

The Final Destination

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Date: 11 June 2000

Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 11th of June 2000. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled The Final Destination and is from Matthew 7.13-14. Almighty God, we thank you for your word and pray that we may be not only hearers of it but doers also.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. You may like to have open the passage from Matthew's Gospel that was read for us, page 788.

Only two verses, but important verses nonetheless. Imagine your name up in lights on Broadway. Fame is yours. It's success. It's success. It's prosperity. popularity. It's the adulation of the mobs and the crowds. For Broadway, Broadway surely stands for the pinnacle, not only of the theatrical and musical world, but in a sense, it stands for success all round.

[1 : 17] The allure of the lights, the songs, the theatres, the glitz, the glamour, the media mobs, the paparazzi, it would all be yours. It's the Big Apple, the Emerald City, the Emerald City, the streets are paved with gold.

It's busy, bright and bustling, enticing and exciting. To be caught up in the crowds, carried along in the mobs of success and popularity. This is easy street.

You've made it. The world is yours. This is the place to be. Everybody else at your feet. And beckoning neon invites the world to join you there.

But far away, and at a different time, Christian stood at the edge of a field, searching for the celestial city.

And a man directed him across the field, pointing out to him in the dim distance, a small wicket gate. So small and so far, that Christian couldn't even see it from where he stood across the field.

[2 : 31] No neon sights beckoning, enter here. No wide entrance that is unavoidable. No crowds and throngs and mobs flocking down through that little gate.

Jesus said, enter through the narrow gate. The Sermon on the Mount climaxes with this command. Enter through the narrow gate. Why the narrow gate? Why not Broadway? Not because there's something inherently right about being narrow, but rather because, as the next two verses go on to tell us, a negative reason and a positive reason.

Negatively enter through the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the road is easy, that leads to destruction. And there are many who take it.

Broadway looks great. Broadway looks good. It's width seems to be inviting. It is wide and easy. Words that have connotations to do with prosperity and spaciousness and room.

[3 : 45] Plenty of space to be there with all your friends and the crowds and everything you want to take along with you. It's full of popular appeal. It's where everybody goes to Broadway.

And most of us are attracted by a crowd. If we walk down a street and we see a crowd standing outside a particular building, we're just as likely to walk over and see what they're looking at. We don't want to miss out on anything and we certainly don't want to miss out on a bargain.

If you go to a shop and there's a crowd in that part of the store and the rest is empty, you'll go over there. You'll think there's a bargain here to be had. In foreign cities, they say that the advice is, especially at night, to keep to the big, wide streets that are well lit and with lots of people.

They're safer. The best places to be. And of course, that's where the excitement surely is as well. But it doesn't apply with issues of faith. The Broadway is highly dangerous.

Indeed, those who take it are embarking on a journey of suicide in the end because the road is deceptive. It looks alluring, exciting and enticing.

[4 : 58] But its end is destruction and hell. Less obvious and less popular is the narrow gate.

And the reason to enter the narrow gate now expressed positively, Jesus says, the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life.

And there are few who find it. Literally, the verse says, how narrow it is. It's not just that compared to Broadway, you'd say that this gate is rather narrow.

It is that it is particularly narrow. How narrow this gate is. And it's described as hard as well. Or the road is hard. The connotations are of trouble or difficulty.

Indeed, even more than that, suffering and distress and persecution. That's the gate. And that's the path that leads from the gate. No wonder it's unpopular.

[6 : 03] No wonder it's unattractive. Nobody stands there beckoning people in. There are no crowds flocking in. And few find it. Christian in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress couldn't even see it from where he stood at first.

It is like finding the eye of a needle in a haystack. But ironically, this narrow gate is the gate that leads to life.

To eternal life. To Bunyan's Celestial City. Or to use Matthew's terminology, to the Kingdom of Heaven. For 2,000 years, people and not only Christians have marvelled and wondered at the teaching of Jesus.

So profound. So wise. So clever. So sharp. Such pithy parables and proverbs. Such striking teaching.

And people have marvelled at the wisdom and greatness of Jesus the Teacher. And they're not necessarily Christians who've done so. And of Jesus' teaching, perhaps the Sermon on the Mount is the centrepiece or the pinnacle.

[7 : 18] There we find such grand statements that even our world as a whole thinks wonderful. Blessed are the poor.

Blessed are the meek. And so on. But the point of the Sermon on the Mount is not just that it's marvellous teaching to remember or recite or say. It is to do it.

It is a sermon to obey. Not to marvel at. So later on at the end of chapter 7, a couple of paragraphs down in verse 21, we've seen two ways.

The broad way, the narrow way. The idea of there being two possibilities is continued here where we've got two groups of people. Both of them hear the word but only one group do it. And they are the ones who are on the narrow way.

Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. That's what the sermon is for. To obey it.

[8 : 19] And then in the last paragraph of the chapter, the same thing. A story that's well known to us from Sunday school probably. About building a house on a rock or on the sand.

But the wise person is not just the person who thinks Jesus' teaching is wise and clever, who appreciates it or marvels at it. The wise person is the one who hears these words of mine and acts on them.

That's why Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount. Not to show off his cleverness or wisdom but to urge his hearers and readers to obey.

You see, the way that goes through the narrow gate is the way of obedience of Jesus' words in this Sermon on the Mount. And that is not easy.

Jesus says it's narrow and it's hard. You see, it's not easy to be poor in spirit. Our world tells us we should be self-sufficient in every way including in our spirit.

[9 : 23] But Jesus says blessed are the poor in spirit. the blessing of the kingdom of heaven will be theirs. It's not easy to be that but that is what we're called to be.

It's not easy to be meek. Meekness is often regarded in our society as weakness. Something to be despised and looked down upon. But Jesus says blessed are the meek.

It's not easy to be meek. It's hard. It's hard. It's part of the narrow and hard way. But inheriting the earth is yours if you are.

It's not easy to be merciful. Our society does not prize mercy. It's not easy to thirst after righteousness. Our society tells us to thirst after all sorts of other things.

Beer, Coca-Cola, self-fulfillment and so on. It's not easy to be pure in heart. But when we are merciful and thirst after righteousness and are pure in heart, when we're on the narrow and hard way, then will we see God.

[10 : 32] It's not easy to face persecution for Christ's sake. It's not easy to do away with our anger. It's not easy to put aside all lust. It's not easy to be sexually faithful to our spouse.

It's not easy to keep every promise and oath that we make. It's not easy to turn the other cheek. Our society, our world and Broadway are telling us to do otherwise all the time.

It's not easy to love our enemies. It's not easy to be pious and generous in private. It's not all that difficult to be pious and generous in public because then we get the adulation of the people around us thinking, oh, what a pious and generous person you are.

But Jesus' sermon on the mount commands us to be pious and generous in private where only God knows our hearts and nobody else can see. It's not easy to pray in private, consistently and regularly.

It's not easy to forgive. It's much easier to condemn and hold grudges. It's not easy not to worry. Oh, we love worrying.

[11 : 39] We look for things to worry about. It's not easy not to worry. But Jesus tells us not to. It's not easy not to judge others.

Our media is full of encouragements to judge other people. But Jesus says don't. It's not easy to love others as you love yourself. We're told to love ourselves.

We're not often told in our society to love other people in the same way. You see, they're the commands of the Sermon on the Mount. They're the things that Jesus commands us to do.

And none of them is easy. None of them comes naturally. None of them is what our world values and highly esteems. The narrow gate involves doing all of those things.

And yes, it is narrow. It is restrictive, ethically and morally. All those commands, and there are many more, of course, in Jesus' teaching elsewhere, actually set boundaries within which Christians can operate, but beyond which we must not.

[12 : 41] It is restrictive, and it is narrow. It is the way Jesus commands. Broadway, of course, is the opposite. It's permissive and liberal and tolerant.

Anything goes. Do what you like. There's no ethical standard. There's nothing to obey. It is full of loose morals and promiscuity and permissiveness and perversion.

It thirsts after other people's adulation, not after righteousness. We follow our own desires, not the will of God. And of course, if you're on Broadway, persecution will be something you never know. If you're on the narrow way, though, you will necessarily not seek to please other people. Seek to please God, but not others.

But those who are on Broadway will parade their piety in public so that the public will adore them and adulate them. Jesus has already condemned such hypocrisy in the Sermon on the Mount.

[13 : 48] Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites. They love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners so that they may be seen by others. Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them.

Whenever you fast, do not look dismal like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. And so on. That's the way of Broadway.

Do things so that others think we're good or pious or generous or loving or kind so that others think that we're the sort of people they want to be with. That's not the way of the narrow way.

The people on the narrow way who've passed through the narrow gate seek God's will and God's pleasure and God's approval. And they're not bound and constricted and guided by serving the will of other people.

You see, the Broadway is the way of our world. It is easy. There's nothing to be obeyed there. But the narrow way is the way of obeying Christ, following and imitating him.

[14 : 56] On the Broadway there's plenty of room to carry around our sins, our luggage, our baggage, our desires and lusts. But the narrow way is so narrow we have to leave them behind in order to pass through the gate.

So to the woman who was an adulteress Jesus said, leave your life of sin. Sin no more. In effect, he's saying what this is saying here.

To enter the narrow gate, you've got to put your sin beside you and leave it behind. The writer to the Hebrews wrote that we are to cast away our sins and weights, everything that burdens us down or slows us down in our spiritual walk.

That's the way of the narrow way. Broadway lugs its treasures around, clasps and grasps them closely to its chest.

But for those on the narrow way, their treasures are already stored up at the end in heaven. And so to the rich young ruler, Jesus said elsewhere, sell all you have, give your money to the poor.

[16:05] In effect, he's saying you want to walk through the narrow gate? There's no room to carry all your riches with you. Leave them behind. Broadway says do what you like, you're the boss.

The narrow way says submit to Jesus and do God's will. You see, when Jesus says enter through the narrow gate, he is commanding his followers to live a particularly moral, ethical life in obedience to his commands.

And yes, it is narrow. Yes, it is restricted. Jesus makes no apology for that whatsoever. But it's not just about doing good. It's not just about being a good, moral, ethical, upright sort of person obeying Jesus' laws.

The narrow way is also narrow theologically. That is, it's not just about right practice, it is also about right belief. And they go together in the Bible all the time.

In the end, you can't have one without the other. So in the next paragraph after the one we're dealing with, verse 15, Jesus says, beware of false prophets. That is, the people who speak wrongly or untruth about God and about Jesus Christ.

[17:20] Beware of false prophets. They're the ones standing at the entrance of Broadway, beckoning us in, saying, it doesn't matter what you believe, come in, you're all welcome, we're all on the same journey or the same path.

But the narrow way, through the narrow gate, is restricted not only ethically, but also theologically, to what is true about Jesus and God.

Theological permissiveness is the mark of Broadway, but not so the narrow way. And again, you see, the broad way is the way of our world. Nothing is to be obeyed and nothing is to be believed. Believe what you like. It doesn't really matter, but the narrow way says, believe in Jesus Christ alone. It does matter. Broadway says, believe what you like because all roads lead in the end to Nirvana.

The narrow way knows that only in Christ is the entrance to the kingdom of heaven found.

Broadway tells us that we all believe in the same God. Whether you're a Muslim or a Hindu or a Buddhist or a pagan or an atheist or a New Ager or a Christian, it's all the same God.

[18:32] There's only one God, so we all believe in the same God, so we're all on the same path to the same nirvana or heaven. It doesn't matter. But the truth is the narrow way. It does matter.

Jesus is uniquely God. Increasingly, I think that we Christians ought to be seeing in our world how narrow the Christian way is.

Our world is becoming increasingly permissive and liberal and divergent and tolerant and pluralistic and so on and that looks very appealing. It looks attractive. We're not forced into any confrontation or difference with the world.

And the world promises much. It looks alluring and exciting and enticing. And most of us don't like to be different. Most of us like to generally conform.

We don't really want to stand out too much. And more and more our tolerant so-called society is labelling those on the narrow way as being extremists and fanatics and fundamentalists.

[19:35] truth is not democratic. Truth is not determined by the majority opinion. Truth is objective and is determined by God in Christ.

Few are those who walk the narrow way. We ought not be deterred by that. But most of us also find it hard to make big decisions.

Most of us on some issues prevaricate especially when the decision is important and when choosing A means a rejection of B. You can't have a bit of both.

That's why I think people like going to places like buffets and smorgasbords because you can choose a bit of this but that doesn't mean you can't have a bit of that as well. We just don't really know so we'll have a bit of everything.

How often do you go to somebody's place and they say well there's a choice of dessert you can have cheesecake or chocolate mousse or you can have a bit of both. Oh I'll have a bit of both thank you. Jesus confronts us with a decision here that is an exclusive one.

[20:46] It's not a matter of a bit of both. There's no third way. There's no via media. There's no middle road by which we can lean over and pick up the treasures of Broadway but keep pretty close to the narrow way as well.

It is one or the other. We can't have the allure and the excitement and the fleeting pleasures of Broadway now and still arrive at the destination of the narrow way.

They're divergent paths. They end up in opposite poles. Broadway promises popularity and prosperity now but it leads to a very different end from the narrow way which promises trouble or hardship now but has life as its destination.

Why would anyone choose this narrow way when it's hard, narrow, difficult, unpopular, troublesome, even persecuted?

Because the destination of it is life. Not just life more of the same of what we're experiencing here and now but life in its fullness, life in its abundance, the kingdom of heaven, seeing God inheriting the earth, the various expressions that Jesus uses in the Sermon on the Mount.

[22 : 06] It is total joy, total perfection, being in the presence of God forever and a day. Persecution now leads to rewards in heaven.

Meekness now leads to future inheritance. The trouble now is worth it for the sake of heaven. our world wants instant gratification.

It wants its pleasure now if not just before. But that is fleeting so often and ultimately dissatisfying. But Jesus promises for those on the narrow way solid joys and lasting treasures.

They're in heaven, stored for us, certain and secure, even though now the way is narrow and hard. All of this so far looks like being just hard work, as though somehow the reward of heaven is for those who just do good works and be done with it.

But that's not the full story. We need to see Jesus' command about entering through the narrow gate in the light of what else he says in the Sermon on the Mount. The end of verse 14 he says there are few who find it.

[23 : 25] Finding the narrow way and coming to its destination of life is not a reward for those who are clever enough to find it or who work hard enough to find it. Because just a few verses earlier in the same chapter Jesus has said search and you will find.

Not because you search hard, not because you're clever, not because you're full of good works but because God will open the door to you. That's his grace at work you see.

To be on the narrow way and to arrive at its destination of life is yes partly our own endeavour and commitment but it is sustained, begun and ended by the grace of God who makes it possible.

The same sort of thing comes in the last paragraph of the chapter. Again two groups of people building on a rock or building on sand. That's the broad way, the narrow way or vice versa.

But anyone who hearing Jesus' words here in his day would not fail to pick up the allusion to the Old Testament. For there time and again God is the rock.

[24 : 31] Building on the rock is building on God or to expand that in the New Testament terms building on Jesus himself. So the person who enters the narrow gate, who walks the narrow way, hard though it is and arrives at its destination is not just somebody who's done the right thing full of good works and great achievement.

It is somebody who has relied on God and his grace. You see this is not just about good works. It's made possible by the grace of God himself.

Well these two little verses invite us to make a clear decision. decision. We don't stumble into the narrow gate by accident. We need to find it.

That is an act of our will and our determination. Which gate are we going through? The narrow gate or broad way with the crowds?

It's an important decision. Our eternal destiny is at stake. The roads don't lead to the same place. They lead in opposite directions. Broadway is deceptive.

[25 : 40] It looks as though it's going to promise us everything. In the end it delivers little and leads to destruction and hell. And that's a real destination.

But the narrow way which doesn't obviously seem to promise a lot does lead to life. And that also is a real destination. There are only two ways.

It is simple and blunt and straightforward. Those who think that somehow we should be more sophisticated and think of third ways and fourth ways and all sorts of other combinations have got it wrong.

It is very easy. There are two ways and two only. Two destinations, two only. Two different groups of people travelling these roads, two only. You're either in the crowd or you're not.

You're either going to life or you're not. You're either through the narrow gate or you're not. In the end they're the only two possibilities. choose life.

[26 : 41] Choose the narrow gate. Search for it. You'll find it. God will let you find it. He'll open it for you. And he'll lead you to life that is worth every bit of the narrowness and the hardness of the way.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. we pray this for Jesus' sake Amen