



The Parish of Wellow

Matthew 7:13-14 - Two ways

Passage, Talk Notes and Questions

Please feel free to take these talk notes home with you and you may wish to find some time during this week to consider the questions below.

1. Talk Passage – Matthew 7:13-14

13 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. **14** But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

2. Talk Notes

2.1 Introduction

- Jesus is coming to the end of what we know as the 'Sermon on the Mount': 'Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them' (Matthew 5:1-2) and by the time he has finished preaching his sermon the people realise that they have heard something extraordinary: 'When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.' (Matthew 7:28-29)
- There are three parts to this great sermon, which covers chapters 5 to 7 of Matthew's gospel:
 - i) In the opening part, which covers Matthew 5:1-14, Jesus encourages the crowd then and us today, to be counter-cultural, to live lives that are radically different from everybody else.
 - ii) In the main part of the sermon, which covers Matthew 5:15- 7:12, Jesus details how they and we should do this.
 - iii) In the final part, which covers Matthew 7:13-29, Jesus summarises all he has said by using three pictures which involve: two roads, two trees, and two houses.
- At the opening of this great sermon Jesus commissions those who know him and love him to be 'the salt of the earth': "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. (Matthew 5:13). Jesus likens the world to rotten food, full of the bacteria which cause its disintegration. Jesus' followers are to be its salt, arresting decay.
- He then goes on to share that the world is a dark and dismal place, lacking sunshine, living in shadows. Jesus' followers are to be light to this dark and dismal world, dispelling darkness and gloom: "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)
- Having explained how to be counter-cultural and how to live lives that are radically different Jesus concludes his great sermon with one of three pictures. He asks his audience then and us today which of two roads we are on. Have we entered through the wide gate onto the broad road that leads to destruction. In other words are our lives no different to the world around us or have we entered through the small gate onto the narrow road that leads to life where we are living lives that are distinctly different to those around us.
- In this powerful picture:
 - Jesus states that we are heading for one of two destinations: Life or Destruction.
 - We have either entered the wide gate or the narrow gate.
 - We are either following a broad or a narrow road.
 - Many are on the broad road but only a few on the narrow.

2.2 Two Destinations: Life or Destruction

- Jesus is very challenging here. He states that we can be living our lives counter culturally or we can be living our lives like the rest of the world. He doesn't give his audience then or us today a third option.
- A few verses on from this picture of the two roads Jesus is even more explicit. He explains

that *'On that day'* (Matthew 7:22), the Day of Judgement, many of the people hearing Jesus' words then and many people today will profess they know God and expect to be with God for eternity: *'Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven'* (Matthew 7:21).

- 60% of the population of England and Wales according to the 2011 census profess to be Christians. This figure is anticipated to fall below 50% for the 2021 census. How many of these people who claim to be Christian actually live distinctive Christian lives. Many of the Jews listening to Jesus back then would have claimed to be Jewish, but how many of them would be living according to God's laws? Jesus asked them and he asks us today are we *'doing the will of my Father who is in heaven?'* (Matthew 7:21).
- 1% of the population of England and Wales attend church regularly and many think that by coming to church, saying the right things and taking communion that they too will be spending time with God in eternity: *'Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'* (Matthew 7:22). The shock for some of these people is that Jesus will say: *'I never knew you.'* (Matthew 7:23). You were not in relationship with me, you were not living counter culturally for me, you were not demonstrating to others what being in relationship with me is like.
- Many of these people will have heard God's word but they will have failed to put God's word into practice. Jesus warns by use of this powerful picture that such people will have entered the wide gate and have been travelling the broad road that leads to a place without God, a place Jesus refers to as destruction .

2.3 Two Gates: Narrow or Wide

- So which of these two gates have we entered? It is so easy to absorb and be part of today's culture. A culture that promotes self. A culture that tells us we must consume: *'I shop therefore I am.'* A culture that promotes inclusion, tolerance and secularism. It is easy to enter that wide gate.
- It is altogether harder, as Jesus knew, to enter the narrow gate and live a life of being counter cultural. The Jews on that hillside would have had different pressures to the ones we have today. Pressures to conform to the culture norms of their day along with pressures, like us, from other religions be they Roman Gods, Emperor Worship, Eastern religions or from at least 20 different Jewish factions like the Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes and the Zealots.

2.4 Two Roads: Narrow or Broad

- Which of these two roads are we on? Putting ourselves first and doing things our way is of course easy. That is the broad road.
- It is much harder on the narrow road. It is not easy to live God's way as Jesus has just outlined in this great sermon. It is hard to:
 - i) Love others as ourselves: *'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.'* (Matthew 7:12)
 - ii) Love our enemies: *'You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.'* (Matthew 5:43-44)
 - iii) Keep our hearts from lusting: *'You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.'* (Matthew 5:27-30)
 - iv) Cultivate a right attitude towards money: *'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'* (Matthew 6:19-21)
 - v) Avoid anger and hatred: *'You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.'* (Matthew 5:21-22)

vi) Live out our marriage commitments: *'It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.'* (Matthew 5:31-32)

vii) Avoid casual and irresponsible commitments to God: *'Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.'* (Matthew 5:33-37)

viii) Show mercy and love to others: *'You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.'* (Matthew 5:38-42)

ix) Avoid hypocrisy and judging others: *'Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 'Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.'* (Matthew 7:1-5)

2.5 Two Ways: Many versus Few

- Given how hard it is on the narrow road it should come as no surprise that few are on it.
- Some people find this picture painted by Jesus offensive. Why would a loving God only have one way to access the Kingdom of Heaven, eternity and Him. Surely there are multiple ways to heaven these people would argue. Why would a loving God allow the majority to head towards destruction.
- How we answer such questions will depend on how we view who Jesus is and the voracity of his word.

2.6 Conclusion

- Which road are we on: the broad or the narrow? Have we entered through the wide gate onto the broad road that leads to destruction. If so then our lives will probably not be very different to those of the world around us. If however we have entered the narrow gate and we are on the narrow road then we will be facing an uphill battle. Day by day we will need to be in close relationship with God drawing on His power and strength in order to be that salt and light to the world around us.

3. Questions to consider at home

3.1 Why are the crowds amazed at Jesus' teaching?

3.2 What do we learn about Judgement Day from Matthew 7:21-23?

3.3 What are the key differences between a life lived on the narrow road and one lived on the broad road?

3.4 In John 3:16 we are told *'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* If God loves everyone and died for them, why will only a few people make it into the *'Kingdom of heaven'?*

3.5 Are the three images overleaf a good illustration of the picture painted by Jesus of the Two Ways?