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Series: The Sermon On The Mount
Message: A Necessary Choice

Transcribed Message
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Matthew 7:12-14

Just down the street from our apartment complex, really not even a block away, was the best cafeteria in all of the Dallas Metroplex. It was called the Highland Park Cafeteria. People would get in line and the line would go out the door every lunch and every dinner to eat at the Highland Park Cafeteria. The neat thing about a cafeteria is that you grab your tray and you work your way down the line. You go by the salads, the vegetables, the meats, the rolls and the desserts. And you get to see it. It's all right there. You get to pick whatever it is that you want. You get to pick what you think is going to be the best for that particular meal. I would always get the same thing. Just a creature of habit. I'd get the breaded cod, the buttered carrots, the cloverleaf roll and I'd top it off with the best coconut cream pie this side of heaven. I got that all for about \$3.50. Bonnie would go through and she'd be a little more creative and she'd get something that had maybe caught her eye that day and she too would eat for \$3.50. so when you looked in the restaurant guide in the Dallas area and if you looked up cafeterias, Highland Park Cafeteria had the most stars and it had the least amount of \$ signs, which was just exactly what a seminary couple needed to go and have a meal occasionally. when you think about a cafeteria and the benefit of walking through the line and just picking and choosing whatever you want, if it looks good and you're hungry for that for that time you get it. If not, then you don't and that's great.

But what happens when people do that with the words of Jesus? What happens when people do that with the truth of God's Word? They walk through the cafeteria line of Scripture and they take that because it looks good and they don't need that because that might in some way infringe upon their life. The passage before us this morning is an excellent case in point study of this very thing. We're in Matthew 7. We're looking this morning at verses 12 through 14. Let me read those and then we'll dig into them: "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, and those who find it are few.”

It seems to me what Jesus says to us in these verses is that we face choices. We face daily choices. The choices that we make actually have eternal impact. So we need to be making wise and careful choices as we go through our day. Verse 12 is in some ways a summary of the entire sermon. We look at verse 12 “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them for this is the law and the prophets.”

This is a bookend verse. It's a bookend verse as it starts off, it starts off with the word “so”. It could be translated “therefore”. You know whenever you see a “therefore”, you know what you have to do. You see what that “therefore” is there for. Well, we have a “so” but we're staying it's a “therefore”. When we look back to the preceding section, it's not just the verses before that most immediately that catch our eyes. It requires that we go all the way back to the 5th chapter and you look back at verses 17 through 20 and you see that that's the other end of the bookend. The bookend is back in chapter 5. That is the last time Jesus mentioned the Law and the Prophets. “Do not think that I come to abolish the law of the Prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” So what you have is the bracket is now completed. 5:17 to 20 Jesus says this is going to be all about the Law and the Prophets and the fulfillment of God's law and God's Prophets. You get to 7:12 and He brackets it again and He says this now is what we would say is the heart of the matter. In some ways you could say of verse 12 that this is the heart of the matter. This is a good summary of everything that Jesus taught us to this point in the Sermon on the Mount. In fact, you can argue that this is the end of the Sermon on the Mount, that when you get to verse 12 and go to end of the chapter you're now in a summary mode. I think that's the sense of these bookends.

God tells us in one verse how it is that He wants us to live life. This is kingdom living. This is life as Jesus lived. It's captured in one verse. What do we often call this verse? We often call this verse the golden rule. It's the golden rule. Jesus didn't name it the golden rule. We think that a Roman Emperor named Severus in the 3rd century gave it that title. He actually appreciated what Jesus said so much that tradition tells us that he had it engraved onto a piece of gold and put it on his wall. I think most of us probably

find it easier to think about it, to read it, to see it, to say it, then maybe we do to live it. But this is the golden rule.

I want to see two things about the golden rule. The first is that it is simple and yet it's profound. It's simple and yet it's profound. We teach in principle the golden rule to children, don't we? They understand it. They get it. They get the golden rule. If you want someone to be nice to you, then you be nice to them. If you want somebody to be kind to you, then you be kind to them. If you want somebody to share their toys with you, then you share your toys with them. If you don't want Johnny hitting you, then don't you hit Johnny. We have this very simple principle that we see even children can understand and apply to life. But at the same time that it's so simple, it's incredibly profound. It is an incredibly profound thing to say you treat other people in the same way that you want them to treat you.

What would happen in our lives, in our relationships if we daily put into practice the simplicity and yet the profundity of the golden rule? Life would look quite different. It reminds me a little bit of Robert Fulghum's book. Remember way back years ago, he wrote that little book *Everything I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*? Go back and look at a lot of the things that he said in that book and most of them have some connection at least in principle to what Jesus says in Matthew 7:12. You just treat other people the way that you want them to treat you and life will look amazingly different most of the time. But it's not just a matter of simplicity and profundity. It's also that it is positive and powerful. it's positive and it's powerful.

Do you notice that Jesus does not state this principle in a negative? He doesn't want us to see this as a negative. Don't do this. Now that's true, but that's not the way He states it. To state it as a negative leads to a passivity of spirit. Jesus wants this to be understood in an active sense. He wants us to understand that this principle is best realized and applied in our life when we engage, when we involve ourselves in these ways that we're to be treating others. DA Carson nails it when he says: "Here there is no room to withdraw into a world where I offend no one but accomplish no positive good either." It reminds me a little bit of Jesus's encounter with the lawyer who asked in a moment probably trying to catch Jesus off guard what's the greatest commandment? In light of all the law that God has given to us, what is the one commandment that we

should live out most fully and completely? Jesus, as He always does, was right on His game and He said it is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength. That's the first commandment. And the second is like unto it. You shall love your neighbor as you already love yourself. He was amazed. He was amazed by the simplicity and profundity of Jesus's answer. He was amazed of the power of that answer and the positive nature in which that changes our lives.

Here's what I want you to see about verse 12. You can take verse 12 and you could preach a sermon on verse 12. Listen carefully. You can preach a sermon on verse 12 in any house of worship in America and get an amen. You could take verse 12, the golden rule, into any house of worship – Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, it doesn't matter. You can take it anywhere and you can teach this principle of the golden rule and you would have people nodding in agreement with you right and left. It would be universally accepted... but immediately following the most universally accepted word from our Lord are a couple of verses that are universally rejected.

So let's look at this second part of our lesson this morning. It underscores for us that the golden rule is not the gospel. The golden rule is not the gospel. We don't earn heaven by doing the golden rule. We don't earn heaven by pursuing the golden rule. Jesus is going to address this in the road less traveled in verses 13 and 14. What you see in these two verses are there are choices before us. There are choices before us. Let me say something about this metaphor that Jesus uses looking again at verses 13 and 14: "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." What we're going to see in the choices that are before us is there are four categories that are going to be contrasted with each other. So we have two choices and within each choice there are four contrastive elements to this little metaphor.

This is not an unusual metaphor in the Bible. In fact, this idea of choosing a path, of choosing a way of making choices is all through Scripture. In Deuteronomy 30, when Moses is near the point where the Lord is going to take him home, remember he challenges the children of Israel that they are the recipients of the law of God. They

have already heard in principle everything that Jesus has just taught us in the Sermon on the Mount. Moses said to them, you guys need to listen because you're at a crossroads. You're going to be making choices going forward. You need to understand that those choices you make every day are going to have an eternal impact. Some of you are going to choose to go this way and God is going to honor that choice because it's in keeping with obedience to Him. He is going to bring blessing into your life and you're going to enjoy the land and live there in prosperity. Some of you are going to choose the other path, and you're going to find life is incredibly and increasingly hard and difficult. Joshua, when he took the reins of leadership, did the exact same thing. He just picked up on what Moses said and he declared after he challenged them in that same way. He said but as for me and my house we're going to serve the Lord. He could just as easily have said for me and my house we're going to be walking on this path of obedience to God. You get to Psalm 1. The Psalms open up with the blessing of the psalmist not walking and standing and sitting in the path of sinners and those that are scorning and those that are mocking. But blessed is the man, blessed is the woman who walks in the path of truth.

You remember years ago when we went through the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah chapter 6 verse 16 and Jeremiah calls out to the people and he said remember the ancient past. Remember the way that God has called us to live and walk with Him. Remember the choices that we make and you can choose to go down that path. You can meet disaster or you can choose the path that God has given and see the blessing of God on your life. This picture culminates in John 14:6 when Jesus said I am the way. I am the truth. I'm the life. Jesus is simply saying I am the path that you need to walk on. I'm the way of obedience to God.

Let's begin. We start with the broad path. We're going to move quickly through these and we're going to see four things in each of these categories. The first thing that we see is the gate is wide. The gate is wide. It's easy to enter, in other words. It's easy to get through. It's huge. It's wide. There are signs pointing to this gate. There are flashing arrows saying this is the way. Walk this way. You have this picture, this image of this this huge, massive gate that people are walking through. They're walking through arm in arm 20 at a time, 30 at a time, 50 at a time, 100 at a time. They're walking

through. They're going through this incredibly wide, spacious gate. The way, Jesus says, is easy. This way is easy. Just like the gate. It is wide. It's roomy. It is a thoroughfare. It's a multilane highway. All along this path, there are hotels and motels and rest stops and restaurants. It's all there. The beauty of this way is that there are no curbs. There are no boundaries. Nobody cares what you think or don't think. Nobody cares how you live or don't live. Nobody cares what you do or who you do it with. This is the wide gate and the wide road. There are no boundaries. There are no limitations. There are no restrictions. It's easy.

What about the companions? There are a lot of them. Jesus says there are many. There's a crowd on this road. Since the gate is wide and the way is easy you can rightfully say this is the majority opinion. This is the majority. Everybody who wants to be somebody seems to be on the wide road. All the beautiful people seem to be on the wide road. The popular people seem to be on the wide road. They've gone through the wide gate. They enjoy the life that has no boundaries, no restrictions. Nobody telling them what to do or not do.

Then finally you come to the destiny and the destiny is that of death and destruction. Listen. It's not marked death and destruction. Nobody gets on a road that's marked death and destruction. This road is marked heaven. and this road is marked paradise. this road is marked utopia, nirvana. This is where you want to go. But then the ominous and sobering Word of God speaks its truth to this circumstance. In Proverbs 14:12, the writer of Proverbs says there is a way that seems right to a man. There's a way that seems right to a woman. There's a way that seems right to a young person, but the end thereof is the way of death. Jesus has simply captured the writer and the wisdom of Proverbs in this first description. In other words, everybody on this road is living in deception. Everybody on this road is blinded to the reality of what awaits them at the end of the way.

But then Jesus lifts up another way. We're at the crossroads, right? There's a choice and it's called the narrow way. Again, we have the same four things. Let's look at the contrast. First thing we notice is the gate is narrow. I want you to notice the very first word of verse 13. What's the very first word in verse 13? It is the word "enter". In the word "enter" is an imperative. It's a command. Jesus is commanding that we enter. He

is commanding that we go through the narrow gate. There's a choice that has to be made. We have to obey what Jesus has said. That is exactly what Moses was saying. That is what Joshua was saying. That is what the psalmist was saying. That is what Jeremiah was saying. That is what Jesus says.

It could be argued that we are on the wide road from birth all right. It could be argued that we are on the wide road from the moment we're born. From the moment we entered into this life, the Bible says that we enter in a state of spiritual separation from God because of sin. That's just what the Bible tells us. We don't come into the world as a blank slate. We don't come into the world in some amoral condition. We come into the world highly disadvantaged spiritually because we're dead in sin. and so we have to do something. We have to make a choice. Jesus says enter. A command and imperative. Enter through the narrow gate. In my mind, it simply reflects what Jesus said to Nicodemus. Here is Nicodemus, the teacher of the Law and the Prophets, and Jesus has to say to him, Nicodemus, do you understand that you are standing at a crossroads? That you've got two paths in front of you? You have to make a choice. You have to make a determination as to which one you're going to go. You have to be born again, Nicodemus. That's what you have to do.

Now see then secondly that this road is restrictive. This road is restrictive. I'm reading a book called *Women of America*. I'll tell you the back story another time. It's written by a lady named Gail Collins. She's writing from a secular perspective. It's a fascinating read. What struck me was she was talking about the women of America in the colonial period In the opening section of the book. You talk about a hard life and a hard time. We need to be reminded occasionally that it didn't just all start like this. But talking about that time period and she brings a bias. She brings a perspective in which the Puritans are always going to come out on the bad side. Every comment she makes about this period of time and the influence of the Puritans on colonial life is basically cast as a negative thing. I understand her perspective and I understand her line of thinking on that. But I also understand and appreciate the Puritan mindset and theology and the influence that they had for great good in our country.

Here is what this means. This road is restrictive. What we need to visualize is on this narrow road through that narrow gate there are guardrails on either side of this

road. Those guardrails have the words “divine revelation” on either side of that road. They have the words “the Word of God” on either side of that road. In that sense, yes, it does matter what you think. It does matter what you say. It does matter how you live. There is in that sense a restriction that the word of God places on this path.

Notice thirdly the companions are few. The companions are few. At times it seems lonely. At times you feel alone when you're on this road. You wonder at times if anybody else is even on this road. Can you think of some situations where you wondered at times am I the only person on this road? You think as you head to school here in a month or so and some of you may be across the street at one of the largest high schools in the state, do you ever think am I the only one over here who is on this road? In your neighborhood, does it ever occur to you that maybe you're the only one on this way? It can feel lonely at times, can't it? There aren't a lot of people on this road in terms of the appearances.

Why do we remember certain things from our youth? I don't have any idea why this memory sticks out in my mind but I thought of it when I was thinking about this metaphor and point. I remember a family vacation when we were going to visit my sister in Selma, Alabama. Her husband was stationed at Craig Air Force Base and we were driving down there. It was later at night. We were coming in somewhere in Alabama. We're going on a 2-lane highway. Trees, big trees on either side and it is as dark as a night could be. There weren't any other cars anywhere. I remember asking my dad what we would do if the car breaks down. Now, as a dad having been in those same things, I can't imagine anything less comforting for my son to say then what are we going to do out here in the middle of nowhere all by ourselves if the car breaks down? Sometimes that's the way Jesus portrays this life. This road is a lonely one.

But now notice the destiny. The destiny is that of life. Here's what I want you to consider. It's easy to think that everything I've said this point means this life is dull and gray and there's a little bit of morbidity to it. Who really wants to be on this kind of overcast tiny little lane of a road by themselves? That would be to totally miss where Jesus is going with this. John Stott helps us out and he says: “There's a whole spectrum of joys and freedoms for the Christian. The deepest joy in personally knowing God through Christ just as the deepest human joys of always being in close personal

friendships. There is the liberty of sins forgiven and of progressive triumph over temptation. New loves and friendships mushroom with the other disciples of Christ as God becomes the center of the Christian's thinking. All of life takes on new and fascinating attractions as the glimpses of the whole list of things in life under God. Jesus is at the center of all of that." Now what do we do with this?

What are the implications of what Jesus has said in this metaphor in these two choices and these four contrastive pictures? I want to suggest to you a number of things. I want to suggest first of all that what is in view here is salvation. What is in view is salvation. Jesus says in John 10 in verse 9: I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he shall be saved. Now He could just as easily have said I am the gate. I am the point of entry. I am the means by which you get on this road. You've got to come through this gate. You've got to come through this door. That's why he said in John 14 just a little bit later I am the only way. I am the only truth. I am the only life. So what is pictured for us here is a picture of salvation.

What do we know about that secondly? It requires a personal choice. It requires a personal choice. The very nature of the gospel demands a response. Do we understand that? Every time the gospel is proclaimed here at Covenant, every Sunday. The gospel is put forward in here, back there, all through this campus. Every Sunday the gospel is put forward in a myriad of different ways. I say to you that every time the gospel is spoken, every time the gospel is heard, every time the gospel is read the very nature of the gospel requires that a choice is being made, a decision is demanded. You have to enter by the narrow gate that is called trust, that is called believe. You do not enter the gate arm in arm with other people. You do not enter the gate as a group. You do not enter the gate with other people. This gate, if we're going to visualize it accurately and Biblically, is a turnstile. We've all gone through turnstiles. Most of those turnstiles will not allow you access unless there's something that's put in or acknowledged or recognized and then it allows you to pass. That's what's happening here. That turnstile is marked trust and believe. You do not enter that gate by listening alone. You do not enter that gate by sitting and smiling in agreement and saying a quiet amen to some golden rule principle that has been stated. You do not enter that gate by sitting in church week after week. You do not enter that gate by being baptized. You do

not enter that gate by thinking in terms of your heritage or your family background and history. What your grandma did or what your grandfather did or what your parents did does not bring you through the gate that is marked believe and trust. At some point, everybody has to make a choice. At some point, everybody has to make a decision. At some point, everybody has to respond to where you move from trust in yourself and trust in works and trust in human efforts to putting your faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone.

My friends, that's why we have to be absolutely clear as to what this gospel is. It is incumbent upon every one of us to be able to simply and succinctly explain to someone what the gospel is. You don't have to do it eloquently. You don't have to do it by listing 15 verses for every word that you say, but you have to explain and have to put forward what the gospel is because the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. The gospel is what God will use. He won't use anything that I bring other than the truth of the gospel. That's why parents especially, and grandparents increasingly, have to make certain that your home is a gospel centered home. You have to live out the truth of the gospel in your life every day for it to have the most profound impact possible on the lives of your children. There is a wonderful article that I read recently. it's entitled "The Greatest Gospel Opportunity Lives in Your House". Costa Rica. Incredible that we would get a team and go there. Ukraine. Wonderful that we would send a couple over there. But we dare not overlook the reality that the greatest opportunity for the gospel is right in your home. Whether you have children or not, it doesn't matter. The greatest opportunity for the gospel is still in your home. That's why, parents, you have to understand and know and proclaim and live out the gospel every day.

As far as I understand and read the Bible, the gospel (sorry, but I don't mean to upset) is not invite Jesus into your heart. I don't know what a child is hearing and thinking when we present God's truth that way. Invite Jesus into your heart. I know what they need to understand. They need to know who Jesus is, that He is the Son of God. They need to know who they are, that they're a sinner before God, that they have fallen short of the glory of God, that they have done things that are wrong. They need to know what Jesus did when He died on that cross, that He died for sins in payment for that transaction and that transgression. They need to know that the response on their part is

to believe those things. However we may say that, that's the reality of what we need to be living out in our lives and in our homes and in our churches. My friends, that is what God honors.

Number three. What you need to know. The path is not easy. The path is not easy. One of the dangers of the seeker movement, and the seeker movement is still there. It is not quite at the level of popularity as it was a few years back. The seeker movement says let's make Christianity as attractive as possible and take out as many barriers as we possibly can. Let's invite as many people to experience what we have as we possibly can. Obviously we should all be for wanting people to come to Christ and wanting people to sense a welcome. I'm all about being seeker sensitive. But I think the seeker movement has gone so far in its desire to attract Christians that many places have taken down for instance symbols of the cross. They don't want to offend somebody. They remove any religious symbols at all because they don't know who is to come through that door and be offended by that. That may be their personal choice and opinion, but the point is we easily move from that to minimizing sin. We fail to talk about the holiness of God and the judgment of God and the wrath of God. We dare not mention the word hell because that would be most offensive. And yet what is it that God has called us to proclaim? It is not a gospel of self-love and self-improvement. It is a gospel that brings us face-to-face with who we are before God. The gospel is not about personal happiness and how Jesus is going to make everything in your life great. I think those are false leaders. Read the Sermon on the Mount. Did you think as you read that this is an easy life? I'd like to sign up for this. I'd love to be persecuted for my faith. I'd love to find some enemies that I can love. You just go through the whole sermon and you quickly realize we're on a hard path. This is not easy. Jesus tells us that, doesn't He?

Then lastly, what many miss is there are only two choices. There are only two choices. You see, if everybody accepts verse 12 and they do, then most of those same people reject verses 13 and 14. And they do so for a variety of reasons. For instance, they say what about those who are sincere? You're making this really difficult because what about all the people who are sincere in their faith? Sincerity is an admirable quality. We all appreciate sincerity as opposed to hypocrisy. But at the end of the day,

we all know if you're sincerely wrong you're still wrong however sincere you are. Somebody else says what about all the other religions? There are a lot of other religions that are doing a lot of good out there. It sounds to me like you're kind of depreciating those opportunities that are before people. My friends, at the end of the day if we got every worldview that exists in the world today and brought them into this auditorium and filled it up with 1200 people each representing a worldview and a religion, I suggest to you that at the end of the day we could make a division into two groups. There would be one group of 1199 and there would be another group of one. Biblical Christianity would stand alone. Why? On what basis?

First of all, because we have the only worldview, the only religion if you will, where the founder said He is the only way, where the founder said He's God, the Son of God. There isn't any other world religion any other worldview, any other philosophy where the founder of that particular viewpoint said follow me because I'm God. That was only true Christianity. It was only true of Jesus. He's the only one who said that. People say I have a hard time believing a man could become God. I have a hard time believing that too because that isn't what happened. God became a man. That's what the Bible tells us. And in doing so He told us that the only way to experience eternal life with Him was that we do nothing for ourselves. We do not offer any works. We don't offer Him anything at all from what we can generate and do. If you put Jesus with something, the Bible says you get nothing. If you put Jesus with nothing, the Bible says you get everything. It's that simple. The gospel requires that we believe that Jesus did everything that needed to be done. That's what we're trusting. That's what we're believing.

What about the seeming intolerance of this position? Did Christians really think this up on their own? Actually no, we didn't. of course we didn't. It's Jesus who said this. It is the Sermon on the Mount we're reading here. It is from the words of our Lord and He said He's the only way, the only truth, the only life, the only one comes to the father through Him. Truth by its very definition is narrow. Truth in every other discipline is narrow. It's intolerant. Do you want people all over the place preparing you for some surgical procedure or some medical procedure or giving you some prescription? Of course not. You want to zero in on the truth and what is before you. Take science, math,

anything that you can think of and truth is what we require of all of those. That's all that Jesus is saying.

Then lastly, could Jesus be one of many ways to God? Well, my friends, the answer has to be no. Either we believe what Jesus said or we don't believe what Jesus said. You can't pick and choose. We aren't in a cafeteria line picking the religious beliefs and truths that we want to believe. You cannot admire Jesus and reject Christianity as the only way.

So what do we take away? Simply this. There is only one road. There is only one way. The ones on the road are there by only one means. By the amazing grace of God. The Christian message may seem intolerant and it is. The Christian message may seem narrow and it is. The Christian message seems to be arrogant but that it is not. Because there isn't anybody that is on this way who can lay claim to being there by anything they've done. They truly are on that path and that way by the amazing grace of God.

My friend, my prayer for you this morning is whether you've been sitting in this church or another one like it for a week or two, for a month or 20 years, my question to you this morning is there a point in time in your life where you have stood before that path and one of them is wide and like a thoroughfare and most of the world is on it? The other is this narrow gate with the turnstile marked believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. At some point, we're going to stand before God and give an account of our life and there is going to be a judgment. The Bible calls it the Great White Throne judgment where every unbeliever will stand before God. He will say what is it that you have done with my Son? Have you believed in Him or have you rejected Him and tried to work your way to this time and this place and this day?

I'm so glad that the gospel is the good news that says to us Jesus has done everything that needs to be done. You can make that choice right where you're sitting this morning. You can put your trust in Christ right in the closing moments of this time or you can come talk to any of us on the pastoral staff or the elders and we'd be delighted to have a conversation with you about the gospel because it is the power of God unto salvation.

Let's pray. Father God, we're thankful for this gospel. Lord, in the midst of the bad news that all have sinned and have fallen short in the midst of the bad news is that the wages of sin is death, there springs up this good news of life that is offered in Christ who has said that if we will but believe in what Jesus did on that cross, that He did for us and what He did was enough, that You will give to us the gift of eternal life. We thank You for that precious gift, Father. We lift our voices in praise to You. In Jesus's name, Amen.¹