

Two Ways to Live

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[0 : 0 0] Now, if you do have a Bible with you, please open it at the Gospel of Matthew, the first of the gospels in the New Testament, and to chapter 7 where our reading was taken from.

And this is coming towards the end of the Sermon on the Mount, the great and famous sermon that Jesus preached and that's recorded for us in Matthew's gospel.

Now, someone has quoted, I'm not going to quote them directly, but there's a quote that speaks about the Bible being simple enough for a child to paddle in, like a river or like a body of water, that's simple enough for a child to paddle in, but deep enough for an elephant to swim. And I think that was Gregory the Great or Augustine or C.S. Lewis, they probably all quoted one another. I've got all these books by my bedside and read them so regularly, I can't quite remember. But it's a really true and interesting analogy of the Bible because there's great simplicity in what Matthew says, but the longer I go on and the older I get, I'm tempted to say, I feel like an elephant. But that's not really what I mean. I just mean there's great depth to his word as well. And we really, we pray for his Holy Spirit to help us see both the tremendous depth and richness and beauty from this passage, as well as the simplicity. And I hope that by God's help today that we can have both of these elements as we look at the passage. Because the sermon really that

Jesus preaches here is highlighting, if we break it down and analyze it, two ways to live, two different ways of living. We're told at the beginning of the sermon that it was addressed to his disciples. He called his disciples together and he was speaking to them. But as he did so, lots of crowds gathered round and listened to what he was saying as well. And therefore, Jesus is speaking both to believers but also to anyone who will listen and he addresses them also throughout this sermon. And he's really making clear the difference between being a disciple and not being a disciple, being a follower, not being a follower. What it means to live with Jesus in our heart, to live as those who trust in Jesus and those who don't trust in Jesus. And we come to this passage and the end of the section we read is the beginning of the conclusion. Like any good conclusion, it doesn't introduce new material but it summarizes really what he's saying. So in verses 13 and 14, the last two verses that we read, Jesus is saying, enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction. Those who enter it by are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few. And he's making comparisons and he's using illustrations to picture the two ways to live, hear it's a narrow way and a broad way. And then Thomas next Sunday morning when he looks at this remaining few verses, we'll see there's a tree with good fruit and bad fruit or two builders, a wise builder and a foolish builder, very famous passage or a famous illustration with which to end the sermon. And he's really just summarizing very powerfully what he's been saying right through the sermon and it's startling. Like all that Jesus says, it's startling, powerful, authoritative and unexpected. And what he says here is as realistic as it is unexpected in many ways. And we're going to take a look at that this morning. He says that life without Him, life without Jesus, life without God is like living on a broad, a broad road, like walking on a broad road. Enter by the narrow gate, it says, for the gate is wide or broad and the way is easy that leads to destruction. So he's using this illustration and it's not what we would expect in many ways. He uses this, a good picture to describe life without God. He says it's like walking on a broad and a spacious road.

It's an attractive picture really and it's contrasting the narrowness that we'll look at in a little while. In other words, he's saying it's kind of like an easy decision to walk on this broad road. It seems such a great place to be and it's so open-minded.

[5 : 19] There's lots of people, it's a lovely road to be on, it's flexible and easy. You know, it doesn't require a lot of effort in many ways and much work or much forethought because everyone seems to be on this way and we just need to follow the crowd and do what they're doing in order to just carry on living. There's not that many parameters. There's plenty space for everyone and it seems a freeing and a broad and an easy way to live. You know, as long as there's so much room, people don't get in my way and I don't get in other people's way and don't hurt other people then, it's great. Along this way we can discuss philosophy and science and we can learn from the experience of our fellow travelers about what is meaningful and what is truth and we can all chip in on this great broad road. It's hugely inclusive and the unknown, where the road leads, well, maybe that's for another day. And Jesus, as

He goes through the sermon, kind of pinpoints and highlights some of these things. He even says that, you know, I could be religious on this road, on my own terms, you know, I'll do my best and I can believe in the kind of God who will accept me for doing my best, you know. I'm as good as other people around me and that will be good enough for the God I believe in. And there'll be other people on this road who think differently. There'll be weird people and crazy folk, people who do bad stuff, fanatics. But the road is broad, the road is broad enough to accept all of us and I can avoid these people. I can even kind of mock them and laugh them a little bit from a distance and it would be good if they were on a different road but, you know, that's life and I'll just ignore them. But on this broad road there's a general consensus about the direction we're going and what is important to us, you know, we all want to work to a greater or lesser degree. We want to earn money, we want to go on holidays, we want to eat nice stuff and we want to wear good clothes and we want to be healthy. That's what life's about. That's the kind of things we'll talk about on the road. That's what we care about. That's what we're worried about. We want to be looking good and living good. We want to walk on this road with our friends, with our family, loving life and life as we understand it. That's the journey, isn't it? You know, we don't need to be too hard on ourselves. We don't need to think too much. We don't need to be hemmed in. It's an easy road, this broad road. The God of the Bible, he's just a pain. And really, that's what Jesus is trying to highlight is the thinking of many, many people in his own day and throughout history. That's really what the Sermon is all about. He's highlighting the two different ways to live. And he's giving this accurate picture of what he knows is in people's minds. That without God, life is a broad way and it's an easy road in many ways. Do you find that an accurate picture? Is it an accurate picture of the way many people think with regard to God or not having God in life?

Because then he goes on to speak about life with Christ, being a narrow way. Because again, he's speaking in the Sermon about being disciples, about being followers, and about his standards and his reality. Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life. Man, that's an ugly word Jesus uses, narrow. It's an ugly word for us, certainly. There's an air of exclusivity about it. You know, when we talk about people who are narrow-minded, it's a negative thing. And although he doesn't say it here, and we're going to speak about this a little bit more later, he is himself the narrow way. And he is the gate, and John 10, which we looked at last week, he speaks about being the gate, and John 14 speaks about being the way. We're going to look at them a bit more later. But he's basically pointing forward to his life and his death and resurrection, which we talked about with the kids, as being this narrow way. And living for God as a believer is hard.

The word he uses, word comes from a word that means crushing, almost claustrophobic. It's the same word that's used of Jesus when in Mark 3, 9, he needed to get onto a boat to avoid the crush of the crowd. And that's the word that's been used here, that it's hard, it's crushing, it's difficult. And we can see what that means as believers sometimes. We can feel and sense that, you know, the standard of Jesus on my own heart. He gives a tough diagnosis about my need. Yes, I've got great belonging, but he talks about sin and it's a battle. And the light of Jesus shines into my dark heart, and he challenges my motives and sometimes my comfort and my desires and my choices. He rattles my selfishness, and he speaks about purity and loving my enemies and morality and how I live. And it's so exclusive and it's so difficult and it's narrow. The demands he makes and faith and prayer and Bible reading and self denial, it's hard. It's narrow and so much so that he speaks about the Christian ways as being like crucifixion, like we die to ourselves, and crucify the sinful nature. And there's a narrowness and a toughness there, not just in my own, in the demands that he makes of those who follow him, but of the experiences we go through in life, the opposition, being isolated from the majority, being faced with so many questions about God and life here and about pain and illness and disappointment.

We feel like we're in the minority. We're always saying, no, we're not participating. Certainly a road less traveled and it doesn't feel like a road of love sometimes. And there's a narrow and steep and difficult reality that Jesus focuses on and actually highlights here.

[12 : 45] He's not embarrassed by it. He doesn't avoid it. He explains that that is what life with Christ is. Well, yeah, that's not very good, is it? That's not very attractive. It's not very appealing. Well, I think we need to let Jesus finish the image. He hasn't finished speaking with these two introductory images of life with and life without God, Broadway and a narrow way. Let Him finish, and we see as He does so, the image is becoming inverted very interestingly and powerfully. Because He says this Broadway, life without God, life without dealing with the gospel and with Christ, it's a broad and an easy road, but it leads to destruction. Interestingly, it leads to the kind of crushing that He uses in the previous picture about the road being hard. The word for destruction is being cut off from life, being destroyed, losing everything that's worth having. And He's basically saying that ignoring God seems easy and seems a broad and an inclusive way to live. And it may feel like gain in the short term, but He says it's a self-destructive path. It's like leaving home in a rage to rebel against parental love and the seeming parameters or rules that hem you in. But to do so is not real freedom, because you can never run from the mirror.

You can never run from your heart. You can never reverse the realities of failure and disappointment and aging. We can't wipe out suffering and being disappointed or broken hearted in failed relationships or loss of a job. And there can be in that broad road a great feeling of powerlessness or anonymity and a loss, a loss even of control. You know, doesn't happen much now, but in the olden days, when I was young, sometimes football crowds were very, very big, or any kind of crowd could be... that was a big crowd could be so closely packed together that you would just be lifted off your feet and driven forward by that crowd. And even if you were walking, it was very difficult to change direction and a sense of helplessness that you just had to go the way that everyone else was going.

So there is a... Jesus saying there's a temporary broadness about this road and a apparent easiness, but it's not real freedom because it's a pathway Jesus says that is walking away from the Source and the Author and the giver of your life, the living God. It's the wrong road to be on. Views being at home, longing for home is an illustration of what we all want, recognizing we have different thoughts on that, but that we want all the best things about being home, you know, the safety, the warmth, the love, the provision, the rest, all these great pictures of company and happiness and celebration and being home. Well, can you take that picture and imagine that picture of home being like a little... or more not so little house on a hillside, on a beautiful hillside with a narrow and steep winding road towards it. That's the way home. That's where you're wanting to get to. But you misread the map and you find yourself cruising, not on a single track, narrow and twisty road, but cruising on a glorious highway, maybe in a great car. But you're going the wrong way. You're moving away from that ideal and that reality of life and happiness and contentment, and you're being separated from it. You're getting further and further away. And that's what Jesus is saying about being on a broad and easy road, but it leads to destruction.

And the destination is terrible. Revelation in the Bible, the last book of the Bible, speaks about the second death. And it's a picture that not only physical death is destruction, but beyond that there's a spiritual death, a second death which is ultimate separation from life and from God and from goodness and from warmth and from joy and from hope.

And he says that on this road, in a sense, we're already condemned and we need to change and move from that. And he doesn't want us to ignore that reality. Proverbs, chapter 14 says, there's a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.

[18:15] So the picture of the broad road is one that ends in destruction, but interestingly also, the picture of the narrow road is one that leads to life. And Jesus is reminding us that He is the one who is both a door and He is the one who is the way. And it said, we'd look back at John 10 says, I'm the door, if anyone enters by me, he'll be saved and we'll go in and out and find pasture, passage we read and looked at last week. And also in John 14 verse 6, he says, Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me. So Christ is saying that He is the way to life, the broad road is destruction, but the narrow road that He speaks about is life and all that life means is found in Him. Christ is both the gate and the way. And He's attractive and He is awesome. And therefore, He's reminding us that in this passage and throughout the

New Testament that salvation is all about recognizing who He is and recognizing and putting our trust in Him as the King of kings, as our friend, as our brother, as our Savior. He's pointing towards the fact that His death and His resurrection opens up the way to fullness of life, to forgiveness and to a new relationship with the living God. And He is the one who sees us on this broad road and He sees us as needy and helpless and broken and failed and weary and frustrated and insecure and fearful. He sees us as sinners lost on this broad road, confused by the paradox of good things and bad things, the hints of something better, the inexplicable evil both in the world around us and sometimes in our own hearts. And He comes to us and He says, I love you. I'm your God. I've come to redeem you. I've come to bring you life. Turn around. Follow me. Give me your sinful heart to heal and to forgive, and I will give you everlasting life right now. You enter by freely trusting and accepting the gift of salvation that He offers, and that becomes the way of life.

That becomes a relationship with Jesus Christ. That's how it's narrow. It's because there's only one way. It's because there's exclusivity within His claim. It's similar to the exclusive vows that we take in marriage. It narrows our options of how to live and who to relate to and who to be faithful with. Absolutely. But it comes because we're committed in love to our partner, and we want to restrict ourselves to loving and being faithful to them.

And God is saying the same thing to us that in His jealous, in the best way of using that word, in His jealous divine love, He says, I am the only way. I love you with that, an exclusive love, and there's no one else that can love you in this way if you will come to me. He wants our rightful first place because it's the place where He offers us protection and safety and fulfillment and joy and life and all its fullness. Yeah. It's a bit like having to go for a physical heart transplant. There's only one way you can do that. You need to go to the expert. You need to be under His guidance and His authority, and you need to let the surgeon do his work. You can't DIY that. You can't just go at home and get a pair of scissors and a knife and open yourself up. You can't just have your mates around and see if they can give you a heart transplant. There's an exclusivity about how to do that, and spiritually there's a narrowness of exclusivity that opens up life and all the broadness of that life to us. Christ is both the gate, and therefore Christ is both the way. So we enter as we put our trust in Him. We're not just writing or signing some kind of insurance check for the future, and we forget about Jesus for the rest of time. He gives us a new heart now, and all the Christians in the church, we recognize that, and we recognize we have the spirit of Christ in our lives, and that His love is to transform us and to change us, and to bring us to become more and more like Him, and to live in the way of love that He wants us to loving Him and loving one another, and that transforms us.

And He walks with us. He empowers us and strengthens us to live that way, and that is both glorious, and it can be a grind in the short term. And so in this chapter, just as we bring everything to a conclusion, and very, very, just in a summary way, we see that He often speaks about this way, how we live as Christians because of the newness of life that He's given us.

[23 : 53] It means certain things to live and to know life. What are some of the things it means here? Well, it means that we have a powerful relationship with our Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ, verses 7 to 11, asking, it will be given you, seeking you will find, knocking the door will be opened. He says, you know, what can a Father, if His Son asks for bread, will give Him a stone or fish, a serpent? And He says that your heavenly Father is good, and He will give you good gifts. And He speaks therefore that our spiritual life comes from having this great relationship, renewed relationship with our Father, a prayerful relationship, one of need where we're asking, we're persevering, we're seeking, we're finding. And we have this, we see Him as a good Father, a beautiful good Father. And I think it's for Christians, but it's also an invitation to faith to pray and ask for God to open your eyes, to see the different ways and to entrust your life to Him. As Christians, I sometimes wonder if our image of God is as a grumpy old man, as opposed to a good Heavenly Father. Stay close. See, in these days, as Christians, stay close. Stay close to your heavenly Father.

It's a narrow way, and it can be hard sometimes. We know that, and He knows that, but we stay close because He empowers and strengthens and helps and loves and it is life. And therefore, also we live by His golden rule in our relationship with others. Verse 12 is that golden rule where He says, so whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets. And these earlier verses of chapter 7, verses 1 to 6, speak about that, treating others in the way that you've been treated by Jesus with respect and with honesty, with commitment and with grace. So He doesn't want us to be censorious, you know, in verses 1, judge not that you'll not be judged. And if you're mean with other people, then other people will be mean in their judgment of you. It's not saying we're not to be discerning, not to have opinions, but it's saying not to judge harshly and harshly on others and easy on yourself without knowing or maybe without caring or finding out or understanding or making the wrong assumptions. It's a destructive spiral. Grace should change that. Knowing

Jesus should change that because of the way He has treated us in Jesus Christ. So how we consider and make judgments of other people, also with, I think, more specifically within the church context, not to be hypocritical, He speaks in verses 3 to 5, that really funny picture that Jesus gives of not being a hypocrite within the Christian family when He speaks about a brother or could be a sister. He says, you know, don't try and take a tiny speck out of someone else's eye and there's a huge big beam and log of wood in your own eye.

And it's such a ridiculous picture. But sometimes as Christians, you know, it's as if we think God's on our side all the time and that we know all the right answers, always correcting other Christians and saying, oh, they're not as orthodox as we are. They don't do the things that we do. But not being known as someone who allows the light of Jesus Christ to shine into our own hearts first. Don't be known as someone who's quick to find fault with others in the church, but blind to our own personal feelings that are obvious to all.

But rather be known in the Christian community as someone who is close to Christ, who is humble because we're allowing Christ to deal with our own sins and our own feelings. And therefore, in love and in gentleness, allowing us to be gracious enough to be open with others, to share with others, to help them to see maybe some of the small mistakes that they make in order to bring them closer to Jesus and walk the walk of grace. And I think it also involves knowing when to walk away. Verse 6, do not give to dogs what's holy, do not trample and do not throw your pearls before pigs lest they trample them underfoot and turn and attack you. In and out of the church, knowing by grace not to answer fools and according to their folly or giving them the impression that they can treat you anyway and mock your faith. Don't fight fools, saying, walk away because God will not be mocked in these situations. So, I haven't really looked in any detail at these particular areas other than seeing them within the context of the life that Jesus commands us to live.

[29 : 20] So the narrow way is the way of divine love. He's both the author of love and of life. And in the short number of years we're here, it's hard and it's exclusive because we have remaining sin that we're dealing with and battling against. And I just say to us all as Christians, stay with it because there's great reward now because he is with us and we're forgiven and we're empowered and we have his love protecting and showering us.

And there's unimaginable goodness to look forward to. It may be a road less traveled but it's a great road. I mentioned earlier Proverbs 12, there's a road that seems right, there's a way that seems right to a man but in the end it leads to death. I'm going to finish with that but as a paraphrase from the message which is a paraphrased version of the Bible and very often in more accessible language maybe but also in provocative language.

So of this verse it says, there is a way that looks harmless enough, look again, it leads straight to hell. Sure, those people appear to be having a good time but all that laughter will end in heartache. It's a very powerful and very challenging verse and the encouragement from Jesus is to come home to God and to stay home through Christ, to think very seriously about what road you're on and consider what Jesus is challenging you to do. As Christians to stay home in Christ, through Christ, to avoid temptation and to resist temptation and not give in to just doing what's easy and what everyone else is doing because that way is a broad way and it leads to destruction. And if you're not a believer, I would love you to please think about these things and you can pray. And you can pray right now and ask God, even if you've never prayed before, you can ask God just to make you, enable you to think, to open your eyes to see what He is saying and what

He is offering and who He is and ask Him to show Himself, show Him your heart and also show Himself and His love and His desire for you as your Creator, as your Lord, as your Savior. May that be something we all find more and more life-giving. Let's pray.

Father God, we ask and pray that you would help us to understand both the simplicity of the gospel and the depth of the gospel. Keep us from running away from thinking about it because it seems just too uncomfortable. Keep us, Lord, from simply wanting that easy road, that broad road and being content just to follow what everyone else is doing without thinking about its destination, without thinking about its direction. Lord, we pray as Christians that we wouldn't, with the life that we have in Jesus, recognizing its exclusivity and sometimes how hard it is, that we wouldn't just be looking over our shoulders and ignoring your love and your provision and your promises and selfishly looking at that broad road again and its seeming ease. So, Lord, help us, we pray, and may your Spirit take your truth and apply it to our hearts. Encourage us, build us up, challenge us, renew us, refresh us. In Jesus' name, amen.