# Jesus on the Narrow Way

### Text: Matthew 7:13-23

**Introduction:** In his allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan tells the story of a man named Christian and his journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City.

The story begins with Christian reading a book and discovering something that terrifies him. He learns that the city where he lives is going to be destroyed and that he and everyone in it are facing certain destruction. Christian becomes so troubled by this discovery that he cries out, "What shall I do?"

As the story unfolds, Christian meets a man named Evangelist who points him toward the way of escape. He tells Christian that he must flee the City of Destruction and make his way toward the wicket gate.

Christian has a decision to make. What will he do? He can remain in the City of Destruction and face the destruction that awaits him. Or he can leave the city and pursue the way that leads to life. Christian chooses rightly to follow the counsel of Evangelist, flee the City of Destruction, and head out on his way on the path that leads to life.

Christian's journey is not an easy one. We see throughout *Pilgrim's Progress* that Christian faces obstacles, distractions, and people who try to convince him to abandon his journey. But Christian continues toward the Celestial City.

Bunyan's story is an allegory. But it's intended as an illustration of something we all face. We are all on a journey. We are all headed somewhere. And Jesus teaches us in the Sermon on the Mount that there are ultimately only two destinations, life or destruction.

That's what we see in our text this morning in Matthew 7. As Jesus brings the Sermon on the Mount to a close, He confronts us with a decision. There are two ways we can travel, two kinds of people we can follow, and two ways we can respond to His commands. And the decision we make has eternal consequences.

Go ahead and turn in your Bible to Matthew 7. You can find it on page 762 in the black pew Bible in front of you. We're going to be looking at verses 13-23. If you don't own a Bible, we invite you to take the pew Bible with you when you leave.

(Read Matthew 7:13-23…Pray)

Sinclair Ferguson calls this text in Matthew 7 the "climax" of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus presents to us the decisions and choices that His teaching demands. There are only two ways to live. Jesus has made that clear throughout the sermon. There is the way of the Lord. And there is the way of the world. And Jesus challenges us to make up our minds. There is no room for negotiation or compromise. A choice has to be made (Ferguson, 140).

**You must decide whether you will follow Jesus and experience life or if you will reject Him and experience destruction.**

Jesus teaches us that…

## I. Followers of Jesus walk the narrow way that leads to life (Matthew 7:13-14).

**A. That's exactly what Jesus says at the beginning of verse 13. He says, "Enter by the narrow gate" (vs. 13a).**

1. **This is an imperative. It's a command. An instruction. "Enter by the narrow gate."**
2. **Of course, Jesus is using a metaphor here. And I don't think the metaphor is particularly cryptic.**
3. **Jesus is talking about entrance into His kingdom, and He exhorts us to "Enter by the narrow gate."**
4. **In addition to the narrow GATE in verse 13, Jesus refers to a narrow WAY in verse 14.**
5. **There is some debate among scholars about whether the narrow way leads to the narrow gate in Jesus' metaphor or if you go through the narrow gate and then proceed on the narrow way. That's probably pressing the metaphor too far because there's a sense in which both are true.**

a. **If the narrow gate is at the beginning of the narrow way, it represents our initial conversion. The moment of salvation. That time when we first turn from our sin and place our trust in Jesus. It is certainly true that the entryway to initial salvation is narrow. The only way there is through Jesus. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." The only way for anyone to be made right with God is to turn from your sin and place your faith in Jesus. The gate of initial salvation is narrow.**
b. **But if the narrow gate is at the end of the narrow way, then it represents our final salvation. Our glorification. That moment at the judgment seat of Christ when we receive entry into God's eternal kingdom. And whichever way you take it, the gate is narrow.**

B. **But there is also another gate that Jesus references here. A gate that is wide.**

1. **Jesus says, "For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction" (vs. 13b).**
2. **The fact that Jesus says the wide gate leads to destruction again points us to the reality of final judgment. There is coming a day when we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. And either Jesus will say, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," or He will say, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:34, 41).**
3. **There is one way that leads to life, and there is another way that leads to destruction.**
4. **The author of Proverbs describes this way that leads to destruction in striking detail in Proverbs 1. He warns his son, "My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, 'Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason; like Sheol let us swallow them alive, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; we shall find all precious goods, we shall fill our houses with plunder; throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse'—my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths, for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood. For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird, but these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives" (Prov. 1:10-18).**
5. **You and I need this warning this morning. There is a gate that is wide. There is a way that seems easy. But it leads to destruction.**
6. **Sadly, Jesus says that "those who enter by it are many" (vs. 13c).**
7. **The gate is wide. The way seems easy. Those who enter by it are many. But I want you to know this morning that you do not have to follow that path. You can heed the warning of the author of Proverbs in Proverbs 4:14-15, "Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on."**
8. **See, "the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble" (Prov. 4:19).**
9. **Do not enter by the wide gate!**

C. **No, instead, "enter by the narrow gate" (vs. 13a).**

1. **(Read vs. 14)**
2. **We might hear Jesus' words here and initially wonder in what sense the way is narrow and hard that leads to life.**

a. **And I think we would first have to say that it is narrow THEOLOGICALLY. I've already quoted those well-known words in John 14:6 where Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn. 14:6). But Peter also said of Jesus, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name**

**under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Understand this morning that there is only one way for you and me to have a right relationship with God. And that is through Jesus. We have rebelled against God. We deserve God's punishment for our sin. But Jesus came and lived the sinless life that you and I have not lived. The life we could not live. And then He went to the cross and died to pay for our sin. And the only way for you to be made right with God is to turn from your sin and place your trust in Jesus. That's what I mean when I say that the gate and way are narrow theologically. There is no salvation outside of Jesus. Some will say that there are many ways to God. They are wrong. There is only one way to God. And that is through Jesus Christ His Son.**

**b. But understand this morning that the way that leads to life is not just narrow theologically, it is also narrow ETHICALLY. You cannot claim to follow Jesus and believe yourself to be on a path that leads to life and live your life however you please. Jesus has told us throughout the Sermon on the Mount what it looks like to be a follower of Jesus. It looks like following the Sermon on the Mount. It looks like being poor in spirit. It looks like mourning over your sin. It looks like being meek. It looks like hungering and thirsting for righteousness. It looks like extending to others the same mercy you have received in Jesus. It looks like being pure in heart. It looks like being a peacemaker. And it looks like remaining faithful and joyful even when others revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of Christ. It looks like loving your enemies. It looks like giving to the needy. It looks like fasting and praying and storing up treasures in heaven. Goshen, the narrow way of Jesus requires following and obeying the commands of Jesus.**

**c. Sometimes people will have their soteriology all straightened out. They understand that salvation is by grace through faith. That it's not a result of works. That it's only through Jesus. They're clear about those truths. But their life doesn't look much like the Sermon on the Mount. That's not the narrow way that Jesus is talking about here. Others will live lives that look a lot more like what Jesus describes in the Sermon on the Mount. But when it comes to salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, they get squishy. They want to carve out room along the way for those of other faiths or even those of no faith at all. They forget that Jesus says, "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."**

3. **See, on that hillside in Galilee that day when Jesus delivered His Sermon on the Mount, He called the people to a point of decision. A decision between two gates. A decision between two ways. One gate is narrow, and it leads to life. The other gate is wide, and it leads to destruction. The people who heard Jesus deliver this sermon two thousand years ago had a decision to make. And I want you to know today, friend, that you too have a decision to make. You must decide between the narrow gate and the wide gate. You must decide between the narrow gate that leads to life and the wide gate that leads to destruction. Those are your choices. There is no other choice.**
4. **Followers of Jesus walk the narrow way that leads to life.**

## II. Followers of Jesus reject false prophets who lead to destruction (Matthew 7:15-20).

**A. Jesus issues a clear warning concerning false prophets in verse 15. (Read vs. 15)**

1. **Again, the verb here is an imperative. It's a command. An instruction. In this case it's a present imperative, so it's an ongoing command. "Beware of false prophets." Jesus instructs us to continually beware of the presence and influence of false prophets.**
2. **There are those prophets or teachers who will lead you astray if you listen to them or follow their teaching. In fact, they will lead you on the way that leads only to destruction.**
3. **Sinclair Ferguson asks, "What is a 'false prophet?'" He says, "We have a tendency to associate prophecy with foretelling of the future. But in fact that was only a part (and actually a less prominent part) of the prophet's ministry. The basic task of the prophet was to forth-tell, not just to fore-tell, God's word. He was to explain and apply God's truth to the lives of the people in his own day, as well as speak about the future. Indeed, the reason he was to speak also about the future was to influence the way that his hearers lived in the present. Simply put, a 'prophet' was one who spoke from God. A 'false prophet' is one who falsifies God's word either by openly contradicting it, or, more likely (as Jesus indicates), by twisting its meaning" (Ferguson, 144).**
4. **We asked earlier in what sense the way and the gate are narrow. We saw that the way is narrow both theologically and ethically. We could ask the same question of these false prophets. In what sense are they false? And I think the answer we would have to give is the same answer we gave about the way. False prophets are false both theologically and ethically.**

    a. **Theologically because they say false things about the gospel. There is no limit on the number of ways in which men might pervert the truth, but there are some ways that stand out to us as particularly common.**

        1) ***As I mentioned before, there are those who want to say that there is more than one way to God than just through Christ. That it doesn't matter which religion you choose. They're all equally valid paths that ultimately all lead to the same place. As we've seen already, Goshen, that is not what Jesus believed, and it's not what Jesus taught. There is only one way to God and that is through Jesus Christ.***
        2) ***There are other false prophets or teachers who want to say that the gospel is about health, wealth, and prosperity. If you follow Jesus, He will make you healthy, wealthy, and prosperous. But we know from the Bible that isn't true. Yes, there is blessing, even sometimes material blessing, that comes from following Jesus. But there is also suffering. Jesus has not promised us health, wealth, and prosperity in this life.***
        3) ***There are still other false prophets or teachers who say that the gospel is Jesus plus something else. Yes, you need Jesus, but you also need to do this or that to truly be a Christian. But the message of Jesus is one of grace not works. Salvation is by grace through faith. It is not of works. There is nothing we can do to earn our salvation. It is only by the grace of God to us in Christ.***
        4) ***These are just some of the ways that false prophets or teachers are false theologically.***

    b. **But they are also false ethically. And this is actually the emphasis of Jesus' teaching here in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus focuses here not really on the TEACHING of the false prophets but rather on their LIVES. The lives of false teachers do not match the kind of life devoted to following Jesus that we see throughout the Sermon on the Mount. See, it is possible for a false prophet to appear to have all his theological t's crossed and i's dotted, but his life doesn't match his confession of the truth. He can appear to believe and speak a true gospel, but if he doesn't also live a true gospel, Jesus says he is a false prophet.**

c. **Therefore, we must "beware of false prophets."**

5. **This warning concerning false prophets or teachers is one we see throughout the New Testament.**

   a. **Jesus Himself later said in Matthew 24, "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. So, if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it" (Matt. 24:23-26).**
   b. **The Apostle Paul warned the Ephesians elders in Acts 20, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:28-30).**
   c. **Paul then later wrote to Timothy, "But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men" (2 Tim. 3:1-9).**
   d. **We could point to numerous other texts that warn God's people against the reality of false prophets or teachers.**

6. **We must beware because one of the things Jesus points out about these false prophets or teachers is that they are deceptive: "They come in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (vs. 15b). They initially appear to have everything together on the outside, but on the inside, their heart is far from the Lord.**

B. **So, how do we recognize these false prophets about whom Jesus warns us?**

   1. **Look at what Jesus says beginning in verse 16. (Read vs. 16-20)**
   2. **Danny Akin says, "Two essential tests will expose those working to slip into our communities of faith: the doctrinal test and the practical test. The doctrinal test asks, Do their teachings line up with the gospel of Jesus Christ that is salvation by grace alone, through faith alone? It asks whether they avoid the deadly mathematics of false teachers that add to the Bible, subtract from the person and work of Christ, multiply the requirements of salvation, and divide the people of God by a divisive and destructive spirit. The practical test asks, Are they antinomians on the one hand or legalists on the other? It asks whether they throw off all constraint to the extreme or seek to shackle us with legalistic obligations that are suffocating. If we closely watch doctrine and practice, then rotten fruit will expose a rotten teacher" (Akin, 143).**

C. **We should also notice the judgment that awaits false prophets.**

   1. **Look again at verse 19. (Read vs. 19)**

2. **Chuck Quarles points out that verse 19 reiterates a theme from the preaching of John the Baptist in Matthew 3:10, "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." Quarles writes, "The statements of both John and Jesus are clear warnings that false prophets will be consigned to hell. Those who embrace their teachings and are characterized by behavior like theirs will receive the same sentence" (Matt. 3:10).**
3. **False prophets walk along the wide road that leads to destruction, and they lead many astray with them.**
4. **This is why followers of Jesus reject false prophets who lead to destruction.**

We've seen that followers of Jesus walk the narrow way that leads to life and reject false prophets who lead to destruction. Finally, we see that…

## III. Followers of Jesus demonstrate their confession by doing the Father's will (Matthew 7:21-23).

### A. It is true that the confession that Jesus is Lord is foundational to the Christian faith.

1. **Later in the Gospel of Matthew, in Matthew 16, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They responded, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Jesus then asked, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter responded, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Peter got the answer exactly right. In fact, he was so right that Jesus said, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:13-18).**
2. **In Romans 10, the Apostle Paul writes, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."**
3. **So, central to what it means to be a Christian is the confession that Jesus is Lord.**

### B. But listen to the warning of Jesus beginning in verse 21 of Matthew 7. (Read vs. 21-23)

1. **Jesus says that it is possible to confess that He is Lord and still hear Jesus say to you on the last day, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."**
2. **This passage in Matthew 7, the climax of the Sermon on the Mount, is teaching us very clearly that ultimately there are only two groups of people. There are those on the narrow road that leads to life. And there are those on the wide road that leads to destruction.**
3. **And we might initially think that all of those who confess that Jesus is Lord with their mouth are on the narrow road that leads to life. But Jesus says that isn't so. It is possible to confess that Jesus is Lord with your mouth and still be on the wide road that leads to destruction.**
4. **Why? Because your life doesn't match your confession. And if your life doesn't match your confession, Jesus says that your confession is a false confession. Your life doesn't look like the life of a follower of Jesus as described in the Sermon on the Mount.**
5. **Oh, Goshen, I hope you see this morning that this is a warning for you and for me. That it is possible to say, "Lord, Lord." To prophesy in His name. To cast out demons in His name. To do mighty works in His name. And still hear in the last day, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."**

**Conclusion:** Goshen, Jesus is calling us this morning to self-examination.

Have you entered through the narrow gate of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone? Have you turned from your sin? Have you placed your faith in Jesus? Have you been brought into a right relationship with God through genuine saving faith in Jesus Christ?

Are you walking along the narrow way? The way of obedience to Jesus and His commands.

Are you sure that one day you will hear the Lord Jesus say, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”?

Or are you perhaps on a road that leads only to destruction? Headed for a gate where one day you will hear the Lord Jesus say, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

There’s still time to change roads. You do not have to continue down the road to destruction. You can today begin along the road that leads to life.

You begin on that road through repentance. Turning from your sin. You begin on that road through faith. Trusting Jesus as your only hope of being made right with God.

For the Lord Jesus says to you today, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn. 14:6).