

Enter through the narrow gate

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[0 : 0 0] Lewis, thank you. With these words open in front of us, which are, I think they're glorious! And at the same time, shattering and horrifying what Jesus says here. The day will come in the! future when all of us stand before the Lord Jesus Christ, the judge of all, and our hearts and lives will be exposed to him and open to him. Can you imagine what it will feel like on that day?

Can you imagine it as he sees you and then he opens his mouth and he says to you, I know you, come in, enter the kingdom of heaven, and on that day, to your delight, you are ushered in to a feast in the light with the king. You're welcomed in through the door to life as it's meant to be in the kingdom of heaven. And at this feast in the kingdom, we will neither cry nor hunger no more. In fact, at this feast together, we will see our father and we'll live in his presence and we'll look on his face and we'll feel his approval and we'll glory in his love towards us.

In this kingdom, in this family community, God's character will infuse everything, will infuse us. So all of Jesus's kingdom teaching, everything he commands in the Sermon on the Mount and lives out in his own life, a pure, deep, selfless love for God and others, that is actually what is going to come out of our hearts forever. And together we'll be comforted and filled and blessed beyond imagining and we'll live in safety and we'll have overflowing life and we'll hallow our father's name for all eternity. We are meant to sense just a touch of what it will feel like on that day when our Lord says to us, come, enter in. Could you, on the other hand, could you imagine the horror?

Were you to stand before him and hear him say to you, I never knew you, get away from me. And you find yourself on that day outside the kingdom, in the darkness and destroyed for all eternity. And the Bible says, Jesus says here at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, that there are two final destinations. And that what we do with Jesus's teaching today and through our lives, 2022 and on, will determine whether Jesus says to us on the final day, come, come in, enter my kingdom or away from me. And that is why in this last section of the Sermon on the Mount, which is his word for us today, Jesus commands his listeners and he urges us to choose wisely and decide clearly and follow him as our Lord. I just want to walk through this teaching together. I want us to allow our Lord to move us, to make a wise choice and a clear decision in our lives today. First, says Jesus, look at these verses with me, verses 13 and 14. He's speaking to disciples, he's speaking to those listening in on the edges and everyone in between. And he says, enter through the narrow gate. Listen, enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it.

[4 : 1 0] So you're standing, let's say, listening to Jesus' teaching and you see before yourself two gates. You see two gates.

Question is, which one will you walk through? Right in front of you, if you can imagine this, there is a very wide gate and beyond it a broad road.

And as you stand and look through the wide gate onto the broad road, people brush by you and enter through it. And they're normal people and confident people. They're people that you know from work and school.

And they're chatting and laughing, some of them healthy and happy. Some of them are limping along with all sorts of worries and burdens. But there's a steady flow past you and through the wide gate and onto the broad road. Many people, the majority of people.

And I guess if you ask them about following the Lord Jesus Christ and his teaching, they might say, who? Or they might say, are you serious? Because, well, why would anyone today be interested in some imaginary ancient figure who teaches such outdated things and harmful things? We want nothing to do with him. And with so many people in 21st century Cambridge wanting nothing to do with Jesus and confidently brushing past you and through the wide gate, how easy it would be in

your class at school or your workplace to go with the flow and follow the crowd onto the broad road. [5 : 50] Just to the side, though, as you look and see the wide gate, stands a narrow gate, ignored by many. And above the gate hangs a sign. It says, Jesus Christ is Lord.

Such a small gate. Such a small gate. You'd have to bend low. You'd have to kneel in humility to get through. And beyond the gate, there's a narrow road. The road is tight and strewn with rocks. And it is a road much less travelled. In fact, there's just a few people on it. You look closely. There is one who stumbles along alone because all the rest of his family went through the wide gate. One cries as she struggles on because she so wants to please her Lord, but she fails so often. There's another on the road who bears the scars of the insults and the beatings he's received for being a Christian.

He can barely walk. Having listened to Jesus' teaching, Jesus, at this point in the sermon, he lays this choice before us.

[7 : 04] Which gate will we enter through? Because for every person, there are only two gates to go through. And two paths we can walk as creatures in God's world with our lives before us.

Will we go through the wide gate? Will we turn away from Jesus as Lord and follow the crowd onto the broad and easy road?

Would you do that? Jesus says here at the end of his sermon, he urges all who listen, don't. Don't do it.

Don't turn from me. Enter through the narrow gate. Because that wide gate and that broad popular road, do you know where it leads?

If you walk that path through your life, do you know where it goes? It leads, verse 13, to destruction. A few pages on in Matthew's Gospel, in chapter 10, verse 28, Jesus says to his followers, Be afraid.

[8 : 15] Be afraid. Be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell. At the destruction he's talking about here in verse 13, the destination at the end of the broad road for all who reject Jesus Christ as Lord is hell.

Hell. So often on the lips of Jesus is the place outside God's kingdom. It's the place away from God's blessing.

It's a place of darkness and fire and weeping. Hell is the place, Jesus says, where God will justly destroy forever those who reject him and his king, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Why tell us this, Jesus? He tells us this because he's urging us to choose wisely. Jesus is saying to all who will listen to him in the first century and today, do not go with the flow.

Do not go with the majority. Do not take the easy path through the wide gate with the many around you. Do not take the highway to hell.

[9 : 35] Do not. Instead, enter through the narrow gate. Even if it feels like it's just you doing it.

Seeing Jesus come into the world to save his people from their sins and listening, as we all have, to his stunning God-given teaching, we are meant to fall on our knees before Jesus Christ.

You are my Lord. I will follow you. As we do that, we mustn't imagine we'll have the happiest, happiest life now.

Jesus says the gate is small and the road is narrow. Following Jesus, putting the Sermon on the Mount into practice, you may feel it's so much harder being a Christian than if I just let go and live like everyone else.

Walk the narrow road. Walk the narrow road you may feel alone. You may cry with shame at your failings. But, verse 14, look.

[10 : 39] Look where this road leads to. It leads, says Jesus, to life. Rather than destruction, we will receive eternal life.

Overflowing life forever. comforted and safe and satisfied with your Father in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 7, 13 and 14.

Two short verses here from the lips of Jesus. But the whole of our eternity is in the balance. I can't say it much more meaningfully than that.

And so the Lord Jesus Christ says to all who will hear him, it is time to make a wise choice and a clear decision. I know there's some of us here at St John's who, what would we say, maybe we'd say we've been listening to the Christian faith for a while.

And you wouldn't quite yet say, Jesus is my Lord, I follow him. But everything he says, his claims, his offer of forgiveness, his offer of life in the kingdom of heaven, do make sense to you.

[12:00] And he's drawing you to himself and you feel yourself attracted to him. And I want to say to us today, is today the day to actually decide?

To say, I'm not going to go through the wide gate. I do not want to be destroyed. Lord Jesus, I turn to you today, lead me to eternal life.

I say that to some of us. Many of us in our little church have already entered through the narrow gate. But if we're honest, we might say that the Christian walk really hurts right now.

And it might be that we'd be tempted to secretly think, if only I was on the broad road. I wouldn't be so lonely. I'd have a partner and a family.

Or more people would like me. Or I could just do what I want. The Lord Jesus would say to us from these verses, don't.

[13:07] Don't go off on the highway to hell. Stick on the road that leads to life. Stick with him. First thing this morning.

There are two. There are only two final destinations. Enter through the narrow gate. That way. That way. In verse 15 through to verse 27, Jesus continues to command us and warn us, we who are listening, because he so wants us to choose wisely and decide clearly and enter the kingdom of heaven.

Let me just read what he says with just a few comments around the edges. First thing this morning, the main thing, verses 13 and 14. Enter through the narrow gate. Second, verses 15 to 19.

Watch out. Watch out for false prophets. Look, verse 15. Watch out for false prophets.

They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. That is both in amongst and around Jesus' followers from the first century up to today, there are false prophets.

[14:24] You know that? People who you imagine you can trust to teach you what God says. As you walk along the narrow road. And yet they are false preachers and vicars.

They seem harmless like sheep and helpful, surely, because they're Church of England ministers, or they have a large internet following.

And yet underneath the sheep's clothing, they are wolves who will savage your faith and leave you spiritually maimed. Jesus says watch out for them. You've got to watch out.

False prophets today may clearly contradict the teaching of Jesus. It's what clergy in the Church of England may say. There's no such thing as hell.

And no one will end up there. Or men can marry men. God will bless that. Or God wants you to be rich now. And when you hear someone say something like that, which is so clearly not what Jesus Christ says, you've got to run away from them.

[15:34] You've got to run away before you are taken in and savaged. But if it's not obvious from their teaching, then verse 16, by their fruit you will recognise them.

That is, someone who teaches God's way truly will have a life that lines up with God's way. There will be good fruit in their life. Jesus puts it so memorably.

Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Of course they don't. Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. And by the way, every tree, every prophet that does not bear good fruit, is cut down and thrown into the fire, the fire of hell.

But what you need to know is that by their fruit you will recognise them. As you've entered through the gate, as you walk along the way, there will be voices who tell you false things.

[16:45] So watch out for false prophets. And by the way, don't go listening too much to internet preachers whose lives you cannot see and don't know.

Enter through the narrow gate. Enter through the narrow gate. Watch out for false prophets. Third, if there are true and false prophets in and around the church, Jesus goes further and says there are also true and false disciples.

And so says Jesus, verses 21 to 23, do the Father's will. Do the Father's will. Look, verse 21.

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 who's in heaven.

Is that a shock? It might be for us. Because churches are full of people who seem to have entered through the narrow gate.

[17:54] And we say and we sing, Lord, Lord. But Jesus says not everyone will enter the kingdom of heaven. Only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

There's a long dead man called Thomas Akempis. Akempis. He once wrote, truly at the day of judgment, we shall not be asked how well we have spoken, but whether we have lived righteously. And that's right. That's the Sermon on the Mount. Having Jesus Christ as Lord isn't about talking the talk. We've got to walk the walk. Which doesn't mean we think and act perfectly. Of course it doesn't. We will fall very far short of the righteous living Jesus demands here for sure. And we'll mourn.

We should cry about how we displease our God. That's why true disciples pray, forgive us our sins. And we ask and keep on asking our Father to change us by the Holy Spirit.

[19 : 02] And as true disciples, we'll hunger and thirst for the righteousness we don't yet have. And we'll pray your will be done. And we'll go out into our days saying, help me God, I will give myself to doing your will.

And walking this narrow road and trusting our Father, we will enter the kingdom of heaven. So choose to do the Father's will in your life.

Verse 22. Could you imagine the shock on the final day? As you stand before a Lord whose teaching you hadn't followed.

Verse 22. Many will say to me on that day. Not a few, many. Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?

Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers. Rather than, as I'd imagined, I know you come to me.

[20 : 19] Instead, I never knew you. Away from me. Jesus isn't teasing us here. He's not playing with us.

He's saying how it will be. We're listening this morning to this last section of the Sermon on the Mount.

All of it is from God. All of it is spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ. The Sermon on the Mount is about the kingdom of heaven. It's about God's beautiful saving rule.

It's about the offer of unimaginable blessing. As through Jesus, God forgives us our sins and restores us to himself forever. And in this last bit, I almost not wanted to be here this morning to share these words.

But I'm just reading and telling you what Jesus says. In this last bit, Jesus commands us and he warns us with deadly, deadly seriousness, doesn't he? Reject him as Lord and take the broad road?

[21 : 28] Or were we just to say and sing, Lord, Lord? We will end up destroyed, thrown into the fire of hell, sent away. We will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

But do you know this? He warns us. He warns us because he loves us.

He loves us. And he's urging us to choose wisely and decide clearly and live radically.

Come to the Lord Jesus Christ and embrace his teaching and know our Father in heaven and give yourself to doing his will in your life this November and on and on in your life.

And on the day that you and I stand before the Lord Jesus Christ, because of his immeasurable grace to us, we will hear him say, I know you.

[22 : 31] Come in. He will say that to us. We have heeded his warning and humbly put ourselves under Jesus Christ. And on that day, to our everlasting delight, we'll be ushered into the feast in the light with our King.

We will enter into life as it's meant to be. And we'll be comforted. And on that day, we will have hearts of pure Christ-like love.

And we will see our God and we will feel his approval. And we will say to him on that day, your kingdom has come, Father, and your will is now being done on earth as in heaven.

And we will hallow his name for all eternity. We will. Right now today, through November and on into our lives, let us put Jesus' words into practice.

Let's take the Sermon on the Mount and staple it in our hearts. And come before our God poor in spirit and mourning our sin and hungering and thirsting for Jesus Christ.

[23 : 44] And let's follow Jesus as Lord. Or, in the words of verses 24 to 27, let us build on the rock.

Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house. Yet it did not fall. Did not fall. Because it had its foundation on the rock.

That is where to build our lives. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man, a moron, who built his house on sand.

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. Two gates, two ways.

[24 : 52] Build on the rock or build on the sand. It is time to choose wisely. When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching.

Because he taught as one who had authority and not as their teachers of the law. What we'll do, I'd love to give us a moment just to be quiet and look over again those words of Jesus.

And then I'm going to lead us in a prayer. Amen. My god.

My god. Thank you.

Heavenly Father and Lord of all, we praise you this morning for your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. He was to be called Jesus, for he saves his people from their sins.

[26 : 35] Our Father, we hear the words of Jesus here in this Sermon on the Mount. To live like this, to have your Son as Lord. What better way to live? Yet we know ourselves how far short we fall.

We hear the warnings of your Son, his urging, his invitation. And we know that with you, with your Son, there is life eternal and comfort in the kingdom of heaven.

Our Father, you know our hearts. We can hide nothing from you. We ask and seek and knock.

We long for forgiveness and restoration. Please make us those in the middle of this autumn in this world of yours.

Make us those who choose wisely and decide clearly. Make us and millions of people around the world those who enter through the narrow gate and walk the narrow road that leads to life.

[27 : 49] We pray and ask in Jesus' name. Amen.