The Constitution of the Kingdom

A 33-Session Journey through the Sermon on the Mount & the Sermon on the Plain

SESSION TWENTY-EIGHT — The Narrow Gate

Part Six: The Two Ways · Texts: Matthew 7:13–14; Luke 13:23–24

The Texts

> **Matthew 7:13–14** *Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*
>
> **Luke 13:24** *Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able.*

From Teaching to Appeal

Something changes here, near the end. For twenty-seven sessions Jesus has been teaching — describing the Kingdom, its people, its ethics, its heart. But the Sermon is almost over now, and a great teacher, when the teaching is done, does not simply stop; he turns and asks for a response. He looks his hearers in the eye and says: now — what will you do with all of this?

So the Sermon's final movement begins, and it is one long, tender, urgent appeal to decide. And Jesus casts it as a series of choices between two ways: two gates and two roads, two kinds of tree, two kinds of claim, and finally two houses on two foundations. It all begins here, at a fork in the road: "Enter through the narrow gate."[1]

Let's search the Scriptures together.

The Two Ways

Before we look at the gate itself, know that Jesus is not inventing this picture; he is preaching in one of the oldest grooves in all of Scripture. "The Two Ways" — a path of life and a path of death set before you, and a choice you must make — runs straight through the Bible. Moses stood before Israel and said, "I have set before you life and death… therefore choose life." The very first psalm opens on two ways, the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. This is a deep and ancient form, and Jesus steps right into it: he sets two roads before us, and, like Moses, pleads with us to choose the one that leads to life.[2]

And notice what a mercy it is that he does. He is not leaving us to drift. He is not pretending every road goes to the same place, that it makes no difference how we live or what we build our

[1]Unless noted, Scripture is quoted from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition (NRSVue), the base translation for this course. Matthew 7:13–14, with a parallel at Luke 13:23–24. This begins the Sermon's closing appeal, a series of contrasts between two ways (7:13–27): two gates and roads, two trees, two claims, two builders.

[2]"The Two Ways"—a path of life and a path of death set before the hearer—is a deeply rooted biblical and Jewish form: Deuteronomy 30:15–20 ("I set before you life and death… choose life"), Psalm 1, Jeremiah 21:8, and the early church manual the Didache, which opens, "There are two ways." Jesus preaches within this tradition, not a novelty.

lives on. He loves us too much for that. So he draws the map honestly, marks the fork clearly, and points — the way a good guide points, because he wants us to make it home.

The Wide Gate and the Easy Road

Look first at the road most people are on. "The gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it." Picture it: a broad gate you can stroll through without breaking stride, opening onto a wide, smooth, downhill road, thronged with a great and cheerful crowd. Everything about it is inviting. It asks nothing of you. You need not choose it, or even notice it — it is simply the way everyone is already going, the path of least resistance, the current of the culture that carries you along if you never decide to swim against it.

And that is exactly its danger. The easy road is easy because it is downhill, and downhill roads all run to the same low place. You do not have to be wicked to end up on it; you only have to be passive, to drift, to go along, to never stop and ask where the crowd is actually headed. Jesus is warning us that the most natural, comfortable, popular way to live — the way that requires no decision at all — is not, in the end, a way that leads to life. The crowd is not a compass.

The Narrow Gate and the Hard Road

And then the other way. "The gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it." A narrow gate you have to turn aside for, and choose deliberately, and go through one at a time, leaving your baggage behind. A hard road — often uphill, often against the flow. And, Jesus says plainly, not crowded: few find it. Now, we have to be careful here, because these words have frightened a great many tender souls. Jesus is not handing us a grim statistic about how few people will finally be saved, and he is not trying to make us afraid. When someone later asks him point-blank, "Lord, will only a few be saved?" he refuses to answer the numbers question at all — he just says, "strive to enter." The point of "narrow" and "few" is not a headcount. It is this: the way of the Kingdom is not the way of the crowd, and you will not stumble onto it by accident. You have to choose it, on purpose, and keep choosing it.[3]

Because think about what the hard road actually is — it is everything we have spent twenty-seven sessions climbing. It is the greater righteousness. It is turning the other cheek and loving your enemy and giving in secret and forgiving your debtor and taking the log out of your own eye. Of course that road is narrow. Of course few walk it freely. It is the cross-shaped life, and the cross was never the popular route. The gate is narrow not because God is stingy with life, but because the life God offers — a life of costly, self-giving love — is a road most people, most of the time, will not choose to walk.

Narrow, but Not Earned

[3]The point of "easy… many" versus "hard… few" is not a prediction of final population statistics or a message of fear, but a summons to choose the demanding way of the Kingdom over the crowded, effortless way of the culture. Compare Luke 13:24, "strive to enter," and the whole Sermon's call to a "greater righteousness" that the crowd will not naturally take. Speculation about "how many are saved" is elsewhere gently deflected (Luke 13:23–24); the command is simply, "enter."

Hear one thing clearly, so this does not curdle into fear or into works-righteousness. The narrow gate is not the gate you earn your way through by being good enough. Grace has run through this entire Sermon like a river: the very first word blessed the poor in spirit, the empty-handed; and just last session the Father was handing good gifts to his children simply for the asking. The gate is not narrow because God set the bar impossibly high and dares us to clear it. It is narrow because it is the doorway of surrender — you cannot carry the world's baggage of pride and self-sufficiency through it; you have to come with empty hands, as a child comes. What makes the road hard is not that we are trying to purchase God's love, but that actually following Jesus — laying down our will, our grudges, our comfort, our little kingdom — costs us everything, even as it is given to us free.[4]

Bonhoeffer said it as well as anyone: the grace is free, but it is never cheap. It costs you your life — and gives you back a truer one than you ever had. That is the narrow gate. Not a toll booth. A turnstile of surrender, opening onto the road that actually leads home.

Freedom for Others

Put it to our thread, and the narrow road turns out to be paved, from end to end, with freedom-for-others. What is the "hard road" but the whole self-giving way we have been learning — the mercy, the peacemaking, the enemy-love, the open hand? The easy road is the road of self: go with the crowd, protect your own, keep what is yours, love the ones who love you back. The hard road is the road of the neighbor: it turns outward, it costs you something, it swims against the current of a culture built on getting and keeping. To choose the narrow gate simply is to choose the life of love the whole Sermon has described. So ask with me, honestly: where am I drifting with the crowd on the easy, self-serving road — and where is Jesus asking me to turn aside, deliberately, onto the harder road of love? *Freedom for others may cost us the comfort of just going along — what can we lay down?*

Around the Table — For Discussion

- The Sermon turns here from teaching to appeal — Jesus asks for a decision. Where in your life is he asking, "now, what will you do with this?"
- The easy road requires no choice — you just drift with the crowd. Where are you most tempted simply to go along?
- "Few find it" has frightened many. Why does it matter that Jesus refuses the numbers question and just says "enter"?
- The hard road is the cross-shaped life we've been studying. Which part of it feels most "narrow" — most against the current — for you right now?
- Freedom for others may cost us something. Where might you need to turn aside from the crowd this week and choose the harder road of love?

[4]The narrow gate is not earned entry or works-righteousness; grace runs through the whole Sermon (the Beatitudes bless the empty-handed; the Father gives good gifts). The "hard road" is the costly, cross-shaped life of actually following Jesus—narrow not because God is stingy but because love of God and neighbor, enemy included, is a road few will freely walk. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, names this well: grace is free but never cheap.

This Week — A Practice

Two movements. First, name the fork. Find one place in your life this week where you are simply drifting with the crowd — doing what everyone does, going the way of least resistance — and stop long enough to ask honestly: where is this road actually leading? Just seeing the fork is half the work. Second, take one narrow step. Choose one deliberate act of the harder, self-giving way — an enemy loved, a grudge released, a good done in secret, a comfort laid down for someone else — and take it on purpose, against the current. You do not have to walk the whole road today. You only have to choose the gate. Then bring back what you found. This Kingdom, like all the rest, is learned in the doing.

Looking Ahead

Next session, the second of the two-ways warnings, and a searching one: how to tell the real from the counterfeit. "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits." Jesus hands us a test for discernment — not by their words, not by their robes, but by their fruit — that is as needed in our own moment as it ever was in his.

Benediction

So go this week and choose. Do not drift; decide. See the two roads honestly — the wide, smooth, downhill way that asks nothing of you and the whole crowd is on; and the narrow gate, turned aside from the traffic, opening onto the hard and holy road of love. And do not be afraid of the word "narrow," or the word "few." They are not a threat; they are an invitation, and the door is standing open. Come with empty hands, lay down the baggage of your own little kingdom, and step through — onto the road that costs you everything and gives you back a life worth living. Blessed are those who take the narrow gate, for the hard road they have chosen is the only one that has ever led home.

Love, practiced — not just professed — reveals the Kingdom among us.

Blessings,
Pastor Mick Finch

SESSION TWENTY-EIGHT

Introduction Video Script

Single presenter, to camera · target 5–6 minutes · warm, steady, unhurried

[Begin still.]

Welcome back to the table. Something changes here, near the end. For twenty-seven sessions Jesus has been teaching — describing the Kingdom, its people, its ethics, its heart. But the Sermon's almost over now, and a great teacher, when the teaching's done, doesn't just stop — he turns and asks for a response. He looks his hearers in the eye and says: now — what will you do with all of this?

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[The two ways.]

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[Wide and easy.]

Look first at the road most people are on. "The gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and many take it." Picture it: a broad gate you stroll through without breaking stride, opening onto a wide, smooth, downhill road, thronged with a cheerful crowd. Everything about it is inviting. It asks nothing of you. You don't even have to choose it — it's just the way everyone's already going, the path of least resistance, the current of the culture that carries you along if you never decide to swim against it. And that's exactly the danger. The easy road is easy because it's downhill — and downhill roads all run to the same low place. You don't have to be wicked to end up there; you just have to drift, to go along, to never stop and ask where the crowd's actually headed. The most natural, comfortable, popular way to live — the way that takes no decision at all — is not, in the end, the way that leads to life. The crowd is not a compass.

[Narrow and hard.]

And then the other way. "The gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and few find it." A narrow gate you have to turn aside for, choose on purpose, go through one at a time, leaving your baggage behind. A hard road — often uphill, often against the flow. And not crowded: few find it. Now, be careful here, because these words have frightened a lot of tender souls. Jesus isn't handing us a grim statistic about how few will be saved, and he's not trying to scare us. When someone later asks him flat out, "Lord, will only a few be saved?" — he refuses

the numbers question entirely. He just says, "strive to enter." The point of "narrow" and "few" isn't a headcount — it's that the way of the Kingdom is not the way of the crowd, and you won't stumble onto it by accident. You have to choose it, on purpose, and keep choosing it.

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[The thread and practice.]

So here's our question this week — freedom for others: the whole hard road is paved with it. The easy road is the road of self — go with the crowd, protect your own, love the ones who love you back. The hard road is the road of the neighbor — it turns outward, it costs you, it swims against the current. To choose the narrow gate just is to choose the life of love the whole Sermon has described. So where am I drifting with the crowd on the easy, self-serving road — and where is Jesus asking me to turn aside, on purpose, onto the harder road of love?

Two things to practice. First, name the fork — find one place you're just drifting with the crowd, and stop long enough to ask: where's this road actually leading? Seeing the fork is half the work. Second, take one narrow step — one deliberate act of the harder, self-giving way, on purpose, against the current. You don't have to walk the whole road today. You only have to choose the gate.

Next time — the second warning: how to tell the real from the counterfeit. "Beware of false prophets in sheep's clothing… you will know them by their fruits." A test for discernment as needed in our moment as in his.

[Slow. Land it.]

For now, go and choose. Don't drift — decide. See the two roads honestly — the wide, smooth, downhill way the whole crowd's on, that asks nothing of you; and the narrow gate, turned aside from the traffic, opening onto the hard and holy road of love. And don't be afraid of the

word “narrow,” or “few.” They’re not a threat — they’re an invitation, and the door is standing open. Come with empty hands, lay down the baggage of your own little kingdom, and step through — onto the road that costs you everything and gives you back a life worth living.

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