

*Last month, Trish and I went on a vacation to Montana – and to do what we wanted to do, required a lot of driving on unmaintained mountain roads. Some of the driving we had to do, I would describe as “white knuckle” driving because the roads were that bad – covered in snow and packed with mud, there were huge holes and deep ruts that could swallow us up to the truck axles, and then with one wrong move, there were the steep drop offs that could send us hurling down the mountain side. These roads were tense and testy for me – but for Trish, who was sitting in the passenger seat, they were almost traumatizing, and my encouraging words of “Trust me, I got this” inspired no confidence in me and had no comforting effect on her, in fact, on one snowy mountain road to an abandoned mine we wanted to explore, she got out of the truck and walked. Fun times for us!*

*Just the other day, we were at home watching a documentary entitled “The World’s Most Dangerous Roads” – roads that made our Montana driving seem like child’s play, and to give you some idea what I mean, let me show you a couple.*

*First is Road D915. If you fear landslides, and if you are prone to vertigo, it’s best to steer clear of D915. This road, which is mostly loose gravel, is located in the northeast region of Turkey and with its narrow stretches of road, its sharp turns, its steep slopes that sometimes reach inclines of 17%, and its massive drop-offs without any guardrails – it’s very daunting and dangerous. The riskiest part of this road has 13 hairpin turns that will have you climbing over 1000 feet in just three miles.*

*The next road is called the “Friendship Highway” which is not very friendly at all. This road connects China to Pakistan and it is full of buses taking people to the K2 Mountain. This road winds some 16,000 feet in elevation – meaning shortness of breath, light-headedness, and altitude sickness are real problems for those who are behind the steering wheel – and if that’s not bad enough, it’s a narrow road with sheer cliffs, hairpin turns, landslides, and a death drop when the road decides to give way from under you.*

*Then there is the North Yungas Road, also known as the “Death Road” for all of the reasons you can imagine. This 43-mile stretch of road in Bolivia is extremely dangerous due to dense fog, avalanches, sharp rocks that slash through tires, bad weather, and steep cliffs that drop some 2,000 feet at every turn. This single lane road has no guard rails, seldom gets any wider than 10 feet, and along the way, you are blessed to see the many unnerving sights of makeshift memorials dedicated to those who have perished on the road. Nearly 300 people are killed on it every year.*

This morning, we are going to take a look at two other roads, and one of these roads is the most dangerous road of all, because it does not take people to where they have hoped.

We are nearing the end of the Lord's *Sermon on the Mount*, where it seems that Jesus has saved His most passionate words for last. In light of everything He has preached about concerning living in the kingdom and real righteousness from God's point of view, Jesus comes to the place in His sermon where He essentially says,

***"Now that you've heard what I have said, what are you going to do?"***

In response to His sermon, Jesus calls His listeners to make a decision, and in doing so, He offers them a series of choices which we will look at over the next few weeks, and the first of these choices involves two roads where He will explain in so many words, that where we wind up in the *hereafter* depends on which road we take in the *here and now*, or said a little differently – the road we take determines our destination.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Matthew 7** and we are going to camp out on only two verses – **verses 13 and 14** where Jesus says,

**<sup>13</sup> "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. <sup>14</sup> For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."**

In this passage, Jesus paints an interesting picture of contrasts for us. He tells us there are two gates and two ways or two roads depending on your Bible translation through those gates. One gate is **wide** and one gate is **narrow** and **small**. One road is **broad**, while the other road is **narrow**, and these two roads lead to two entirely different destinations. And also take note in this passage that there are two crowds of people – one crowd is made up of **many**, but the other is **few**.

Now, before we dig into this passage, I want to step back a bit to view this from a larger perspective so I can point something out.

If you notice, Jesus leaves no wiggle room for middle ground here. **Do you see any middle ground in His words?** No! In a nutshell, it's an *either-or* proposition that Jesus offers – experience *life* one way or *destruction* the other – that's it –

those are the only two options, and these days, most of the people in our culture would label that as *narrow-minded*.

These days, with all the religious beliefs out there, with all the philosophies of man, and with all the insights into spirituality where it is taught “*There are many paths to God and many roads to eternal bliss*” – one might think there are thousands of options available for people to follow that will impact their eternity, but Jesus essentially says,

*“No! When it comes to eternity, there are really only two options to consider – one leads to life and the other leads to destruction. That’s it.”*

**Well, isn’t that being narrow-minded?** Absolutely, it’s narrow-minded – you have no idea how narrow-minded it really is. People say, “*Christianity doesn’t leave room for anyone else’s view of salvation.*” They are right, I will give them that – but that does not change the truth. Jesus made it really simple for us – it needs to be simple – one way leads to life and the other way – really, every other way does not, and Jesus makes this abundantly clear in **John 14:6** where He says:

***“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”***

I didn’t say that. Jesus said that. Later in **Acts 4:12**, when speaking to the Jewish religious leaders, the Apostle Peter shares this when referring to Jesus,

***“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”***

If there were 50 ways to be saved, Jesus would have told us about the 50 ways to be saved, and I would be preaching about the 50 ways to be saved, but there’s only one Savior – there’s only one way to be saved – and that’s through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Listen, if someone said there is a cure all for cancer – just one cure – only one, people would be standing in line for miles to get it, and people wouldn’t say ***“Come on, really, there’s only one cure for cancer?”*** People wouldn’t say that.

There is a **way**, and if you think about it – that’s really the amazing thing. Amazingly, Jesus has made a way for a sinful lost rebellious people to be right with a holy God. Jesus is the way – He’s the only way. It’s that simple.

So, I wanted to point out that there is no middle ground because Jesus gives us no middle ground. This is an *either-or* proposition given to people – to all people, and with that, let's dig into the passage. Jesus says:

**<sup>13</sup>“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. <sup>14</sup>For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”**

In this passage, Jesus begins with the first set of options: two **gates** – one is **small** and **narrow**, while the other is **wide** – and as gates, people can choose to **enter** through one or the other, and this is where people need to be really careful because there's nothing here to suggest that these gates are marked in any way. These gates are not marked with signs that read “*This way to heaven*” and “*This way to hell.*”

These gates are not marked, and so people who are entering through these gates are assuming they all lead to some version of heaven. People say “*You Christians have your thing, and we have ours. We are all going to the same place*” – and that's the great deception – in fact, so great is this deception, one gate is **wide** for a reason – it has to be – it's well used by the vast majority of people who believe there are many paths to God, many roads to eternal bliss, many avenues to save themselves, and many ways to be good enough apart from Jesus Christ.

Those who enter through the wide gate are deceived – they are headed for destruction, and that's why Jesus says “*Enter through the narrow gate.*” That's a command, meaning entering through the narrow gate does not happen by accident. It's a deliberate decision, expressed through our saving faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. It's a command to be obeyed, but unfortunately, most will not, and therefore by default, in the end, they enter through the wide gate.

Listen to what Jesus said in **John 10**, beginning with **verse 1**. I am reading this passage from the NLT. He said,

**<sup>1</sup>“I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! <sup>2</sup>But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup>After he has gathered his own flock, he**

*walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice.” <sup>6</sup> Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn't understand what he meant, <sup>7</sup> so he explained it to them: “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep.*

The truth is, the gate is narrow because we cannot save ourselves, we will never be good enough, there are not multiple paths to God, and there are not many ways to heaven. Our salvation is solely based and narrowly focused on what the Son of God did for us – out of grace and mercy, forgiveness and love, Jesus did for us what we could never do for ourselves. Jesus is the gate – He's the narrow gate – the only gate that leads to eternal life, and by faith, we must personally choose to enter through Him – only Him.

Okay, back to our focal passage in **Matthew**.

**<sup>13</sup>“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. <sup>14</sup> For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”**

If you notice, Jesus also mentioned two ways or two roads. One road is **broad** and it follows the wide gate. It's popular, there's room for everyone, it's attractive and appealing, it's inclusive and permissive – it's an easy road to take. On this road, there are few rules, few restrictions, and few requirements – you can even claim to know God but live like He really doesn't matter.

There's something for everybody. Everybody gets to believe what they want to believe, everybody's gets some religion, and that surely must count for something, and as a result – surprise, surprise, the overwhelming majority of people choose to take the broad road – but it's the most dangerous road because it fails to take you where you believe it is going.

There is a proverb that says, ***“There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”*** (Proverbs 14:12)

The broad road is the wrong road, but there's another road. Jesus called it the **narrow** road, and I need to clarify something here. The Greek word for “*narrow*” in **verse 13**, speaking of the gate, is *stenos* – as in *small*, but in **verse 14**, referring to the road, the word for **narrow** is *thlibo* – it's a different Greek word, and it

means *to press* or *to constrict*. It implies affliction, and let me explain what I think this is all about.

In His Sermon, Jesus taught about living by the righteous standards of the kingdom of God, being a light in a dark world, following Him in trust and obedience, turning our hearts to God, loving the unlovable, treating others the way we want to be treated – and He taught this knowing all too well it was contrary to the principles of this fallen world.

For those who walk His way – through the narrow gate, on the narrow road, Jesus implies that there are many setbacks and struggles – and there is suffering. There is no “*sugar coating*” the truth here by Jesus. The cost is high, there may be loss, there may be burdens to bear, don’t be surprised if you are hated because you identify with Him, there may be false teachers who try to trip you up, but for those who enter through the *narrow gate* and walk the *narrow road* – a road that seems steep and bumpy and rugged at times – the destination is well worth it, and I also need to add, that no one who walks the narrow road, really walks it alone – ever.

Continuing with this passage, Jesus tells us about two destinations – one is **life** and the other is **destruction**, and both are eternal. That word “*destruction*” speaks of that which is “*wasted*.” The wide gate and the broad road lead to waste and the ultimate consequence of this waste is an eternity in hell – a real place of real torment without God.

*Dr. Maurice Rawlings, who has since passed away, was a cardiologist and a professor of medicine at the University of Tennessee. Rawlings was a devout atheist, who considered all religion to be ‘hocus-pocus’ and he saw death as nothing more than a painless extinction – until something happened that changed his life.*

*In 1977, he was giving a stress test to a man who was having chest pains, and in the middle of the test the man dropped dead in Rawlings’ office. Dr. Rawlings and several nurses began to work on him – he began chest compressions while a nurse began mouth-to-mouth. Several times, the patient would regain consciousness and then he would die again, and each time the patient was resuscitated he would scream, “I am in Hell!” Dr. Rawlings thought he meant he was in pain from the CPR but then the patient gave a strange command. “Don’t stop!” This shocked Dr. Rawlings who says that when most patients recover, they tell him to take his hands off them because he is hurting them from the CPR.*

*Dr. Rawlings went on to describe the man as having a terrified look on his face, worse than the expression typically seen in death. This patient had a grotesque grimace expressing sheer horror. His pupils were dilated, he was perspiring and trembling – and he looked as if his hair was “on end.” Then still another strange thing happened. The patient said, “Don’t you understand? I am in Hell. Each time you quit I go back to Hell! Don’t let me go back to Hell!”*

*This incident was so powerful that Dr. Rawlings would become a committed Christian and he wrote a book telling stories of these near-death experiences. He concluded by saying, “Now I feel assured that there is life after death, and not all of it is good.”*

Unfortunately, this will be the destination of **many** – by default, it’s the destination of those who reject Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. The majority of this world have no idea that the broad road they travel on – the most dangerous road of all, leads right to there.

Now, in stark contrast, Jesus says that **few** – referring to the minority, will take the narrow road that leads to eternal life.

I was reminded of what the Apostle John described in **Revelation 21** when he got this amazing vision of our heavenly home descending to a brand-new earth. John had some difficulty in describing what he saw, but in so many words, this is what he said: In our final destination, there is no longer any death, no longer any mourning or crying or pain. I suspect people could share tears of joy and laughter, but there will be no cause for tears of pain or sorrow from the experiences in this life – for all those experiences will belong to the past. And as awesome as that is, it’s all overshadowed by the overwhelming presence of God for all eternity.

So, near the end of His *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus explained there are only two roads, and where you wind up *later* depends on the road you take *now*. It’s an *either-or* proposition He offers, and it brings all of us to a crossroad, so to speak, where we are forced to answer a life-changing question: **What will you do with Jesus?**

Given what we have learned this morning – there is a choice, but when thinking about the gate, the road, and the destination, the choice should be pretty clear.

Someone might ask, **“Will the saved be few?”** Unfortunately, the answer is “yes” but as a follow-up question – a better question: **“Will the saved be you?”**

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