

Choose the Narrow Road

As young & sometimes mischievous college students, we were always looking for the opportunity to have a good laugh. So we would pull our car up along side someone who was walking along, & ask: "Can you tell me if I am heading in the right direction?" They would naturally respond by asking: "Where are you going?" We would then say: "You are getting personal, aren't you? I didn't ask you where you are going?" That may, in fact be a personal question, but allow me the privilege of asking you this morning: "**Where are you headed & how do you plan to get there?**" In this case, I'm talking about **eternity!** Where do you hope to spend eternity & how do you plan to get there?

Most people would answer that question quickly by saying they plan to spend eternity in **Heaven!** If that is so, **how do you plan to get there?** How much thought have you given to eternity? Eternity is "forever!" What choices, what commitments, have you made to be assured that you will spend "forever" in God's eternal home? Are you moving in the right direction? Are you making the right choices along the way?

Life is full of choices, isn't it? Our lives are filled with decisions as to: what to wear; what to eat; where to go; what to do; what to say; what to buy; whom to marry; what career to follow; & on & on. **Every day we are confronted with choices!** Some choices are petty & minute; some choices have consequences that effect us for time & for eternity! The most critical of all choices is our decision about those matters pertaining to **eternity!** That is the ultimate choice we have to make, & **our eternal destiny depends on the choice we make!**

Jesus Christ calls our attention to this all important choice as He came to the end of His great Sermon, often called the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew's Gospel, chapters 5-7. Jesus concludes this great Sermon in the latter part of Matthew 7, by describing a **series of alternatives!** Listen again to what Jesus says in **Matthew 7:13 & 14.** "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, & broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, & many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, & narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, & few there be that find it."

Jesus tells us that we must choose which way we will go, for there are two gates, two roads, two groups of people, two destinations. The world may think there are three kinds of people: *good, bad & neutral*, but the Bible knows of only two kinds: the saved & the unsaved. The solemn truth unfolds before us that there are only two ways for humanity to choose: the way of the righteous & the way of the ungodly. Spiritually we are either *black or white*; there is no *gray*. There is no in-between; no debatable; there is not a "no man's land." We are either "in Christ" or "without Christ" -- travelers to **heaven**, or travelers to **ruin**. Let's examine what Jesus is saying to us today in these two verses: --

1. There is the Broad Road of Destruction.

Most people, Jesus says, journey on the road that requires **no commitment** to get through the gate, nor conviction of truth to stay the course. It's the **easy way** of the world where you give allegiance only to yourself, & do whatever satisfies your own fancy. And since it's the popular way to go, you need only follow the crowd.

Actually, this is the natural thing to do, the way all of us are born to travel. As the Psalmist says: "I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). **You do not have to curse God to be lost.** Just do nothing; keep drifting along the path of least resistance, & "**ignore**" the call of God to take the road that leads to eternal life.

The Hebrew writer asks an all important question: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation" (Hebrews 2:3). What we tend to overlook is that **neglect** is in itself a choice! And as with all decisions, there are consequences! After all, all roads lead to somewhere! It may be a dead end, but it is still somewhere.

If you plan to travel it's good to know your destination. It's imperative that you sit down, look at the map & decide on the best way to get to your destination. You would be foolish not to do so! You ought to have an "end" in mind, or you'll travel around aimlessly, in a clueless manner. Foolish indeed is the person who sets out on a journey & does not consider where it will end.

Jesus wants us to understand that the broad way "leads to destruction." Different translations describe this term "leads to destruction," with varying terms: "disaster" (Phillips); "ruin" (Weymouth); even "hell" (NLT). Jesus often spoke of hell as a place reserved for the eternal punishment of those who forget, or neglect God. Jesus likened hell to "darkness where there will be weeping & gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8:12), or as an endless torment of pain, & "the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48). Jesus is not trying to **scare us**; He is attempting to **warn us!** He simply wants us to know that everyone who continues on the road to **ruin** will someday face the day of reckoning with God.

It's hard for us to look ahead & consider the end of our journey. The **gusto** of the moment seems too much fun to take the time to think about the future. Yet, have you noticed as we get farther down the road the pleasures of sin become less exciting, & down deep in the soul there is a nagging, but persistent sense of loneliness; a yearning for true happiness that is **not** being satisfied. This unfulfilled desire breeds restlessness, & attempts to find fleshly remedies which only bring **more** despair.

You often see this in the lives of celebrities: After his last show in Las Vegas, at age 44, **Elvis Presley** was asked by a newspaper reporter: "Elvis, when you started out you said you wanted three things out of life: to be rich, to be famous, to be happy. **Are you happy?**" The king of rock & roll replied: "No, I'm not happy. I'm lonely as hell."

Remember **Marilyn Monroe**, the sex symbol of her day? She reveled in the adoration, the idolization, of her many fans. Finally coming to realize the meaningless of it all, reflecting on her career, she confessed to a reporter: "Fame will go by, & so long; I've always known it was fickle." Not long afterwards, Marilyn Monroe committed suicide.

Think about **Aristotle Onassis**, who through his business enterprises, became at one point the most wealthy man in the world. But in an interview after the death of his son, he said: "Until now I always believed that money could give a man everything he wanted in life. But now money means nothing. My own life has become pointless." Wiping tears from his eyes, the broken-hearted father could only say: "What now? -- What now?"

Yes, that **is** the question: "**What now?**" When the treasures we have lived for in this world have lost their luster, & the end of life's journey looms ahead, "what now?" The Bible clearly states: "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Are you ready for that day? Or is there in your soul an uncertainty, even a fear, of what lies ahead? **Don't you think that God has something better for you?**

2. So let's look at -- **The Narrow Road of Life.**

Thankfully, there is another way, a road less traveled, but a road that leads to a fully satisfying life; a life abounding with joy, a life overflowing in love that grows sweeter as the years go by. **Sounds wonderful, doesn't it?** But Jesus tells us that "strait is the gate & narrow the way that leads unto life, & few there be that find it."

We are led to believe that it is not politically correct to be out of step with the majority; sometimes called in ridicule, "narrow-minded." But I have come to realize that ridicule can be expected when we choose this narrow road of life.

For one thing, **it's narrow because Jesus is the only way.** "No one comes to the Father," Jesus said, except "by me" (John 14:6). He affirms: "I am the gate... All others who came before me were thieves & robbers" (John 10:7-8).

There are many religious leaders who claim devotion from their followers. But there is only **One** Who accepted in His body, the guilt of our sins, Who bore our judgment unto death, & then rose victoriously from the grave! The Resurrection of Jesus Christ confronts the world with a bewildering problem! For when someone dies who has power over the grave, you must ask, **why** did He die? The Bible gives the only answer: "He was handed over to die because of our sins, & He was raised from the dead to make us right with God" (Romans 4:25).

Facing this fact, everyone now must come to terms with the **crucified & risen Son of God**, for "there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). My friends, **Jesus Christ is Lord!** By Him alone can we enter through the **gate** into the Kingdom of God.

Also this gate is narrow **because to go this way we must repent.** Jesus came to call "sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32; Matt. 4:17). And He said, "Unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish" (Lk 13:3). **Repentance means a change of direction!** Seeing ourselves responsible for what happened at the Cross, in godly sorrow for our sins, with brokenness & remorse, we choose to leave the road that leads to destruction, & start to follow Jesus! We confess our sins, & resolve to **turn away from** everything displeasing to the Lord.

Furthermore, to go this narrow way, **we must believe in Christ!** Jesus says that everyone "who believes has eternal life" (John 3:15). "He that believeth **not** is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). So I ask you today: "**Do you believe?**"

Belief, as Jesus used the word, means far more than intellectual acceptance of His work & teachings. Saving faith is complete trust in Jesus Christ, impacting our whole personality, affirming His Word, embracing His love, & consenting to His plans for our life. Attempts to impose our will upon God are gone, & in its place comes a new quest, & a new desire to follow Jesus! **Such childlike devotion to Him is so liberating from our previous vain efforts to earn favor with God, that it's like being "born again"** (John 3:3).

That, my friends, is not hard to do; **It is a delight to do!!** When our two children were small, & I would greet them as they came home from school, they would run to me. I would pick them up & hug them until they would squeal with delight. They had no fear that I would let them fall, not even a thought of insecurity. For they knew that I loved them; I was their daddy, & in my arms they were perfectly safe. That kind of confidence is what makes belief in Christ so beautiful! Living by faith is simply resting in the arms of Jesus, & in that sweet assurance, giving all that we are, all that we hope to be, **to Him** Who loved us & gave Himself for us.

3. Now for my final point -- **It is Up to You to Make a Decision!**

There must be a decision! Which road you **choose** to travel in your journey of life involves a **choice!** One of my favorite preachers in years past was Dr. T.W. Willingham. He spoke at several events during my college years. Dr. Willingham made a statement in one of his sermons that provoked a negative response in my thinking at the time. He said: "**We are limited to one choice only.**" At the time I heard that I thought to myself, "I don't believe that." I reasoned: "I make many choices every day; I choose to get up in the morning; to eat breakfast; to go to class; to go to work; to drive my car; to spend money; & to retire at night."

But then I began to realize that **all of these choices are conditional.** I get up if I'm physically able; eat breakfast if I have the food, or

if someone prepares it for me; I go to work if I have a job; & drive my car if it functions; spend money if I have any, & there is something to buy I want & can afford it; & I go to bed at night if I'm still living. All physical, material, & natural choices are **conditional**, limited & hypothetical. **None are absolute**, final, sure & certain.

Dr. Willingham added: "**I can only choose my Master!**" This is the only free, unlimited, unrestricted, unconditional, absolute, & final choice I can make. So I finally agreed with Dr. Willingham's assertion: "One choice only! **I can only choose my Master!**"

Adam was endowed with this **one choice!** He was the first free creature. He was given the sovereign power to choose. You may say, "He had the choice of eating a certain fruit, or not." But it was not the fruit that was important. The choice was: "Will God be my Master, or will Satan? Will I obey God as my Lord or will I follow Satan as my ruler?"

Who, who will have my allegiance? To whom will I be loyal? To what person will I give my life? Will my influence be used for God, or for Satan? **There is but one real choice!** All others are secondary, limited, & problematic.

The spiritual choice of my Master shapes my character; it constructs my ideals; it selects my companions; it forges my habits; it decides my pleasures; it conditions my body; it affects my philosophy of life; & **finally it determines my eternal destiny!** This one all-important choice determines what **kingdom** I belong to: Christ's or Satan's. It determines whom I associate with; what goals I seek; what appetites I gratify; what instincts I follow; what desires I satisfy. **This one choice makes me either a love slave of Christ, or a bond slave of Satan!**

This one choice opens for you, two possible ways! Jesus gave us the description, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate & broad is the road that leads to destruction, & many enter through it. But small is the gate & narrow the road that leads to life, & only a few find it" (Matthew 7:13-14 NIV).

For you, which one shall it be? God's way or Satan's way? God's way is light; Satan's way is darkness. God's way is straight; Satan's way is crooked. God's way is right; Satan's way is wrong. God's way grows larger, freer, & happier. Satan's way grows smaller, tighter, & more painful. God's way leads to eternal life; Satan's way leads to everlasting death. God's way brings you to **Heaven**; Satan's way takes you to **hell**. **It all depends on the one choice! And it's up to you to make a decision.**

Conclusion: -- I have only been to San Antonio, TX once, & that was for a convention. I want to go there on vacation sometime. Being the history buff that I am, I want to once again visit the **Alamo**.

It was in that old Spanish Mission in the year of 1836, that a volunteer band of 182 patriots fought & died for what they believed. Surrounded for 13 days by the Mexican army, numbering 5,000 men, the Texans were under attack. During a lull in the bombardment, William B. Travis, the commander, called his men together & explained their hopeless military position, & that the only way to save themselves would be to surrender. However, there was the possibility that at night individuals might slip through the enemy lines, & he would understand if someone **chose** to leave.

Releasing his sword, placing its point to the earth, Travis walked in front of his battle weary men **until a line was drawn in the sand**. Then in a voice trembling with emotion, he said: "**Those prepared to give their lives in freedom's cause, come over to me.**" Without hesitation every man, save one, crossed that line. Jim Bowie, too sick to walk, asked that he be carried over on his cot.

In the early pre-dawn hours of March 6, 1836, with bugles sounding, columns of Mexican soldiers attacked from all directions. The Texans fought off the first attack, & the second, but the third assault breached the north wall, & the Mexican troops poured into the Alamo compound. In furious hand-to-hand combat, the Texans fought until every able bodied soldier had bathed the earth with his blood. Only a few women & children, & two Black slaves were spared.

That's why the cry, "**Remember the Alamo**" became the battle cry for Texas' independence. The line had been drawn, & now every person who lived in the territory had to choose which side they were on.

No longer could they be neutral! Everyone had to make a decision, to stand with Texas **or** with Mexico.

In an infinitely greater way, God has drawn a line across the conscience of every person. It's a line drawn with an old rugged Cross clearly depicting the choice each one of us has to make, to go with the crowd on the broad road, or take the narrow trail of the Cross & follow Jesus. You cannot have it both ways! What is your choice? Your decision?

My friends, there are no bargain counters; there is no neutral ground. Jesus said: "He that is not for me is against me" (Matt. 12:30). **We are free to make one choice only!** Joshua put the matter to Israel with the challenge: "Choose you this day whom you will serve," & he himself declared, "But as for me & my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). The people made their choice: "We will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:21).

Today Christ confronts you with His call! But Satan also is bidding for you. **You must make the one great choice! Give yourself to Christ, & He'll give Himself to you!** Then, & then only, can you have peace, freedom & happiness here, & be qualified for Heaven hereafter. So, **where are you headed, & how do you plan to get there?**