

The Kingdom of God and Eternal Life (14)

The Small Gate and the Narrow Way

Sermon by Pastor Sylvia Chan

In the last two messages we have looked at two very important questions: Why is it that we cannot have eternal life simply by doing good deeds? And will Christians who still live in sin have eternal life? Today we are going to study another important aspect of eternal life.

^{NAU} **Matthew 7:13-14** “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. ¹⁴ For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

Here the Lord Jesus says that if we want to have life, we will have to choose the narrow gate because only the small gate and narrow way leads to life, but few people find it. Most people will enter though the wide gate and the broad way, but that only leads to destruction.

- Why do so few people find the small gate and the narrow way? Why do most people find the wide gate and the broad way?
- What do the small gate and the narrow way stand for? What do the wide gate and the broad way stand for?

Now we will look into the word of God to find the answers.

Why do few people find the small gate and the narrow way? Why do most people find the wide gate and the broad way?

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Is it that some people are luckier than others, so they find the small gate and the narrow way; they enter through it, and at the end get eternal life ? And is it that most people are not so lucky; they can't find the small gate and the narrow way, but only the wide gate and the broad way, so at the end they will face destruction? Is that the case?

Or maybe the small gate and the narrow way are hidden in some secret place that is very difficult to find. Yahweh God would then reveal its location to those He loves, and hide the location from those He doesn't love, such that at the end very few people can find the small gate and narrow way! Is it like that?

Absolutely not! The answer is definitely no! Yahweh God doesn't show favoritism. He doesn't want anyone to perish, but wants all men to come to repentance and be saved!

^{NIV} **Acts 10:34-35** Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right."

God doesn't show favoritism, so the reason why few people find the small gate and the narrow way is their own fault!

1. We like the wide gate and the broad way

First of all, we like gates that are wide and ways that are broad. I will illustrate this with a short sharing. In the year 1997, Pastor Bentley and I went to Israel together with a group of coworkers. The city of Jerusalem is divided into two areas: one is called the old city, the other is called the new city. The new city has been built just within a few decades, with modern houses and wide streets. The old city was

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built a few hundred years ago or maybe even thousands of years ago; it has many important historical buildings. The streets in the old city are very narrow; actually they are more like alleys and not streets. Some alleys in the old city are so narrow that only one person can go through comfortably; two persons cannot go through together. We rented a van for transportation, and this van could only go on wide streets, not the narrow alleys of the old city. I wanted to avoid those narrow alleys, preferring the big streets. If the streets are wide enough for the van to go through, I could just sit in the van to watch the tall buildings. That would be the best.

You see, it is human mentality to like the broad ways, but we don't like the narrow ways. When we go into a house that has a wide gate, we feel all right; but if that house has a gate slightly smaller than usual, we feel uncomfortable with it, we don't like it. It's our human nature not to choose a small gate and narrow way, but to choose a wide gate and broad way.

The Lord Jesus says that few people will find the small gate and narrow way because we don't like a small gate and narrow way, therefore we would not look for them. We might even avoid them just as I did in Jerusalem.

If we aren't looking for a small gate and narrow way, we certainly won't find them. Even if we accidentally run into a narrow way, we wouldn't want to walk on it. On the contrary we will look for the broad gate and wide way, which in the end will lead to destruction!

2. Even if someone shows us the small gate and narrow way, we won't listen

But even if someone shows us the small gate and narrow way, we won't listen to him.

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Suppose we want to go to a certain place but don't know the way to get there, so we would ask people. One person shows us a broad way, and another person shows us a narrow way. If between these two ways only one is the right way, and if we don't know which one is the right way, we would have to find out which is the right way. I think most people would go on the broad way first. And if that doesn't work out, they will come back to try the narrow way. That's the usual human choice.

But if we want to go to the kingdom of God for eternal life, we cannot simply try this way or that way. If we choose the wrong way, that would lead us farther and farther away from the truth, and we would not realize we are heading to destruction. Only on the Judgment Day of the Lord Jesus will we realize we have taken the wrong way, but it will be too late!

So what should we do now?

Small gate and narrow way, broad gate and wide way

The small gate and narrow way, versus the wide gate and broad way, are illustrations that the Lord Jesus uses to teach us. What do the small gate and narrow way stand for? What do the wide gate and broad way stand for?

^{NAU} **John 14:6** Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

The Lord Jesus himself is the way, so the small gate and narrow way are the way of the Lord Jesus. But most people in the world don't want to follow the teaching of the Lord because it is too difficult to fulfill. We want to get to eternal life through the easier way, so we choose the wide gate and broad way.

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Many Christians say we only need to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came into the world to save us, and then we are saved. Obeying the word of the Lord Jesus is not necessary for our salvation! This kind of teaching is the wide gate and the broad way that will only lead to destruction.

^{NAU} **Matthew 7:21** “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter.*”

The Lord Jesus himself says that not everyone who says to him “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of the Father will enter the kingdom of heaven. Just calling Jesus, “Lord, Lord” is easy, that is the wide gate and the broad way; people like to walk on this way, but the Lord said they will not enter the kingdom of heaven simply by calling him “Lord, Lord”. If people want to enter the kingdom of heaven, they will have to do the will of the Father. To actually do the will of the Father is difficult, but that is the small gate and narrow way that will lead to the kingdom of heaven.

A genuine faith and obedience to the word of God

Genuine faith in the Bible is not simply believing that Jesus is the Son of God, but also includes obedience.

^{NAU} **Romans 1:5** through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about *the obedience of faith* among all the Gentiles for His name’s sake

^{NAU} **Romans 16:26** but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, *leading to obedience of faith*.

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Both passages mention “obedience of faith”. According to Greek grammars, it means the obedience that comes from faith, or the obedience that belongs to faith. Obedience is the manifestation of a true faith. If you truly believe in Yahweh God and the Lord Jesus, you would obey the word of God.

You believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he came into the world to save us. That is very good, but that is not the sum total of true faith in the Bible. True faith includes obedience to the word of God, an obedience that stems from a genuine faith.

We have to continue on the narrow way

Entering the small gate is done only once at the beginning. After entering the small gate, we don't just stand there. We have to keep on walking on the narrow way.

Entering the small gate is equivalent to repentance, committing our lives to Yahweh God and the Lord Jesus, and getting baptized. That is only the first step. After that we have to walk on the narrow way, which is equivalent to living a life of obedience to the word of the Lord Jesus, and following the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Many Christians enter through the small gate, but do not complete the walk on the narrow way. Some people only walk half way, and then don't want to walk any more because it's too difficult to obey the Lord's teaching for the whole life. There are two such sad examples in New Testament: one is Judas, the disciple who betrayed the Lord Jesus; the other one is Demas, apostle Paul's coworker who abandoned Paul to go back to the world.

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Judas left everything to follow the Lord Jesus, yet he later betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Why did he rebel against the Lord Jesus and betray him?

^{NIV} **John 12:6** He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

The word “he” in this passage refers to Judas. Judas was the keeper of the money bag, but he stole money from the bag because he loved money. Eventually he decided not to walk on the narrow way any more, and betrayed the Lord Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. At the end he hanged himself.

As for Demas, he was serving together with Paul, yet at the end he abandoned Paul. Why?

^{RSV} **2 Timothy 4:10** For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

Here the apostle Paul said that Demas had deserted him and gone to Thessalonica. Why? Because he loved this present world and wanted to enjoy the things in the world, so he decided to go back to the world.

These two stories serve as a warning to us: We shouldn't think that because we have already entered the small gate that we don't have to worry any more. Entering the small gate is just the first step. We have to continue to obey the Lord's teaching, and rely on the Holy Spirit to put to the death the sins and desires in our heart.

What should we do to avoid the wrong way?

But how would you know whether you are on the right way or the wrong way? Is there something we can watch out for, so that we won't go on the wrong way?

1. We obey all the teaching of the Lord Jesus

In John 14:6, the Lord Jesus himself said he is the way, so if we want to avoid going on the wrong way, we need to obey all the teaching of the Lord. Some of the teaching of the Lord are hard to understand and put into practice, but we shouldn't avoid them. We should ask the Lord to help us understand his teaching and how to put them into practice.

When people face the difficult teachings of the Lord Jesus, they would usually react in one of two ways in an attempt to evade them. The first way is to simply avoid those teachings; they don't obey them or even mention them. The second way to evade the difficult teachings of the Lord Jesus is to say that these are meant only for high level Christians, not ordinary Christians.

^{NAU} **Matthew 28:19-20** "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

This is the instruction from the Lord Jesus before he ascended to heaven. He told us to observe all that he had commanded us, not just the verses that we like.

2. We watch out for false prophets

^{NIV} **Matthew 7:15-20** Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶ By their fruit you will

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recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?¹⁷ Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

Here the Lord Jesus teaches us that the way to spot the false prophets is to look at their lives. If a servant of God preaches the word of God, but has some sinful behaviors, then we have to be careful. We watch out for this person because he may be a false prophet. The Lord said by their fruit we will recognize them.

^{NAU} **2 Timothy 4:3-4** For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires,⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

In this passage the apostle Paul warns us that in the future people will not want to hear the true teaching of the Lord Jesus. Because it is too difficult, they will gather teachers around them to say things they want to hear. They don't want to hear the truth but will turn aside to myths.

The second point is that we have to watch out for false prophets and to stay away from false teachers who teach things that are soothing to the ears. If a servant of God preaches the word only to please the people, that's a false teacher.

3. Our will is to do God's will

Finally if our will is to do God's will, we will have the wisdom to discern whether someone is speaking God's will or whether he is speaking from himself.

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^{NAU} **John 7:17** If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or *whether* I speak from Myself.

For example, many years ago I listened to someone's preaching, he said that in the last days God will build a highway to bring God's people to Jerusalem. According to this preacher, this highway is special because the unintelligent will not be able to walk on it. When I heard that, I was very surprised because our Father in heaven is not like that. He loves the humble and the poor, and will never reject those who are less intelligent. On the contrary He will help the less intelligent. He will not build a highway only for the intelligent people but reject the less intelligent ones. Even though at that time I didn't know the Bible well enough, I knew right away that what this person preaches is wrong. It is not from the word of my Father in heaven.

Finally it is the love for Yahweh God, love for people, and love for the truth that will safeguard us from going on the wrong way. If our will is to do God's will, He will grant us the wisdom to discern which teaching is the word of truth, which teaching is just man's ideas.

Conclusion

The small gate and narrow way will lead to life, but the wide gate and broad way will lead to death. If we choose the wide gate and broad way, that is the easier way, but eventually we will face destruction. By contrast, if we choose the small gate and narrow way, even though it is difficult, the Holy Spirit will help us, and we will have eternal life. If our desire is to follow Yahweh God's way, He will give us the wisdom to make the right choice.