

Title: Two ways to live: Where are you going?
Text: Matthew 7.13-14
Theme: The narrowness of the gospel
Series: Matthew #42
Prop Stmt: It really matters whether or not you embrace who Jesus is and what he says.

Read Text:

Cathi and I need to get a new washing machine. The one we have is about 30 years old and while it works, it is complaining. In fact it has been complaining so much, that we are afraid that it is going to call it quits. So, I've been researching washing machines. I now know the difference between a top-loader and a front loader. I can talk cubic feet, energy savers, direct-drive motors and cycle-times. I can tell you the opinions on LG, Samsung, Whirlpool, GE and Kenmore. Over the last 6 weeks Cathi and I have investigated and/or talked with sales associates at ABC Warehouse, Sargent appliance, Home Depot, Lowes, Best Buy and Sears. But, we have not yet made the purchase. We know we need to, but, we haven't. Not yet.

For every basketball team there comes the first game. Practice jerseys are taken off and uniforms are put on. For every piano student, there comes the dreaded competition and the moment of performance. For every vocal student, there comes the audition. For every student, there comes the test. For every graduate, there comes the job interview. For every project manager there comes the time to test the result. For every dating relationship there comes the point of commitment. Shopping, researching, investigating, designing, planning, discussing, meetings, lists of pros and cons, and praying are all helpful, but there comes a point where you have to "fish or cut bait." It's go time.

I need to ask you a question. Will you give me the permission to ask you some things or challenge you with some things that you need to hear, but you may not want to hear? Will you let me prod you with some things that you need to consider, knowing that they will threaten where some of you are right now? I raise these questions because I want you to know that I know that what I am addressing this morning is really serious stuff. There are eternal implications to what you think and commit to about Christ. So, just so that you know up front, I am going to be calling you to make a commitment to Christ. I am going to be calling upon you to choose who you are going to follow with your life. And if you claim to have followed Christ, then I am going to call upon you to do what you and I should do every day, and that is renew that commitment.

We have come to that point in this sermon that Christ preached. Christ calls us to "man-up" and make a commitment. It's go-time. You have to do something about it. And this is where it gets uncomfortable. So, in case you have not figured this out yet, this sermon is going to be uncomfortable for some of you. I do not relish your uncomfortableness. I do care for your soul. I am willing for you to feel put upon, and put out at me, if it will cause you to look carefully at where you are with Christ. If you feel threatened, stretched,

challenged, convicted, pushed and loved, then I will know that I am accurately preaching this text.

Now, look at where these two verses are in this text. This statement is coming close to the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is now putting this right in front of the people and his point is very clear. If you are going to listen to the words of Jesus, you must know that you have to do something with what you hear. Jesus is going to confront you. Jesus is going to call you out. Jesus is going to define you. Jesus is going to label you. It does not matter how much you protest, "Don't label me!" Jesus does not play by your rules. He will label you, because you need to know what you really are so that you are motivated to do something about it. From the beginning of his ministry Jesus is drawing a line in the sand. You are either with him or against him. You are either following him, on HIS terms, or you are against him. No one is neutral about Christ. Jesus is the most polarizing person in the world. Any person who simply thinks that he was a good teacher does not understand what he actually taught.

So, here is what Jesus is saying at the end of this sermon. There are two ways to live: where are you going? (Two paths 13-14), who are you following? (Two teachers 15-20), what are you really? (Two professions 21-23), and what are you building your life on? (Two foundations 24-27). This morning we are going to look at the two paths to follow. You can stay on the path that you are already on, or follow Christ. It is a different path. Notice that the statement begins with a command that is followed by two reasons (each beginning with the word "for").

I. The Command - "Enter by the narrow gate"

Imagine that you are standing in front of a wall. There are two gates in the wall. The one is wide, and from what you can see just beyond the wall, the path looks easy, it is wide, smooth and flat. Furthermore, it looks fun. You also cannot help noticing that so many people are going through the wide gate that most do not even notice the narrow gate. In fact, if you hadn't heard this verse, you wouldn't have noticed it either. Beyond the narrow gate, the path is, well, it is sort of like the roads around here. There are quite a few potholes and stones. From what you can see, the path goes uphill. It looks rugged, even lonely at times. Every once in a while someone goes into the narrow gate and you wonder why. If all you knew was the appearance of the gates and the initial yards of the path, the decision would be easy. You would choose the wide gate and the easy path.

There are only two ways to live. There is the way of life and the way of death. This teaching by Christ would have been familiar to some in his audience because it would have sounded like Deut. 30.15, where God said to the nation of Israel, "*See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil*" You pick! Following me (submitting to my commands) is the way of life. Rebelling against me is the way of death. In Deut. 30.19 God said, "*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life...*" Later when the Israelites entered into the land of Canaan, they gathered as a nation near Shechem. Mount

Ebal was on the north and Mount Gerizim was on the south. Half of the tribes were on Mount Ebal and half of the tribes were on Mount Gerizim. The people on Mount Ebal represented those who would rebel against God and would be cursed, while the people on Mount Gerizim represented those who would submit to God's laws and be blessed. You were on either mountain. And that is the point that Jesus is making here.

You have to make a decision. You have to do something. Listening to the words of Jesus, investigating the claims of Christ, studying the Bible are all helpful to a point, but those things alone will not rescue your soul from judgment. You must make a decision. I have counseled plenty of people who have no problem talking about their problem. What they have a problem with is actually doing something about it. In fact, sometimes people have said to others, "Oh I'm talking to Bob about that." I'm seeing a counselor for that." Listen, if I was a counselor who charged \$150 per session, you can come and talk to me three times a day if you want. But, seriously, just talking about it does not mean a thing. What are you doing about it is the real issue?

I noticed something that was out of order this week and I asked one of the staff about it and he said, "We're on that." So I asked, "What exactly does that mean?" And he said, "I talked to so and so and he is working on it." I thought, well, that is a little better, but I kept pushing. "When was the last time you talked to so and so and how do you know he is working on it?" And he said, "Well, now that you mentioned it, it's been a few months."

Talking about it and even talking about talking about it, is no substitute for actually doing something about it. This is the same sort of thing that can happen in a worship service. You can sit here and listen and listen and contemplate and consider. But, once a month we observe communion. Communion is like a "come to Jesus moment." Here is the tray. The person next to you is holding it for you. Are you in? Are you going to take the bread and thus say, "I believe that Jesus lived on this earth in my place and had his body broken on a cross as the substitutionary payment for my sin." Do you believe that? Are you going to take the cup and thus say, "I believe that Jesus died a violent death and poured out his blood in death because my sin is so hideous that it required a hideous sacrifice for me." Are you in? Are you living now in a way that reflects this profession? If your co-workers showed up in church on that day and they sat next to you when the bread and cup came your way, what would you do? You have to decide whose side you are on. By the way, never just do something because everyone else is doing it. If you do not believe it, do not pretend that you do. If you do not believe the truths that we sing, do not sing them as if you do. But, if you have not committed your life to Christ, you can get into a rhythm of attending and observing. Communion, rightfully understood, messes you up.

This is one of the reasons why church discipline is a gift to the church. When someone that we love is living in rebellion to God we are confronted with a decision. Whose side are we on? Are we willing to agree with what Christ says we should do, or are we going to pretend that it does not really matter? But, some protest, that divides the church. Is that what Jesus is doing here? Is he actually dividing people?

Jesus is not dividing people up. Jesus is pointing out that people are already divided up. There are two groups, two ways, two types, and two foundations. Jesus is just putting labels on what is already there. This is what gets him into so much trouble because there are so many people who really do not want to hear the truth. They want to be told that they can live on the easy road and not end up in destruction. But Jesus is clear. The wide gate and the easy way lead to destruction.

A. Reason #1 (13b)

The reason that Jesus wants you to enter the narrow gate and choose the hard path is because he does not want you to waste your life and be lost for eternity. By the way, I do not want you to get too lost in the imagery that Jesus is using here. This illustration of a gate and a path is actually two examples that are teaching the same thing. The wide gate and the easy road refer to the path that most clearly appeals to our human nature. For many, that path is the path of least resistance. It is the path of irresponsibility. It is the path of no consequences. It is the path of making my own rules and living however I want. That is easy to preach about and expose. I can make a convincing case for why going down that path is so devastating.

But it is also the path of respectability, success and acclaim. There are many people who choose to live very disciplined lives; even hard lives because discipline and sacrifice gain them the respect that they so desperately crave. That is why the wide gate and easy road is full of religious zealots, teachers, and ministry leaders, not just party animals. There are people who fast, pray, give and do righteous deeds on the wide road. The wide gate and easy road is the road that follows your own desires and lives for yourself, even if you are using humanitarian deeds as a cover for your self-driven desires.

B. Reason #2 (14)

The narrow gate and hard way leads to life. If you do not know this, you will learn it soon in our study of Matthew's gospel. What Jesus teaches is often counter-intuitive. Again, imagine that you are standing in front of a wall. There are two gates in the wall. The one is wide, and from what you can see just beyond the wall, the path looks easy, it is wide, smooth and flat. Furthermore, it looks fun. You also cannot help noticing that so many people are going through the wide gate that most do not even notice the narrow gate. In fact, if you hadn't heard this verse, you wouldn't have noticed it either. Beyond the narrow gate, from what you can see, the path goes uphill. It looks rugged, even lonely at times. Every once in a while someone goes into the narrow gate and you wonder why. If all you had to go on was the appearance of the gates and the initial yards of the path, the decision would be easy. You would choose the wide gate and the easy path.

From where you are standing, you cannot see too far down the path. But, a tour guide approaches you, so you ask. Where do these two paths lead? He answers, "When you are walking along the wide path, suddenly without warning, the entire road collapses and everyone on the path falls into hell. However, while you are walking along the narrow path, suddenly without warning, you are transported to heaven."

At this point in the ministry of Christ, he has not yet explained to his disciples what it means to become a Christian. We know now, that entering the narrow gate is not a matter of choosing to live a disciplined life in order to earn the approval of God. In fact, what makes the gate so narrow is that you have to admit that you cannot do anything to earn the approval of God. It is as if the gate is not only narrow, it is small, so that only the lowly, the humble and the broken can enter. Later on we discover that Christ calls us to follow him, which means that our first step is a step of faith. We believe Christ. We trust in Christ as the One who died for us and paid for our sins by his death on the cross. We know that now. But, right here in Matthew 7, Jesus is already putting his disciples and the crowds on notice. My way is not an easy way. If you want your best life now, then pick the wide road. True followers of Christ will face adversity. They will face persecution. They will face hardships because they are following someone that the world hates.

So, right here at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus makes it clear that his way is not for everyone and that everyone is not on his path. You have to make a choice. And while the choice may appear to be between the easy way and the hard way, in reality it is between heaven and hell. Jesus wants you to live.

II. The Application

A. Can I follow Christ and be popular?

Probably not. So, parents, how does this influence the type of counsel you give and the conversations you have your kids?

B Can I follow Christ and have an easy life?

Probably not. Following Christ means that we are following One who was rejected and executed by this world. What kind of a response should we expect? Perhaps it is helpful to know, according to Al Mohler, 100 million Christians have been killed in this century alone. We are living in a time of the most intense persecution of Christians that the world has ever known. We do not experience it, here, yet. It is probably coming. So, when we share the gospel with people, we must tell people the entire story as Jesus did. There is no fine print. He concludes this message with clear explanations of the cost. You need to be informed. Following Christ is a hard road. But, while we may not have an easy road, we have a good road.

C Can I follow Christ and go to hell?

Absolutely not! A genuine follower of Christ will not fall away from Christ and stay away.

Popular idea: I will go the easy road and find out if all of the warnings are really true. Then, when I am ready, I will stop in the middle of the road, do a U-turn and head the other way.

To illustrate this... Charlein Hutek was on vacation with parents. Her Dad, not real good with maps and directions, got into the wrong lane in Philadelphia and could not get out and ended up in New Jersey. He figured out, when it was too late, that he was in the wrong lane and there was nothing that he could do about it and ended up going where did not want to go. But, here is the difference. He knew that he was the wrong road and he could not change. If you choose to stay on the wrong road, you will most likely get to the point where you won't care. You won't be able change directions because you will have no desire to change directions.

You are standing in front of a wall. There are two gates in the wall. The one is wide, and from what you can see just beyond the wall, the path looks easy, it is wide, smooth and flat. Furthermore, it looks fun. You also cannot help noticing that so many people are going through the wide gate that most do not even notice the narrow gate. Beyond the narrow gate, the path goes uphill. It looks rugged, even lonely at times. It is not an easy path, but it is a good one. What is your choice?