

Two Paths, One Choice
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Allen Power

Matthew 7:13-21,24-27

Opening discussion: **What are some examples of important choices you've made in life? Were there any that really caused you to agonize over which way to go?**

When we talk about times of decision and choice we often use the metaphor of a “fork in the road.” We stand at the point where two roads “diverge” (as Robert Frost wrote) and we cannot “travel both.”¹ In this morning's text Jesus places every person at the ETERNAL “fork in the road and demands a choice.

Big Idea: Three things are certain for every person: We all come into this world; we will all leave this world; and we will all make a choice that determines where we'll spend eternity. Let's look at this important conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount asking what it says; what it means; and how it should change us this week. We'll begin in chapter seven and verse thirteen as Jesus says...

Matthew 7:13–21 (ESV)

¹³ “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

- If people are living a “good life” it's often said they are “walking the...(what?)” In this text Jesus wasn't talking about “being good,” or “being disciplined,” or even “making good choices. **What WAS he describing? How did Jesus label the road signs to clearly show two destinations? The Romans used to say “all roads _____.” How has the world adapted that in reference to Heaven?**
- Have you ever gotten distracted not watching the signs and wound up in the lane farthest from the exit you're supposed to take and the lanes are packed with cars? That was the first

- thing that came to mind as I studied this text. You see the right exit but are swept past it in the mass of cars.
- But in Jesus' day there were not interstates. **How is this different from missing your exit? Would Jesus just let us mistakenly drive by?**
 - If we disregard the "road signs" we COULD take the wrong turn instead of the "narrow way." However, we won't miss it out of ignorance. Jesus gives everyone sufficient opportunity to stop and ponder the choice.
 - We live in world dominated by the "majority opinion." Everything is researched and success comes by going with what the majority thinks.
 - **What did Jesus say about following the majority?**
 - **In verse fourteen: Not only is the gate narrow, how is the road?**
 - In Luke's account of this sermon, he says in Luke 13:24 (ESV) "Strive to enter through the narrow door.
 - Jesus said you will have to "strive" to enter through the narrow door. When you make the choice to trust Him as Savior and Lord, the road won't be easy. Expect rocky terrain; twists and turns; and no detours.
 - Luke 13:24 continues: "For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."
 - Now wait a minute. Elsewhere in scripture we're told that it's God's will that ALL should be saved. **How can many seek to go through the narrow door and not be able to enter?**
 - Later in that passage in Luke 13, Jesus describes the Kingdom of Heaven as a feast. "But many of the people who were invited waited too long to respond; and, when they arrived at the banquet hall, it was too late and the door was shut (see Matt. 22:1–14; Luke 14:15–24)."²
 - Warren Wiersbe asks: "...why did they wait so long? The parable suggests several reasons. To begin with, salvation is not easy; the sinner must enter a narrow gate and walk a narrow way (Luke 13:24; also see 9:23ff). The world's crowd is on the easy way, the way that leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13–14), and it is much easier to walk with them. Another reason for their delay was their false sense of security."³

- An associate of mine used to pastor a large church in Santa Barbara, California. He said it was difficult to convince people to want to go to Heaven when they thought they already lived there!

Matthew Henry's commentary tells us:

*"It is true, we can neither go in, nor go on, without the assistance of divine grace; but it is as true, that grace is freely offered, and shall not be wanting to those that seek it, and submit to it. Conversion is hard work, but it is needful, and, blessed be God, it is not impossible if we strive, Lu. 13:24."*⁴

- **What restrictions would a "narrow gate" present? How many can go through it at once? How would a "narrow gate" influence your mode of transportation? How would it change what you take on the trip?**
- If the gate or door is narrow and the road is hard, you're limited in what you can take along with you. Illustration: Water bottles at TSA security.
- Here's an even better example: A burning building.
- **What kinds of things must we leave by the side of the road when we go through the "narrow gate" of faith in Christ?**
- Most in our class have already chosen the "narrow gate." What if you were about to go through that "narrow gate" and you realized your family and friends were way behind you on the road. **What would you do?**
- After we've chosen the "narrow gate" of trusting in Christ, we need to make sure we are "traffic directors" to urgently point others to the gate!
- Sadly, in Jesus' day and in ours, there are some "false" traffic directors trying to direct people to the way that leads to destruction. Verse fifteen:

¹⁵ "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut

down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

- Jesus doesn't leave any doubt who he's describing...false prophets.
- "Wolves in sheep's clothing." Some say this means disguised as sheep, others say as shepherds. Either way, they are still "wolves" whose only agenda is to fulfill their own greed and lust for money; power; and fame.
- **So, how do you spot a wolf? How did Jesus say we can spot them?**
- **Let's be very practical. What can you use to detect a false teacher who masquerades as the real deal?**
- Does the "fruit in their life" smell right; look right; taste right?
- If a hiker goes on the Appalachian Trail, they prepare to live off the land if necessary. Some things that look like healthy fruit and berries can kill you!
- **How do those outdoors people protect themselves from poison?**
- God has given us the ultimate guide to wild beasts and poisonous fruit: His word! If we know the word of God we can spot a fake when we see it.
- Truth be told, some of these "false prophets" aren't only fooling other people. They've fooled themselves into thinking they're saved. Verse twenty-one:

²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

- I'm always amazed at actors who are from another English speaking country like the UK or Australia who can speak with such a convincing accent that you'd think they were from Des Moines or Pittsburgh or even Atlanta. You hear them in an interview with their native accent and it's kind of shocking!
- Just because someone uses the right phrases and says them in the right way doesn't mean they are the real deal.

1 John 4:1 (ESV)

4 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

- Jesus gives us one final example of a relationship with Him rather than and eternity without Him.

Matthew 7:24–27 (ESV)

²⁴ “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

- We need the right way; the right teaching; and we need the right foundation.
- It’s easy to drive some stakes into the sand. It’s hard work to drill and chip away at rock. But when the storms of judgment come we need to only firm foundation: Jesus Himself.

Luke 6:47–48 (ESV)

⁴⁷ Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: ⁴⁸ he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.

So, What’s The Takeaway?

- Three things are certain for every person: We all come into this world; we will all leave this world; and we will all make a choice that determines where we’ll be when we leave. It’s either the narrow path that few people choose; or the broad path of going with the crowd. The world says “all roads lead to Heaven.” That’s a lie out of hell!
- Jesus said: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6 - ESV)

- Have you chosen the narrow way...the harder route of salvation through Christ? Most in our group have. Yet, I never want to assume that.
- For those of us who have chosen the correct gate and path, are we being traffic directors for those who are following us? Are we standing at that fork in the road and waving our arms to point them to the narrow gate?
- Are we being alert to false teachers who are really wolves in disguise?
- Are we spending so much time in God's word that we can spot them?
- Have we dug deeply into the bedrock of God's grace to secure our life?
- Remember, Jesus always calls the question: "Who do YOU say I am" and which path will you choose? Let's help people choose wisely.
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¹ The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost. <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173536>

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 226). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 226). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴ Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (p. 1645). Peabody: Hendrickson.