

Two Gates and Two Paths

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Religions at their core, center on certain beliefs. Christianity at its core, centers on a person - Jesus Christ. Religious leaders say, "This is the way to eternal life." Jesus says, "I am the way to eternal life." In Matthew 7:13, Jesus says, "What about you? You've heard what my Kingdom is like and what my followers will look like. What are you going to do with what you've heard? It's time to make a decision about Me and My Kingdom! Which gate, which pathway will you choose – the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of this World?"

PURSUE RELATIONSHIP: *Connect and pray as a group*

1. What kind of road do you prefer to travel on? (a gravel scenic route? six-lane freeway? two-way highway?) Why is that your choice?
2. Tell of a time when have you had to make a difficult decision?

PURSUE GOD: *Time that is devoted to the Word of God*

Observation and Reflection

1. How would you describe the analogy that Jesus uses in Matthew 7:13-14? What challenges does the illustration present in understanding what He is saying?
2. Review the headings of Matthew 5 and 6. What difference in 'cost' is there between the narrow gate (Kingdom of God) and the wide gate (Kingdom of this world)?
3. How do Jesus' words (7:13-14) relate to Deut 30:19-20; Joshua 24:15 and I Kings 18:21?
4. How does cultivating a relationship with Jesus form a foundation for walking along the 'narrow road'? Why is this relationship essential? (See Luke 13:24-27 a parallel passage for comparison)

Application

1. The Australian editor wrote against Billy Graham arguing that he didn't need 'saving.' Have you interacted with people who feel the same way? Tell about that conversation. What next step could you have taken in that discussion? How can we make salvation 'winsome'?
2. Pray for people in your life who need to make a decision for the 'small gate and narrow road.' In what way can you encourage them to make that decision?

THE WORD (NIV)

Matthew 7:13,14

¹³"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Deut 30:19-20

¹⁹This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live²⁰ and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Joshua 24:15

¹⁵But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.

I Kings 18:21

²¹Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing.

Matthew 7:21-23

²¹"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' ²³Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

Someone wrote in response to Billy Graham's crusade in Australia in 1979: "I am heartily sick of the type of religion that insists my soul needs saving (whatever that means). I have never felt I was lost. Nor do I feel that I daily wallow in the mire of sin, although repetitive preaching insists that I do. Give me a practical religion that teaches gentleness and tolerance . . . that remembers the aged and teaches children of goodness and not sin." Many today are content to live their lives apart from God and have no concern about what God desires for them or expects from them. That is their choice.

Jesus, in Matthew 5&6 contrasts the Kingdom of God with the kingdom of this world and describes in detail what His followers will look like. Then he calls for a response. God calls for a decision from us and has done so throughout Scripture. (Deut 30:19, Joshua 24:15, 1 Kings 18:21) What about you? What are YOU going to do with what you've heard? He wraps up his sermon by calling for a choice between two gates and two pathways. (Matt 7:13-14) Many see no urgency to make a clear decision regarding Jesus (for or against), while others 'think' they have made a decision yet live as though much of what Jesus taught does not apply to them or is optional. However, to not make a decision is to have made a decision.

Let's look at the word picture Jesus gives us. Two gates and two paths that lead to two destinations. The first path and gate are wide – and lead to destruction. The other path and gate are small – and lead to life that is satisfying and fulfilling on earth. Both are open to everyone. Yet it is the narrow way that calls us to live a life that cuts against the grain of our culture and to die to our pride, desires and selfish ambitions. Because of this few are on it. But we have to make a decision for we cannot walk on two roads in different directions at the same time. We must choose.

The 'gate' image that Jesus used referred to the shepherds in his day. In the fields at night he would establish a shelter for the sheep for protection and to keep them from wandering off. The shepherd would lay across the entrance to it. He was the door, or gate, and to pass through meant passing over the shepherd. (John 10:9, 14:6) Jesus here was implying that He was the narrow gate. Hence, to enter the Kingdom of Heaven one had to go through Jesus. Today many feel the 'narrow gate' is intolerant and narrow-minded and look for another way. Another gate. Why, though, do people accept natural laws as fact, which by association are narrow – such as the law of gravity – yet feel there is wiggle room with the laws to do with the spiritual realm? God created both realms.

This being said, how do we enter the 'narrow gate'?

1. We have to believe that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life – the narrow gate and only way to eternal life.
2. It is a narrow gate and has room only for you and none of your sin, self-centeredness and regrets; you must repent of your sin and leave behind your old way of life. You are to make the invisible Christ visible for all to see and show through your lives that there is a better way to life.
3. We have to do it alone; the narrow way admits only one person at a time. You make the decision for yourself to put your faith in Jesus and following Him on the narrow path.
4. We need to count the cost (Matt 7:14). By taking this gate you are committing to walk the narrow path and make Him the direction of your life. You are asking Him to change you from the inside out by His Spirit in you and create within you His character and fruit and a hunger to know Him. It will cost you everything. There are only 2 gates. Many think there are 3. One is eternal life for those 'really committed' but it is hard. Another is hell for the 'really bad people'. And the third is for 'the decent folk' who, in the end, would still be accepted by God. Entering the Kingdom of God is not through being decent and trying, or by knowing the right stuff, but in trusting Jesus and cultivating a friendship with Him and making disciples. (Matt 7:21-22) It is more than just hearing and believing and acknowledging the truth of the gospel but entering into a relationship with Jesus and doing what He says. What we believe will be proved by what we do.

Is there anything that you are hanging on to that may prevent you from fully trusting Jesus and entering the narrow gate and doing what He calls us to do? Entering the narrow gate means you are committed to following and obeying Jesus on the narrow path, living the rest of your life doing what He tells you to do. The wide road not just leads to destruction and eternal separation from God, but robs us of the wonderful things God intended for us to experience and have in this life. (Luke 15 – Prodigal Son) This wide road, ultimately, is empty, aimless and dissatisfying. The narrow road may be harder but in the end it leads to abundant 'Sermon-on-the-Mount-kind-of' life. This road may have us say no to some things we want in life and may cause us to lose some opportunities. Yet if we are walking with Jesus on the narrow way we will not only feel His pleasure but we will enjoy His presence, peace and joy each day. We will discover that when all that we have left is God – He is enough.