

The Way of Life

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[0 : 00] Well, we come now to our Bible reading, so please do take up your Bibles, and you'll find that in the New Testament book of Matthew. That's on page 812 of our church Bibles.

I'm delighted to say that Edward Lobb will be preaching to us from this passage later in the service. And we're in Matthew chapter 7, and Edward will be focusing on verse 13 and 14, but it'll be good to get a bit of context. So let's start our reading at Matthew 7, verse 1.

Hear the word of the Lord. This is the words of the Lord Jesus speaking. Judge not that you be not judged, for with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye, when there is the log in your own eye?

You hypocrite. First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Do not give to dogs what is holy, and do not throw your perils before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.

[1 : 29] Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds.

And to the one who knocks, it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father, who is in heaven, give good things to those who ask him?

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them. For this is the law and the prophets. 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. For the gate is narrow, and the way is hard that leads to life.

[2 : 36] And those who find it are few. Well, amen, and may God bless to us this, his word. Well, good morning, friends.

Can we turn together to Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 7, which you'll find on page 812 in our Bibles. It's always a help to have the actual words in front of us, and then you can see them for yourself. But I'll read them out clearly as well. Matthew, Chapter 7. And I'll be reading in a moment verses 13 and 14. Now, my title for this morning is The Way to Life.

The Way to Life. And I want to speak on this very short section of the teaching of Jesus. In these words, the Lord Jesus is addressing the world.

In other words, he's speaking to every one of us. He says, Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide, and the way is easy that leads to destruction.

[3 : 41] And those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow, and the way is hard that leads to life. And those who find it are few.

How do you see there that Jesus is saying to us, Make sure that you find the way to life, to eternal life. Because many people don't. Many people take the easy way, which leads to destruction.

But he says, Fewer are the ones who find the way to life. I don't know whether you've read The Pilgrim's Progress, written by John Bunyan in the 17th century.

For a long time, it was the most popular book in the English language, after the Bible itself. And in the opening scene, the author has a dream. The whole book is really cast in the form of a dream.

But in his dream, at the very beginning, he sees a poor, ragged man. And this ragged man is in great distress. The man is reading a Bible. And as he reads it, he cries out, What shall I do?

[4 : 44] But immediately afterwards, he meets another man. And this other man is called Evangelist. And Evangelist points with his finger. And he says to the ragged man, Do you see a wicked gate over there?

The man says, No. So Evangelist then says to him, Well, do you see a shining light? The ragged man says, I think I do. So Evangelist says to him, Follow that light, and you will then see the gate. Knock there, and you'll be told what to do. And at that moment, the ragged man broke into a run. And as he runs on, he cries out, Life! Life! Eternal life!

And he keeps on running. And he never stops to look behind him. Now Bunyan means us to understand that the ragged, broken man is a picture of every man.

And every man and every woman, Bunyan is saying, needs to find the narrow gate. And needs to go through that narrow gate because it leads to eternal life.

[5 : 52] Now why does Jesus say these things? He says them because he loves the broken, ragged world and its broken, ragged people. Let's be clear about two things.

These words are addressed to the world. They're addressed to everybody. Sometimes a person will say, Well, I'm not religious. These things surely can't be for me. But Jesus doesn't recognize categories like religious or non-religious.

He's only interested in people. In fact, he once said, I didn't come for the righteous. I came for sinners. Which is a great relief to me because I'm a sinner.

It means that he came for me. These words are for everybody. Don't hide from them. Because they're the best news in the world. But secondly, let's be clear that Jesus came to the world as savior.

And that means that he came to rescue those who are under sentence of death, which is all of us by nature. Here's a comparison, if you like. If you were traveling by ferry from Stranraer to Northern Ireland, and if you were to fall off the ship into the sea, at that moment, you don't need an instruction manual on how to swim the breaststroke.

[7 : 09] You need to be plucked out of the water immediately. What you need is rescue. Now, Jesus came as the rescuer. He didn't come just to give advice on how to love other people.

He didn't come just to model a mature and well-rounded human existence. No, he came to save lost men and women, to save all of us from destruction, and to bring us to eternal life.

If you're not yet saved by him, there is nothing you need more than to be saved by him. You don't need more money. You don't need better health.

You don't need better housing. What you need is to be saved for eternal life. And let's never mistake Jesus's motives. He loves us, and he's shown us how much he loves us by dying for us. He died to bear the deserved penalty of our sins. He died in our place. He had to pay the ultimate price so as to secure our salvation.

[8 : 08] As he said himself, greater love has no man than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends. And that's what he has done for you and for me.

Now, let's look carefully at these words of Jesus. 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.

For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few. Let's notice four things here.

The two gates, the two roads, the two crowds, and the two destinations. It's quite plain and clear. Two gates. One is narrow and small.

The other is wide. Two roads. The first one is narrow. The second one is broad. Two crowds. One, a big crowd. The other, a small crowd.

[9 : 08] And two destinations. To use Jesus' words, not mine but his, one is destruction, and the other, life. First, then, the two gates.

Jesus is asking us to think of a large crowd of people. Just imagine being in that large crowd of people. We're all out together. We're walking in the countryside, dozens of us.

We're enjoying our walk. We're chatting as we walk along, looking at everything around us.

Suddenly, there is a big gate in front of us. It's the obvious way forward.

And we're just starting to move through this big gate. When somebody speaks up and says, are you quite sure this is the right way? There's another gate, just up the hill there a little way.

And people peer to where the man is pointing. And they say, where is it? He says, over there. And they say, what? That little stile leading up the steep hill?

[10:06] Nobody's been over that for ages. There's hardly a sign of human footprints anywhere. This is the gate to go through here. This big one. It's absolutely packed hard by countless human feet.

There must have been hundreds passing this way only today. Well, what is the meaning of this narrow, small gate? Let's allow Jesus himself to answer that question.

He says in John's gospel, I am the door or the gate. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved. Jesus is saying that eternal life can only be reached via him.

And you can begin to see why he calls this gate narrow. A lot of people today would use that word narrow. They'd say, that's a very narrow approach, isn't it?

To say that eternal life can only be reached via Jesus. Is God so narrow minded that he will only accept people who come via Jesus? Surely God is more accommodating.

[11:11] But Jesus says, enter by the narrow gate. He also says in John's gospel, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except by me.

He doesn't deny that there's a broader approach or a wider gate, but he makes it quite clear that the wider gate does not lead to eternal life. Enter by the narrow gate, he says.

Let's move now from the two gates to the two roads. One road is broad and wide and easy. It's the obvious way. It's the way that most other people seem to choose.

It's comfortable. But the other road is narrow. It looks difficult. It is difficult. It goes uphill where the wind blows sharper and colder.

And as you stand there looking at the two gates, trying to make up your mind which one to go through, you know very well which road is going to be harder. You can see that the narrow road will be more tiring.

[12:16] It's going to make demands on you which the broad and easy road never will. And you shrink from it. Well, of course you do. Who naturally chooses a difficult course when an easier course is available?

Let me try and describe some of the features of the narrow road. It's narrow in the sense that you can't think and do exactly as you please. Now, there are no boundaries on the broad road.

The broad road is so broad that you can believe and behave exactly as you want to and hardly anybody is going to raise an eyebrow. But God sets some pretty narrow limits, precise limits to the narrow road.

Those limits are summed up in the Ten Commandments. So, for example, God says, If you're going to walk the narrow road with me, you shall have no other gods besides me.

I am to be your chief joy and delight. And therefore, if your life is built around some pursuit or activity which dominates your thinking, your plans and your daydreams, that is your God.

[13:20] That is your idol. There's only room for one God on the narrow road. The narrow road is not wide enough to accommodate other gods. God also says in the Ten Commandments, You shall not steal.

I'm just picking out one or two examples of them. It's one of the limitations of the narrow road. So it means that if we're to walk the narrow road, we must be scrupulously honest in all our money matters.

We're not at liberty to steal from the government by failing to declare some of our earnings to the taxman. We're not at liberty to steal from our employers by working short hours.

There's no room on the narrow road for any kind of financial fiddling. It is a hard road. Then God says, You shall not commit adultery.

On the broad road, there is room for any and every kind of sexual immorality and marital infidelity. But God says that such behavior is incompatible with being a follower of Jesus, a person destined for eternal life.

[14:24] Now this road, this narrow road, is a good road. It is a happy road, but it is narrow. Or think of the tenth commandment, which says that covetousness, the greed for possessions, is incompatible with the narrow road.

And yet our country, our whole western civilization, has become intoxicated with possessions. We see somebody else's car or house, or kitchen equipment, or electronic gadget, and we feel that we simply must have it.

Now there's all the room in the world for covetousness and greed on the broad road. But the narrow road is tough. It's tough in other respects as well.

It requires courage and self-discipline. It takes courage to be a Christian in today's world, because being a secret or private Christian is simply impossible.

In the four gospels, whenever Jesus called a person to follow him, he called those people publicly. He did so because he wanted them to get used to the idea that their role now was to bring a message to the world, to be public.

[15:32] You can't do that if you hide your light under a bushel. It is a public business. In fact, Jesus says, if anyone is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will I be ashamed when I return in glory.

To become a Christian, to walk the narrow road, may involve losing certain friends. It may involve straining certain relationships in your family or your place of work.

And it requires self-discipline to walk the narrow road. When you become a Christian, you join the church. Now the Lord's family, the Christian church, is a wonderful family.

One of the great joys of being a Christian is the people who become your brothers and sisters, your good friends. But belonging to this family makes certain demands on your time and energy because you become a servant of the family.

You need to meet with the family regularly and take on certain responsibilities. You learn to become more of a giver than a receiver. Now we need to bear all these things in mind as we stand thoughtfully in front of the two gates.

[16:47] The gates are only a beginning. We've got to reckon on the kind of road that lies beyond them. Going through the gate is done in just a moment, but the journey along the road lasts a lifetime.

So it won't help us if we rush to the narrow gate without carefully considering the narrow road that lies beyond it. There are many folk who once made an ill-considered beginning.

People who said, yes, Jesus is for me. But they never stopped first to consider that belonging to Jesus means walking a hard road. One Christian writer once put it like this, anyone with moral anemia should steer clear of the Christian church.

We have to ask ourselves whether we want to pay the price of going up the hard road. It can be a steep price. To have the Ten Commandments as a serious lifelong part of your mental furniture is difficult.

Jesus himself always faced would-be followers with the hard facts of the narrow road. There was one time when a man ran up to him enthusiastically and said to him, I will follow you wherever you go.

[18:00] Now what would you have said to that man if you'd been Jesus? I think I would have said to him, my dear fellow, that's absolutely marvelous. You're just the type I'm looking for. Adventurous and bold. But Jesus said something quite different to that man.

He said, foxes have holes and the birds of the air have their nests. But the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. In other words, do you realize what you're saying, man?

Have you considered the difficulties? The little foxes, they have a comfortable earth to go back to when they're tired. The birds have their nests. But I have no security, no place to lay my head.

So if you follow me, you might have to go anywhere and do anything. If the master has few comforts, his followers can expect no better. The Christian life is a narrow road and I'm deliberately emphasizing the narrowness of it this morning.

There is another side to this, of course. There is a great deal that could be said about the joy of following Christ, about the sheer adventure of it, the delight, the real delight of learning the ways of Jesus and getting to know him, the support of the Lord's family, the pleasures, the pleasures of living with the Ten Commandments, which were not given by God to burden us, but to liberate us and to make us fully human and happy.

[19:22] But that's a theme for another day. It's not what these two verses from Matthew's Gospel are emphasizing. So we have a choice of roads.

One is easy. It makes few demands upon us and there are plenty of fellow travelers upon it. The other road is hard. It's just as hard when you've been on it for many years as when you first set out. In fact, in some ways, it gets harder as we grow older. People sometimes say that Christianity is a form of escapism, a way of opting out of life's difficulties and trials.

I've heard people say, your Christian faith, it's just a crutch, something to lean on, to ease you through the difficulties of life. Karl Marx described it as the opium of the people, a drug that deadens

the pain of life.

But anybody who's been a Christian for any length of time knows how false those accusations are. Jesus says, it is a hard road. And let's be under no illusions.

[20 : 26] It is. Let's look thirdly now at the two destinations. The wide gate issues onto the broad road.

It's easy to go through that gate and it costs us little to go along the road. But where does it lead to? Jesus says, and it's not I that say this, it's the Lord Jesus, he says these awesome words, the way is easy that leads to destruction.

And this truth, unpalatable as it may be to the modern Western mind, is one of those truths that is repeatedly emphasized, not only in the teaching of Jesus, but in the Old Testament and in the writings of the apostles in the later part of the New Testament.

Now let me anticipate a question that some people may be thinking. You may be thinking, but how could God send anybody to destruction or hell if he's a loving God?

Well, Jesus does warn us in other parts of the Gospels that God indeed has the power to send people to hell and will use it. But in these verses, Jesus is putting the matter in a different light.

[21 : 39] He's speaking here not of God sending, but of people going to destruction. The whole point of these two verses is that Jesus is presenting us with a choice that we must make.

The responsibility rests fair and square upon our shoulders. He is saying to all of us, enter by the narrow gate. I'm inviting you, I'm commanding you, because I love you.

There is another gate, but be warned, it leads to destruction. Now, he couldn't possibly speak to us like that unless we had the capacity to make our own choice.

It is our responsibility. The two gates lie before us. If we deliberately go through the wide gate and down the broad road, we have only ourselves to blame when we end up in destruction.

Does God want any of us to go there to choose that road? Of course not. Nothing grieves him more than to know that anybody should choose that way.

[22 : 40] It was precisely to save people from that terrible destination that he sent Jesus into the world to be the narrow door that leads to life. Jesus is the way of escape from destruction.

I'm sure you know those famous words from John's Gospel, that God so loved the world that he gave his only son, he gave him up to sacrifice, so that whoever believes in him should not perish, go to destruction, it's the same thing, but have eternal life.

Anyone can be on the road to life in just a moment if he will choose to enter the narrow gate. It's a warning. It's a warning from the God who cares so deeply about us.

We warn our children when they're in danger, don't we? And we warn them because we love them.

We'd say to a little boy, a little son, don't run into the road, Johnny, it's dangerous. Or we might say to a little girl, don't put your finger in that electric socket, Samantha, it'll be bad for you.

It's because we love our children that we warn them of danger. And it's because Jesus loves us that he warns us against choosing the wrong road, against choosing to go to destruction.

[23 : 57] What then is this destruction? Well, Jesus doesn't go into great detail in his teaching about what it's like. He speaks in other passages of it being a place of torment, a place of outer darkness where men weep and grind their teeth.

But if you think about that word destruction, you can see how it's the very opposite of God's characteristic activity because God is the creator. He has made us so that we should live and blossom and rejoice and inherit eternal life.

Destruction is the opposite of creation. It's the end of everything good. It's the final snuffing out of all peace and delight and hope. Do you want to choose that?

What is the other destination then? The other destination is life. The narrow road leads to life.

And by that, Jesus means eternal life. Now, of course, to be a Christian greatly affects our life in this world. Greatly. But the goal of the Bible gospel is beyond this world.

[25 : 05] Jesus came with the promise of eternal life for all who turn to him. He says elsewhere, I came that people should have life and have it in all its fullness.

It's eternity he has in mind. He's not just talking about life in Glasgow in 2019. He says, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, even though he dies, will live forever.

He said, I'm the bread of life. Whoever eats this bread will never be hungry again. To come to Jesus is to be put back in touch with the source of our life.

A person without Jesus Christ is rather like a plant locked up in a dark cupboard. The plant is cut off from the sun. It's dying fast. It's drooping and pale and sickly.

But when you bring it out of the dark into the sunshine, it recovers. It becomes beautiful. It's restored. It bursts into flower. That's what happens when a person goes through the narrow gate.

[26 : 09] Life begins to return. It may take time before that person grows into strength and maturity. But immediately, that person is on the road to eternal life.

Because now, that man or woman belongs to Jesus. And Jesus is life. Then finally, let's notice the two crowds.

There's not much to be said about them except to notice the sad fact that it's a large crowd. Many, is Jesus' word, that goes through the wide gate.

And a small number, few, he says, that enters the narrow gate. Why should there be so many for destruction and so few for life?

Isn't the answer that people compare the two roads rather than the two destinations? They say, this road looks easy. That one looks tough.

[27 : 07] So I'll take this one. But is it worth it? Is it really worth choosing a few years of sin and self-centeredness followed by an eternity of destruction when we can choose a few years of the toughness of the Christian life followed by eternal life and joy with the Lord?

Which is the better choice? Isn't it obvious? But, says Jesus, few people make that better choice. The majority choose the easy road and its destination.

One of the striking things about these words is that Jesus presents the world with two alternatives. There's no third. There are two gates, two roads, two crowds, two destinations.

There's no mention of a third. We deceive ourselves if we think there might be some third category. So let me say this, friends. If you're on the broad road now, it is not too late to change course.

Even well on into life, it is not too late to change course. A window of opportunity remains. Turn around. Leave the crowd. Go to the narrow gate and knock.

[28 : 23] It will be open to you. You won't be refused entry. Jesus died that your sin should be forgiven. These words come to us because he loves us.

Enter by the narrow gate. The gate is narrow. The way is hard. But it leads to life. Let's bow our heads and we'll pray.

Dear God, our Father, we thank you that it was your love for the world that lay behind the sending of Jesus, that he should offer himself as a sacrifice for our sins and pay the penalty for them so that the gate of eternal life should be opened to us.

Have mercy upon us, dear Heavenly Father. To those of us who are walking the narrow way, bless us and confirm us in it, we pray, and keep us steady and secure.

For any who are not, we pray that you will call to them lovingly and mercifully and give them the courage and the grace to come to you and to find the joy of eternal life in your presence.

[29 : 45] We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.