

Jesus at the Center of the Kingdom

Two Paths • Message 4

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Prayer Points for Prayer Time:

- Ask God to give you a faith to obey without delay.
- Pray that God will remove anything keeping you from fully following Him.
- Pray for discernment to recognize the path that leads to life.

Worship Psalm:

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:17 (NIV)

Scripture Reading:

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

Matthew 7:13-14 (NIV)

A. Introduction

Brief introduction to this week’s message.

B. Two Paths

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount has reached its peak. This is the closing, the altar call of Jesus.

1. A COMMAND to OBEY.

(Matthew 7:13. C/R: Luke 13:24; James 1:22)

“Enter through the narrow gate...”

Matthew 7:13a (NIV)

Jesus begins his closing of the Sermon on the Mount by issuing a command: *Enter*. Jesus is not asking us to consider, admire or analyze.

The verb tense of this command is a once-and-for all decisive action. He is saying, *Make a decision*.

You have not truly entered the gate unless you have responded by action. We call that action faith.

Ill: Choice. Did you know psychologists have actually studied what happens when people have too many choices?

Most of us assume that more choices mean more freedom. But the research tells a different story.

One famous study put out two tables of gourmet jam at a grocery store. One table had **24 different flavors**. The other had just **6**.

The table with 24 flavors attracted more people. They stopped, they looked, they sampled.

But here's the surprising part.

The people who saw only six options were **about ten times more likely to actually buy a jar of jam**.

More options got more attention, but fewer decisions.

Researchers call this **choice deferral**—instead of choosing, people choose not to choose.

And it turns out it isn't just about the number of options. Research involving more than **7,000 participants** found that people are most likely to delay making a decision when four things happen: the decision is complicated, they aren't sure what they really want, the stakes feel high, and making the decision feels mentally exhausting.

- **Complicated**
- **Unclear Desires**
- **High Stakes**
- **Exhausting**

Think about it. Have you ever spent thirty minutes scrolling Netflix only to watch the same show you've already seen? Or stood in the grocery store staring at forty kinds of barbecue sauce? Or researched something online for hours and then closed your laptop without buying anything?

We laugh because we've all done it.

The problem isn't always too many choices. We avoid making the choice at all.

And that's where Jesus' words become so refreshing. He removes the fluff for us.

The wide table got attention, but the small table got action. And maybe that is more spiritually revealing than we want to admit. Some people are endlessly interested in Jesus. They admire His teaching. They appreciate His ethics. They share His message. They respect His compassion. They like being near the gate. But Jesus does not say, *Admire the gate*. He says, ***Enter through the narrow gate.***

So, what is keeping you from entering the narrow gate?

- **Complicated**
- **Unclear Desires**
- **High Stakes**
- **Exhausting**

What is keeping you near the gate but not going through the gate?

Is it complicated? Are there questions you still have, doctrines you still do not understand, wounds that make faith difficult, or doubts you have never voiced?

Are your desires unclear? Part of you wants Jesus, but part of you still wants control. Part of you wants forgiveness, but part of you still wants the broad road.

Do the stakes feel high? Because they are. To enter the narrow gate is not to add Jesus as an accessory. It is to come under the authority of the King.

Or are you simply exhausted? Tired of wrestling. Tired of deciding. Tired of being confronted by the claims of Christ. So you keep postponing.

But Jesus does not command postponement. Jesus is asking you to enter.

Today, do not delay; take action. Ask your questions, clarify your desires, be realistic about the stakes, and take a breath and power through your exhaustion.

2. A GATE to ENTER.

(Matthew 7:13. C/R: John 10:7-10; 14:6)

In the ancient world, a gate was more than an opening in a wall. A gate marked the boundary between outside and inside. Outside the city gate, you were exposed. Inside the gate, you came under the city's protection, laws, authority, and identity. A gate separated belonging from exclusion, safety from danger, citizenship from being a stranger, one kingdom from another. To enter a gate was not simply to change location. It was to change jurisdiction. That means that when you enter the gate of a city, you come under the reign of a king.

Jesus speaks of two gates, one that is wide and one that is narrow, or small.

The wide gate is the one that leads to destruction, and the one that is small is the gate that leads to life.

This would have been an image that would have made total sense to the ancient listeners. Let's take a look at this AI Generated image.

III: Image of City Gate vs. Postern

The point is not that God is reluctant to save, as though He made the entrance small because He does not want people to come in. The gate is narrow because you cannot bring everything with you through it. You cannot be the ruler of your life and enter through the narrow gate.

You cannot bring your past sins through the narrow gate. You cannot bring a divided allegiance through the narrow gate. You cannot bring *Lord, Lord* language while refusing the Father's will. The gate is narrow because entrance into the kingdom means surrender to the King.

Jesus isn't being stingy with people, as though there is a max population inside the narrow gate, but He is being clear that not everyone chooses this way.

While Matthew records the command of Jesus, John gives us the identification of the gate in John 10.

Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

John 10:7-10 (NIV)

Jesus does not merely stand beside the gate and point. He is the gate. He is the entrance. He is the way.

The narrow gate is our entrance into the kingdom of God through the person of Jesus.

3. A PATH to FOLLOW.

(Matthew 7:14. C/R: Jeremiah 6:16; Matthew 11:28-30; Luke 9:23-24)

"But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

Matthew 7:14 (NIV)

Jesus does not only speak of a gate to enter; He speaks of a way to walk.

That means Christianity is not merely a moment of decision; it is a manner of life. It is not less than a decision, but it is more than a decision. The gate is the entrance, but the road is discipleship.

You can usually see inside a gate before you enter. You would be able to tell the path after entering the gate, and that is what Jesus wants His followers to do: to count the cost before entering.

The narrow gate has a narrow and difficult path, but that path leads to life. The wide gate is an easy path but leads to destruction.

Now we need to be very clear: the narrow road does not purchase life. Christ alone is the basis of salvation. But the narrow road does lead to life because it is the road where saved people follow their King. The road is not the price of grace; it is the path grace puts us on.

And we do not have to guess what this narrow road looks like. Jesus has been describing it throughout the Sermon on the Mount. It is the road of poverty of spirit, mercy, purity of heart, reconciliation, truthfulness, love of our enemies, secret prayer, forgiveness, generosity, trust in the Father, and obedience from the heart.

It is the road where we learn to follow Jesus.

But Jesus is honest with us: this road is difficult. It is narrow. It is pressed in. It is not always crowded.

It is difficult, but not because Jesus is harsh. It is difficult because we are stubborn. It is difficult because our wounds and habits do not die quietly. It is difficult because obedience often means saying no to desires that feel natural and yes to commands that feel costly. It is difficult because sometimes the crowd is walking in the other direction.

And that matters, because crowds have a way of making roads feel safe. When many people are walking in the same direction, it feels normal.

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”

Luke 9:23b (NIV)

That is the narrow road. It is cross-shaped. It is daily. It is costly.

But it is also good.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)

The same Jesus who says the road is difficult also says, *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.* So how can the way be hard and His yoke be easy? Because the way is hard, but Jesus is not harsh. The road is costly, but Jesus is gentle and lowly in heart. The path presses against our sin, but Jesus gives rest to our souls.

ILL: Path with Children Camping

So do not misunderstand the narrow road. It is not lacking joy. It is not abusive. It is not misery for misery's sake. It is the road of discipleship filled with grace.

And we also need to be careful on the other side. Difficulty by itself does not prove you are on the narrow road. Not every hardship is persecution. Not every setback means you are in the center of God's will. Sometimes we suffer because we obeyed Jesus. Sometimes we suffer because we made foolish choices.

How do I know if the path I'm on is the narrow path? Is Jesus there?

And the reverse is also true: ease does not always mean blessing. A road can be smooth and still be leading you away from God. A choice can feel natural and still be forming you toward destruction. A crowd can approve of your direction and still be walking with you toward the wrong destination.

Jesus' going to the cross may feel as if it is the wrong choice because it is leading Jesus to physical harm, danger, and what feels like loss. Yet this is exactly the road that Jesus was called to walk.

So the question is not only, *Is this road difficult?* or *Is this road easy?*

The question is: *Am I following Jesus?*

JC, I'm just not sure if this is the right path or not. I think Jeremiah gives us some wisdom here:

This is what the LORD says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, 'We will not walk in it.'"

Jeremiah 6:16 (NIV)

But do not become paralyzed by indecision. Enter. Enter the right gate by faith in Jesus and learn to walk the narrow path.