

## The Narrow Way Matthew 7:13-14

It is not uncommon for us today in our normal conversation to have a discussion about the practical value of one's commitments. In fact, someone might even compliment you on your fidelity to the principles you have chosen for yourself—principles that seem to work for you:

- Being moral
- Being a person of your word
- Always working harder than the next guy

You can almost hear them saying to you, "I'm glad that 'it' is working for you." By "it", he or she refers to your faith commitments. In fact, I would go so far as to say that as a culture we love faith commitments. We love to believe in something—something that seems to work for us. It doesn't really matter what it is, as long as it works:

- NFL football
- Late night television
- Ice cream
- Islam or Christianity

This very thing happened to me during a luncheon. Our culture has no problem with you saying that something "works for you." However, **when someone says that their faith commitment is true our culture most definitely has a problem.** Faith, as a commitment or belief is fine. Faith commitments, which stipulate truth must be ruled out of order. Faith commitments, according to the collective wisdom of the office water cooler cannot be true.

However, we should not conclude from this that our problem lies with truth. It is not as though our culture denies truth. After all, in one sense we are obsessed with it. We love all sorts of answers rooted in the scientific method, which guarantees that we can arrive at truth unfettered by bias. Anyone climbing onto an airplane can attest to procedures and technology, which all rigorously apply the truths of science governing the flight of an airplane. When those truths are neglected it results in tragic loss. The problem in our culture is not with "truth" per se, but with what counts as truth. Faith commitments no longer count as truth. Jerram Barrs puts it well,

*We may have our personal religion. We may say that we have faith, go to church and be religious. But Christian statements today make no truth claim whatsoever. People think 'how nice' or 'how comforting'... They do not think that something has been said about what is true, the truth about the world, God, who we are, salvation and so on*

Let me suggest to you that the reason why most of us are never hassled about our faith commitments is because we are never perceived to be making an absolute claim about those commitments. In other words, we are simply saying things that "work" for us, not things that are true for the entire world in which we live.

### **What would it look like for us to build our lives upon the notion that Jesus Christ embodies truth, a truth to which all humankind is accountable?**

You see; right here in chapter 7:13-14, after Jesus has summed his teaching on the character of Kingdom life, he now moves us to the **place of decision**. According to Jesus the first thing we have to come to grips with is that as far as he is concerned there are **two accountings of reality—his way and every other way**. His way leads to life. Elsewhere in the Bible he calls it the truth. Every other way he says leads to destruction.

Francis Schaeffer, in his address at Notre Dame in 1981 said, "Christianity is not a series of truths in the plural, but rather truth spelled with a capital "T." Truth about total reality, not just about religious things.

Again, I ask the question, "What would it look like for us to build our lives upon the notion that Jesus Christ embodies truth, a truth to which all humankind is accountable?"

#### **1) I must recognize such a life is a minority proposition**

Jesus says that the gate, which leads to life is narrow and few find it. He says that gate, which leads to destruction is wide and the road is spacious. Our translation reads "easy", but spacious or broad is the better idea. If we are to use today's language, the road to destruction might be compared to a super highway, which by its very design makes room for more and more people. I think the best word that I have seen to describe the spacious way is "**accommodating**."

The way which leads to destruction is accommodating to everything and everyone. Yet, Jesus will not accommodate. He will not bend. The laws, which govern entrance to the Kingdom cannot be altered. These verses help us understand why the way of Jesus is a minority proposition:

- **Jesus does not accommodate the way of license**

I mean by the word license what the Puritans meant by it, a laxity about moral standards, compromise or worldliness. Over and over in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminds us of the high calling of the Kingdom. If we are to commit ourselves to the Kingdom of Christ, we must be those who are eager to follow after Jesus and hunger for righteousness (5:6). We must be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect (5:48). As Jesus will remind us in a few verses, it is not enough to be a mere hearer of his word we must build our lives upon them. Only the builders rooted in the rock of truth survive the challenges of this life.

Yet the idea that God has standards to which we are all accountable is unpopular. Who wants to think that God cares about what movies I go to, things I let my children do or the places I travel? We reason, “As long as God does not meddle in my personal affairs then we’ll get along just fine.” Yet that is the point, Jesus does meddle in our personal affairs. He will not accommodate our compromising licentiousness.

The truth is nosy. Jesus is going to get in your business. Perhaps you have known some who wanted to follow Jesus until it meant that

- They would have to stop sleeping together until they were married
- A business relationship would have to be severed because integrity had been compromised

It is unpopular for us to let someone or something in our lives who is that invasive. But if we are to follow Jesus we will.

- **Jesus does not accommodate the way of legality**

By legality, I am referring to a superficial adherence to Jesus and his calling in the Kingdom. In Jesus’ day, those individuals who are identified in such a way were the Scribes and the Pharisees. Jesus calls their righteousness inadequate for the high calling of the Kingdom. He tells us early in the Sermon on the Mount that our righteousness must exceed theirs. Next week, we will talk about how Jesus calls us to beware of these teachers; he calls them “false prophets.”

Today, this same confusion about faithfulness to the Kingdom of Christ exists. We might call it the confusion of the religious. Theirs is a righteousness that is...

- **External**, while within dwells unchecked hatred, pride, lusts, jealousy and all sorts of fleshly desires

**Illustration:** Just this week someone shared with me about the story of a man, the father of several children, with a fine reputation as a Christian servant, who was discovered with thousands of inappropriate pictures on his computer.

- **Preoccupied with trivial matters**, when the weightier matters of Jesus’ concern go neglected. As a result, we are distracted from what Jesus is calling us to and we focus on unimportant matters.

The road of life does not accommodate a double-life. **If we are to become a follower of Jesus, his holiness must confront not only our external failure, but more importantly our internal failure and brings us to a true poverty of spirit (5:3).** The Kingdom of Heaven does not belong to those who “look” like they belong there, but to those who know that they don’t. It belongs to the sinners who are rescued by Christ, not the religious who are focused upon their spiritual successes.

Yet, isn’t more popular to be numbered among the spiritually victorious, those who can give you all of the latest success stories about how they have learned how to master their own heart?

According to Jesus, success is the experience of brokenness and struggle, of mourning he calls it—something the religious know very little about.

- **Jesus does not accommodate the way of lies**

By lies I mean that Jesus does not accommodate our **relative notions of truth**. From Jesus perspective truth is not a democratic notion; it is a revealed one. The claim of Jesus’ absolute uniqueness is not something for which we should apologize for if it is in fact the truth.

If the God of the Bible is the one to whom we must be reconciled to in order to have eternal life, and if Jesus, in his life, death and resurrection, is God’s unique provision for that reconciliation, then it is not arrogant to make this claim. Rather, such a claim is an expression of love. In fact, to fail to make that claim is unloving and false. **Let’s don’t forget; Jesus says this is the path to life!** Jesus is not interested in shortchanging our joy. He is not holding out on us. He tells us that he has come that we may have abundant lives!

Jesus does not accommodate the idea that all paths lead the same place if they are rooted in the sincerity of the believer, because all paths do not lead to the same place. Sincerity is not enough; I must be sincere in my commitment to the truth.

But of course, who has time for the hard work of truth? If what I believe seems to be working for me now, why change it? At the end of our life, however, it will not matter how many degrees we have acquired, books we have read or countries we have visited. It will only matter if we have taken Jesus seriously. What have you done with Jesus?

It is for this reason that Jesus says the narrow way is “hard.” **License, legality and lies are all just a lot easier.** We come by them naturally. Nobody has to tell us, “Give in to your impulses.” “Let your pride go unchecked.” “Make up a story to make yourself look better.”

The road to destruction is accommodating; it will adjust itself to whatever you want. The truth is like a hairpin turn on a high, mountain road. There are consequences to being a disciple of Jesus. You’re not only going to be unpopular, there are going to be lots of costs that one must be willing to accept if he is to follow Jesus.

## 2) I must recognize that the way of life must be entered

Commentators have wrestled with whether or not to take Jesus words as primarily directed towards his disciples or towards those he was seeking to make disciples. It seems more natural to understand Jesus words here as given to those who were contemplating following after Jesus, but had not yet made that commitment.

What that means is that following after Jesus is **not simply a minority position, it is a conscious decision.** The only imperative in these two verses is in verse 13, “enter.” If we are to build our lives upon the notion that Jesus Christ embodies truth it is not enough to build on his ideas or teachings, we must build on Jesus himself. Jesus says that the gate is narrow. **Elsewhere he will call himself the gate. The gate is as narrow as Jesus himself. No one enters the Kingdom except through Jesus Christ.**

The Reformers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century referred to this distinction as that between *notitia*, *assensus* and *fiducia*. Discipleship required more than

- *Notitia* (knowledge about the facts)
- *Assensus* (belief that the facts were true)

It required *fiducia* or trust or commitment. That is to say, the **Kingdom calls for a personal decision to follow after Jesus Christ.** In the 1970s and 1980s, it was popular for pastors and evangelists to make calls for people to personally commit themselves to Jesus Christ. Today it does not seem to be so popular. Nevertheless, though the times have changed the need for you to personally commit yourself to following after Jesus Christ has not. You must enter by the narrow gate. It is not enough to know the truth about the Kingdom or even to believe that those facts are true. We must personally commit ourselves to Jesus Christ. There are no objective bystanders in the Kingdom; there are only those committed to Jesus Christ. Where are you? Have you personally and publicly committed yourself to being a follower of Jesus Christ?

So, the question we are faced with this morning should not really be, “What works for you?” It is, “What is the truth?”