

THE KINGDOM-DRIVEN LIFE #18

The Book of Matthew

The Straight Gate and the Narrow Way

I. Introduction: The Curious Case of Christianity

A. The Surprising Message of the Gospel of Christ

1. One of the surprising proofs of the Biblical message, to me, has always been how opposite it is from anything any normal person would come up with.
2. If I, as a mortal man, wanted to start a new religion, I would certainly want it to be *popular*, relatively *easy* to enter into and to practice, and as *acceptable* to as many people as possible.
3. But today we see that Jesus takes the other approach when describing HIS religion, and seems to go out of His way to make sure we understand that the “real” Jesus is never popular, the *genuine* Christian life is never easy, and the gospel of the Kingdom will always be *unpopular* with the majority!

B. Today’s Theme

The entry into eternal life is through a narrow gate; the journey is a narrow way, and the majority will never go there.

You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it. Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions.

Matt 7:13-20 New Living Translation

In this passage, Jesus continues His teaching style of “two’s” where He sets two things side by side for purpose of clarity. Today, we’ll look at two ***gates***, two ***ways*** and two ***messengers***.

II. The Restrictive Nature of the True Gospel

A. Two Gates

1. The term “gate” here is a metaphor for the way IN to the road of life.
2. Jesus is saying the “doorway” to life is straight and narrow, not wide.
 - a. “Wide” would imply the easiest possible access with a minimum amount of “baggage limits.”

That which allures the multitudes (is) the abundance of liberty in that way...you may go in at this gate with all your lusts about you; it gives no check to your appetites or passions...it is a broad way, for there is nothing to hedge it in...

Matthew Henry, *Commentary on Matthew*

- b. The narrow gate is the restrictive nature of how we can get to God.

I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved.

John 10:7-9 NLT

3. We live in a *syncretistic* culture where we are not only called upon to respect the beliefs of others (which is biblical) but also to affirm all other beliefs as equally valid with the claims of Christ. Jesus would never allow this.

...syncretism is combining different pieces of thought from different (religious) systems. The problem with syncretism...is that (true) Christianity claims to possess absolute and interrelated truths*...therefore if the Bible is false on a significant point, i.e. that Jesus is God in the flesh), then none of its testimony is to be trusted. As Nietzsche put it, “What bothers me is not that you lied to me, but that from now on I can no longer trust you.”

Graham Buck, *Reformed Theological Seminary Notes*

**Actually, ALL the world's major religions claim to possess absolute truth at one point or another. Even the postmodern mantra that “there is no absolute truth” is a statement of absolute truth from them!*

It is a mistaken assumption that all religious roads lead to heaven...I believe hell will be populated by religious people, not just by atheists and agnostics...The smug self-confidence of the Pharisees inclined them to believe that when it came to God’s kingdom, they had a corner on the market.

Bible.Org Blog

4. When Christ-followers relent on any major point of clear doctrine, they open the field for contradiction on an innumerable number of related truths.

**Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.
John 14:6 NLT**

5. Every road leads somewhere. The "narrow gate" leads to life; the "wide gate" leads to destruction.

The Lord Jesus narrows our choices to only two: religion and Christianity. Religion, in brief, can be defined as man's efforts to reach God, while Christianity is God reaching down to man. Religion rests upon man's work for God; Christianity, on God's work on behalf of many.

You can go to heaven God's way, or you can go to hell any way you want...the theme song of hell will be, "I Did It My Way".

Bible.org Blog

***Inclusivism* stabs at the heart of Christian faith, which claims Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. The claim is either true, or it is not...the truth is here whether we believe it or not.**

Dallas Willard, *Being Christian in a Pluralistic Society*

6. The majority go through the wide gate. This is most distressing to our minds, yet Jesus assures us that the door to life (through Him) will only be found by a "few".

The offer of Christ's salvation is and should be made to *all*; nevertheless, we should not be surprised that "many" will reject it.

B. Two Roads

1. Once we have found the way, Jesus assures us the pathway and journey will not be without restrictions and trials.

a. Jesus pulls no punches regarding life after conversion!

b. This is consistent with Paul's message to the believers :

(Paul and Barnabus) preached the gospel...and made many disciples...strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

Acts 14:21-22 (Excerpt) NKJV

2. Compare this message with what passes for the Christian gospel today-where some seek to "encourage" churchgoers with assurances that coming to Christ solves all problems and walking with Him is a snap!

3. Children are generally insulated and protected, but by the teen years, somebody needs to tell them that choosing Christ means not going along with the crowd!

Review

- The Gospel of the Kingdom is identifiable by the exclusive and restrictive “door” into it-Jesus is *the way*, the one and only way to the path that leads to life. We can be sure that if the majority is going there, something's wrong.
- The Christian life is also difficult and fraught with peril-we can expect the road to be difficult, with persecutions, tribulations and trials of our faith as common signposts assuring us we're on the right path...again, if most of the population is walking with us, we're not on the right road!

C. Two Messengers

1. The existence of a lie implies there is truth. If there is a counterfeit, there must be a “genuine.” The existence of “false prophets” indicates there are “true” prophets. (Next week, we'll focus on the subject of “false prophets”. Why? Because we see that Jesus, as God's true prophet, after teaching on the straight gate and narrow way that marks the true faith, immediately warns us to “beware of false prophets”.

2. The context of the warning is the clue to identification of false prophets, who claim to be “messengers” for God, but whose message would never include what Jesus just taught about!

3. Jesus and the NT writers were extremely concerned with what was FALSE. Here is just a partial list of what we are warned about:

- False prophets-Matthew 15:19; 24:24; Luke 6:26; Acts 13:6; 1 John 4:1
- False Christs-Mark 13:22
- False witnesses-Matthew 26:60; Mark 10:19
- False apostles-2 Corinthians 11:13
- False brethren-2 Corinthians 11:26; Galatians 2:4
- False teachers-2 Peter 2:1

4. It seems today many are not troubled or concerned about the existence and danger of what is “false” and toxic to our walk with Christ!

5. The Church must guard against the “spirit of the age” where tolerance and acceptance (usually in the name of unity or being non-censorious) are considered more important than doctrinal purity and practice.

6. The Gospel is “good news”-which also means it’s TRUE, because anything UNTRUE cannot be good! Even though Jesus is warning us of what to expect, it’s still good news, because He’s telling us the truth about the way things really are!

7. Many came along, even in the early church, where false teachers were found.

I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who called you to himself through the loving mercy of Christ. You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News. But is not the Good News at all. You are being fooled by those who deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ. Let God's curse fall on anyone, including us or even an angel from heaven, who preaches a different kind of Good News than the one we preached to you. I say again what we have said before: If anyone preaches any other Good News than the one you welcomed, let that person be cursed.

Galatians 1:6-9 NLT

III. Four Take-Aways

- We are to “judge not” in the sense of condemnation or “final judgment” upon others.
- Nevertheless, we must judge when it comes to the Gospel message of salvation, (the door), the Christian life, (the road), and the exclusive claims of Christ.
- We must never imply there’s more than one “door” to life, nor be surprised that the pathway it sets us on is difficult.
- We must beware of any message or messenger that speaks otherwise!