. 13:21,32:8 “the Way;” in 1 Sam. 12:23 “the good and right Way;” in Psa. 25:9 “His Way;” in Pro. 4:11 “the Way of wisdom;” in Pro. 8:20 “the Way of righteousness;” in Pro. 10:17 “the Way of life;” in Isa. 35:8 “the Way of holiness;” in Jer. 6:16 “the good Way;” in 2 Pet. 2:2 “the Way of truth;” in 2 Pet. 2:15 “the right Way.”

The Narrow Way must be followed, no matter how much it may militate against my worldly interests. It is right here that the testing point is reached: it is much easier (unto the natural man) and far pleasanter to indulge the flesh and follow our worldly propensities. The Broad Road, where the flesh is allowed “liberty”—under the pretense of the Christian’s not “being under the law”—is easy, smooth, and attractive; but it ends in “destruction!” Though the “Narrow Way” leads to life, only FEW tread it. Multitudes make a

profession and claim to be saved, but their lives give no evidence that they are “strangers and pilgrims” here, with their “treasure” elsewhere. They are afraid of being thought narrow and peculiar, strict and puritanic. Satan has deceived them: they imagine that they can get to heaven by an easier route than by denying self, taking up their cross daily, and following Christ!

There are multitudes of religionists who are attempting to combine the two “ways,” making the best of both worlds and serving two masters. They wish to gratify self in time and enjoy the happiness of Heaven in eternity. Crowds of nominal Christians are deluding themselves into believing that they can do so; but they are terribly deceived. A profession which is not verified by mortifying the deeds of the body in the power of the Spirit (Rom. 8:13), is vain. A faith which is not evidenced by complete submission to Christ, is only the faith of demons. A love which does not keep Christ’s commandments, is an imposition (John 14:23). A claim to being a Christian, where there is no real yieldedness to the will of God, is daring presumption. The reason why so few will enter Life is because the multitudes are not seeking it in the way of God’s appointing: none seek it aright save those who pass through the Narrow Gate, and who, despite many discouragements and falls, continue to press forward along the Narrow Way.

Now notice, carefully, the very next thing which immediately followed our Lord’s reference to the two ways in Matt. 7: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matt. 7:15). Why does this come in next? Who are the “false prophets” against which a serious soul needs to be on his guard? They are those who teach that Heaven may be reached without treading the Narrow Way! They are those who loudly insist that eternal life may be obtained on much easier terms. They come in “sheep’s clothing:” they appear (to undiscerning souls) to exalt Christ, to emphasize His precious blood, to magnify God’s grace. BUT they do not insist upon repentance; they fail to tell their hearers that nothing but a broken heart which hates sin can truly believe in Christ; they declare not that a saving faith is a living one which purifies the heart (Acts 15:9) and overcomes the world (1 John 5:4).

These “false prophets” are known by their “fruits,” the primary reference being to their “converts”—the fruits of their fleshly labours. Their “converts” are on the Broad Road, which is not the path of open wickedness and vice, but of a religion which pleases the flesh: it is that “way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Pro. 14:12). Those who are on this Broad Road (this way which “seemeth right” to so many), have a head-knowledge of the Truth, but they walk not in it. The “Narrow Way” is bounded by the commandments and precepts of Scripture; the Broad Road is that path which has broken out beyond the bounds of Scripture. Titus 2:11-12 supplies the test as to which “way” we are in: “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.”

Ere closing, let us anticipate and seek to remove an objection. Probably many of you are saying, “I thought Christ was the Way to the Father” (John 14:6). So He is, but how? *First*, in that He has removed every legal obstacle, and thereby opened a way to heaven for His people. *Second*, in that He has “left us an example that we should follow HIS steps.” The mere opening of a door does not give me entrance into a house: I must tread the path leading to it, and mount the steps. Christ has, by His life of unreserved obedience to God, shown us the Way which leads to Heaven: “When He putteth forth His own sheep, HE goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him” (John 10:4). *Third*, in that He is willing and ready to bestow grace and strength to walk therein.

Christ did not come here and die in order to make it un-necessary for me to please and obey God. No indeed: “He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them” (2 Cor. 5:15). “Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world” (Gal. 1:4). “Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). Christ came here to “save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21); and if you are not now delivered from the power of sin, from the deceptions of Satan, from the love of the world, and from the pleasing of self, then you are NOT saved. May it please the God of all grace to add His blessing.