

Set Sail Ministries

“Anchored in the Cross. Sailing by the Breath of the Spirit.”

Sermon Title: “The Narrow Gate”

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Text: Matthew 7:13-23

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Location: Aurora Alliance Church, Aurora, Colorado

Main Idea: Relationship with Jesus and obedience to the Father are true Christianity

Homiletical Idea: Doing the will of God, even though the path is hard and the gate, narrow, is the only path that leads to life

Purpose of Sermon: This sermon should cause people to examine their lives and give them a criteria to determine whether or not they are walking the difficult path that will lead them to life.

VERSES TO SHOW ON SCREEN AT START OF SERMON:

John 17:3 ³ And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

1 John 5:3 “This is love for God: to obey his commands.

John 14:21 “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father

1 John 3:23 “And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-7 “For this is the will of God, your sanctification... For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.

1 John 2:4 “Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning! This morning, we are back in the book of Matthew, in Chapter 7. After several months and many sermons studying Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, this morning we finally come to the very end of His sermon. And we are going to look at a very important message that Jesus has for us. In many ways this is a foundational message because it goes to the very heart of the gospel message.

And I might as well tell you honestly up front, that this is a difficult teaching that we are going to study today. It's not difficult because we have trouble understanding the words or the translation or anything like that, but it is difficult because of the message of the words. Jesus was sort of famous for speaking to the people in parables; stories that they could relate to in their everyday life but had some deeper spiritual meaning. So I think it is notable that he doesn't use a parable in this last part of the sermon, he tells us directly what we need to know.

Let's take a look at this passage, starting in verse 13.

Matthew 7:13-23 ¹³“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. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

¹⁵ Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

²¹ Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

Men and women, if I truly believe the words of Jesus here and I do believe them, then I have to tell you honestly, there may be some of you sitting here today that believe you are Christians, that when you die, instead of spending eternity with Jesus in Heaven you are going to spend eternity separated from Jesus in Hell. [PAUSE] Do I have your attention yet? Listen! The tragedy of this passage is that there are going to be people that stand before Jesus on the day of judgment believing that they are Christians, believing they are safe, that they are saved, believing that they are about to enter eternal rest with Jesus, believing that their good works are were enough to get them in...only to find out that in fact they were wrong, and they will spend eternity separated from God.

I don't want that to be me. And I hope you don't want it to be you. You may say, "But Jeffrey, that's not talking about us, that's talking about the people at the church down the road or people of some other faith." But the point is: Jesus is talking about people who thought they would be let in and they won't.

Now. Some are you are thinking, "Boy, this is sure an encouraging message." I think that the heart of God is that we be encouraged through this message: encouraged to examine our lives, encouraged to make sure we are on the right path, encouraged to make sure we are in right relationship with God. That we understand what it means to truly know God. So let's go back and look at this passage and see what we can learn.

EXPOSITION:

I. The paths we can take (we have a choice).

A. The right answer

I like how Jesus teaches. He gives the answer to the question at the very start of the lesson. Don't you wish you had some teachers that would have done that? That would give you the answer to the test questions at the top of the page?

Starting back in verse 13, we read, "**Enter by the narrow gate.**" Jesus is about to tell us the 2 choices we have, 2 paths we can choose in life and He gives us the right choice up front, and why do you think He does that? Because He wants us to get it right! He wants us to choose the right path.

Jesus starts out talking about gates: Narrow gates and wide gates. What is Jesus talking about? What is this gate? Where is it? Is it a physical or spiritual. Is it when we are born or when we die or in between? Well let me tell you what I believe about this so you have a framework for where we are going: I believe it's a spiritual gate. It's not this door (point to door) or this one, it's spiritual. Here's what I believe the Bible teaches us: the wide gate is when we are born. Each one of us starts out on the easy road through the wide gate. And we can choose: we can stay on the easy path or we can search for the difficult one. But by the time we die, it's too late to change our minds. So somewhere along the easy road, there

is a narrow gate that leads to a difficult path that Jesus expects us to look for. And we are going to see that that gate is Jesus. That is what he means by “gate”.

B. The wide gate.

Once he has given us the answer, He goes back and gives us the question. Continuing in verse 13, **“For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.”** There are several observations I want to make about this sentence.

1. It’s the natural path

First, the wide gate, that leads to the easy path, that ultimately leads to destruction, is the natural path. Again, it’s the path that every one of us starts out on in life. Despite modern philosophy that says, “Man is inherently good” the Bible tells us the opposite. In Proverbs we read, **“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”** (Proverbs 14:12). Paul tells us in Romans, **“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.”** (Romans 3:10-11). So the first thing we need to realize is that the wide gate and the easy path are very natural for us. It’s where everybody starts out.

2. It’s the easy path

Second, it’s an easy path. **“...and the way is easy that leads to destruction...”** We like easy things don’t we? The other day I was looking through a catalog and I found a special cup holder that you could put in your car for your French fries. We like the easy path don’t we? ☺ That may be fine for your French fries, but it’s not so good in spiritual matters.

QUOTE: “There is no difficulty in finding the wide way, you just have to follow the crowd, live as others live, swim with the current. There is no need of a guide to find the wide way, we just have to follow the desires of our own heart, to live without self-denial, without fear of God.” TPC

3. Many are on this path

Now here is the first place where this passage starts to get difficult. Because Jesus clearly says that many are walking down this road that leads to destruction. **“...and those who enter by it are many.”** Now some of you are thinking: “Come on Jesus, what are you saying? Are you saying that lots of people are dying and going to hell?” Yes. That is exactly what He’s saying. Now the church as a whole has kind of gotten away from talking about Hell...we don’t want to offend someone or make them uncomfortable. But Jesus wasn’t afraid to speak the truth in love.

There is an old analogy that says if you were walking down the street and noticed a family having dinner in their dining room and you noticed the whole other end of their house was completely engulfed in flames, would it be more loving to let them enjoy their dinner...or go and tell them, “Hey, your house is on fire. GET OUT!” That is kind of what Jesus is doing here. He’s basically saying to the people, “Many of you are on the wrong path and if you don’t search for the right path, you’re not going to like where you end up.” We are going to see later, that this is not God’s intent, for us to end up separated from Him forever, but Jesus is giving us an accurately assessment of the world around us.

It’s like this picture here on the screen.



We laugh, but many people are on this road right now in their life. We all start on the wide, easy path. That path is wide enough for people of other religions, it's wide enough for people of no religion and it's even big enough for people who call themselves Christians, but who don't have a relationship with Jesus.

C. The narrow gate.

So now Jesus moves on the narrow gate in verse 14: **“For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”** Now again, I want to make some observations about this verse.

1. We must search for the narrow gate

First, did you notice when he talked about the wide gate and the easy path, there was no mention of searching for it? He simply says, “there are lots of people on the easy path.” But now look what he says about the narrow gate: **“those who find it are few.”** What He is saying here is that in order to get onto the right path through the narrow gate, there is actually going to have to be some effort on our part. We are going to have to do some searching, some seeking for the right way.

I like this quote from the Pulpit Commentary. **Quote:** “No one can become a Christian without an effort. We do not drift into the kingdom, nor do we grow up into it unconsciously. Even the children of Christian homes need to come to a decision and make a deliberate choice. Moreover, there are sins to be repented of, evil habits to be renounced; pride must be humbled, and the simple trust of a little child attained. We become Christians by complete surrender to Christ.”

So if we are going to enter through the narrow gate, we are going to have to look for it. I believe we enter the narrow gate when we first enter into a relationship with Jesus; when we become a disciple or follower of Jesus.

2. It is not an easy path

But entering through the narrow gate that is Jesus is just the start: after that we have a narrow, difficult path ahead of us that we must stay on. **“...the way is hard that leads to life...”** And frankly, I think that is why some people don't choose the narrow gate, or else fall back onto the wide, easy path even after they have started down the difficult one.

The Greek word for “hard” there (thlibo) is not an adjective that is describing the path, it's actually a verb. It means “to press or afflict”; it implies action. It means that when we walk down the narrow path we are going to be pressed or squeezed. So if you

are not feeling pressed or squeezed as God leads you down the narrow path, if instead you are feeling like you are in a wide open space...then you might ask Jesus to help you see which path you are on. It's not an easy path that leads to life, in fact in other places Jesus tells us we must take up our cross daily and follow him and sometimes we are tempted to return to the easy path. But I think that is the reason Jesus tell us about it beforehand: so that when the path gets difficult, we are ready for it, we are expecting it. The good news is that this is the same path that Jesus walked down when He was on earth, so He knows how to help us on our path.



3. Few are on this path

Third, Jesus says that **those who find the narrow gate are few**. You know, that is really tough. To know that of all the people alive today, only a relative few have such a close relationship with Jesus that they are going to be in Heaven with Him after they die.

In 2 Peter we learn that, **“The Lord...is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9-10)** God desires that every person come to know him...but he still gives us a choice. He doesn't push us into a relationship with Him. And unfortunately, many people decide to stay on the wide path. They don't answer when He calls.

Jesus made it clear how we can come to repentance and come back into relationship with God: He said, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the**

Father except through me.” (John 14:6) Jesus himself is the narrow gate. He is the only way that we can know God.

READ: “The good news is that the narrow gate, though it is narrow, is open to everyone. For as long as we are alive on this earth, we have the opportunity to enter the narrow gate, to begin a relationship with Jesus. A few weeks ago, we studied **Matthew 7:7** “**Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.**” When we knock on the narrow gate of Jesus, He is faithful to open the gate for us.” **“Enter by the narrow gate.”** For that is the only gate that leads to life.

II. Watch out for those who would lead you down the wrong path.

A. Beware of false prophets

Moving on to verse 15, Jesus says, **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”** So now Jesus is talking about false prophets. What is he trying to tell us? Well, as always when we study the Bible, we need to look at the passage in its context. He just told us that we need to be diligent to make sure we are on the right path. And in that context, I think what he is doing is giving us a warning: He’s saying “be careful who you listen to, be careful of which teacher you sit under, be careful what books you read because there are false prophets or false teachers, false preachers out there who will lead you down the wrong path.” Oh they may look good on the outside, their message may sound good, but when you really listen to them and compare them with God’s word, they don’t hold up.

We sometimes think of false prophets as someone, maybe a TV evangelist who is deliberately trying to take advantage of people, and that can certainly be 1 example, but could it also be those who are simply preaching the wrong message? Could it be someone who is preaching an easy path, a message that everyone is going to be saved if you just do good and be the best you can be? Could it be someone who is saying “follow me” instead of “follow Jesus”?

1 John 4:1 tells us, **“Belov-ed, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”**

B. How do we judge a prophet?

1. By their fruit

So how do you know? How do you know if a prophet or a preacher is from God or is a false prophet? Jesus tells us. Continuing in verse 16: **“You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.**

When I first read this, it was a little confusing. I read words like “good” and “bad” in terms of quality and I thought it was strange for Jesus to say that a good tree could not produce bad fruit. I mean, even the best apple tree occasionally produces some apples that don’t look good or aren’t fully developed, right? But as I studied this passage, God showed me something: when he says “good” fruit, he’s not talking about quality, or how good the fruit looks, he’s talking about the type of fruit, see He says, **“...every healthy tree bears good fruit.”**

The good fruit is just a byproduct of a good tree. If you are an apple tree, you are going to make apples, right? Now one tree may make a lot of apples, and another may make only a few apples, but they’re still apples. Jesus is not saying that an apple tree will never produce an apple that is not fully formed, he is saying that a thornbush is never going to make an apple. Do you see the difference?

And what he is implying is that a person who has a relationship with Jesus is like a good tree. You may have less fruit in some seasons and more in others, you may have more or less fruit than another believer, but regardless of the quality or the quantity, it is good fruit.

And likewise if you do not know Jesus, you are like a thornbush or a thistle and no matter how many good things you do, it's never going to be good fruit.

I like what the Matthew Henry Commentary says about this:

QUOTE: "Just as an apple may be stuck on a thornbush, or a bunch of grapes may be hung on a thistle, so may a good truth, a good word or action, be found in a bad man, but you may be sure it never grew there."

2. What does the fruit look like?

What kind of fruit is Jesus talking about? A good place to start is the fruit of the spirit because if we have a relationship with Jesus then the Holy Spirit is going to be growing this fruit more and more in our lives.

Galatians 5 says, "**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...**" We can recognize people by their fruits. If we are saved, we should be able to see some of the good fruit being produced in us, even if it's only a little.

And did you notice what is not on this list?: good works; doing good things. There is no mention of helping others or telling others about Jesus or anything like that. The fruit of the Spirit is primarily attitudes of our heart, although some certainly get expressed towards others people.

So He says, "**Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.**" We can judge a prophet or a pastor by the fruit of the spirit that we see growing (or not) in their life and what he or she is helping to grow in others. And we shouldn't judge based on a single piece of fruit, but on the pattern of fruit we see in their life. We all make mistakes, that's part of being imperfect humans, but what is the overall pattern that we see in their lives? Look at it. If their fruit is good, then don't be afraid to let them lead you down the right path. If it's bad, then down let them lead you anywhere!

III. Entering the Kingdom of Heaven

Finally we come to one of the most difficult teachings of the New Testament, maybe the most difficult in my mind and the last teaching of Jesus' sermon on the mount.

A. Those who don't know Jesus will not enter

In verse 21, Jesus says, "**Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.**"

We are going to come back to the last part of this verse in just a minute but for now let's look at the first part, "**Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven...**". And let me ask you a question? Does this disturb you? It disturbs me. Let me tell you why: there are a lot of people in our world that don't know Jesus and frankly could care less about knowing him and if you told one of those people that knowing Jesus is the only way to get to Heaven, then mostly of them would honestly say, "Then I am not going to be there, because I don't know Him."

But this is not the situation that Jesus presents. Jesus is telling us about another group of people: a group that claims to know Him. Look at the verse, they call Him Lord, and they do good things and maybe they go to church every Sunday, and maybe they even pray and read the Bible and maybe some of these people are some of you, I don't know, but the point is that they believed they were saved [PAUSE] but they're not.

And just to make sure we get the point clearly Jesus gives us an example. And again, it's at this point that Jesus stops talking about gates and fruits and things like that and he tells us plainly what he means. It's almost as if he is saying, [SHOUT] "Hello! I want you to get this. I want you to understand. I want it to be very clear. I don't want any chance that you might misunderstand." And here is what He says in verse 22:

"On that day (and when he says 'That day', he is referring to the day of judgment when each of us will stand before Jesus and give an account of our lives) On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

And I think that the hardest part of this teaching is who he is talking to: he is talking about people who call Him Lord, He's not talking about non-Christians here, he's not talking about people of other religions, he's talking about Christians, or at least people who call themselves Christians. And even more he's talking about people who not only call Him lord, but who are doing good things, great things, even miraculous things in his name. These might be people who we would look at and say, "wow, they must be a really strong Christian just look at all the good things, all the miracles they are doing." But Jesus says, "I don't know you." See, it's not about what we do it's about who we know and our relationship with God through Jesus.

Even if you stand here and preach God's word like I am doing or even if you go to New Orleans or Africa on a mission trip, those are good things, but it doesn't mean you are going to heaven when you die. We talk a lot about being "missional" around here. Let me tell you, that may be a fine way to reach out to others, and truthfully being missional is really just living life the way God intended for us too, but if "being missional" is just something that you do, and it is not a result of your relationship with Jesus, then it's worthless to you in eternity. I mean, what are you going to say: "Jesus, you have to let me in because I was missional? But Jesus I was Purpose-Driven?" ☺

Jesus is telling us clearly, "It's not about doing. It's not about how big of a miracle you can do. It's first and foremost about a relationship, (remember the first and greatest commandment to love God with everything you have). If you don't know Jesus, if you are not in a growing relationship with Him and his Father, then you can be missional all day long, and you can tell lots of people about Jesus and you may even do some great things and even cause others to begin a relationship with Jesus, themselves, [PAUSE] but if you do not get to know him while you are on earth then you will spend eternity separated from Him, I don't care how missional you've been. Get to know God.

There is an interesting story in the Old Testament concerning a boy named Samuel who grew up to be the first great prophet of Israel. When he was a boy, his mother dedicated him to God and left him with the priests to serve at the temple. Listen to these verses about Samuel from 1 Samuel chapter 2

- "And the young man Samuel grew in the presence of the LORD." (1 Samuel 2:21)
- "Now the young man Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and also with man." (1 Samuel 2:26).
- But then in chapter 3 it says, "Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him." (1 Samuel 3:7)

Do you find this interesting? I do. That even in the Old Testament, a person could be living in the temple, serving God faithfully, a person could be very busy for God and yet not

yet know Him. Now of course, Samuel went on to know God very closely and God used him greatly, but my point is that doing good things does not equal a relationship with God.

B. Instead they are told to “depart”

So to this group of people who thought their good works would get them a place in heaven, Jesus says: **“And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me...’”**

I find it odd for Jesus to say that he never “knew them”. I mean, He’s God; He knows everything! So I looked at the Greek word translated ‘to know’ there. And do you know what it means? It means a very close, intimate knowledge. The Jews actually used this word to refer to physical intimacy between a husband and wife; that’s how strong this word is. Jesus is not saying that he doesn’t know their name; He’s saying there is no relationship with them. There is no connection.

Jesus told a parable once and he said he is like a vine and we are like branches, and if we lose our connection to Jesus, to the vine, we’re not going to last long. That’s what I am talking about when I say “Do you know Jesus?” I don’t mean do you know who he is...I mean to you have a connection with Him, are you experiencing relationship with Him, are you constantly knowing him deeper and deeper, and are you longing for more of Him...or are you satisfied where you are.

Last time I preached we talked about Mary and Martha. Martha was busy doing things and Mary was sitting at Jesus feet hanging on his every word. Which one are you most like? Jesus said that Mary had chosen what was better. Are we listening or doing?

“...depart from me...” These are not words you want to hear from Jesus: I tell you the truth: you will only hear them once. When Jesus came to earth the first time and as long as we are on the earth, Jesus words to us are: “Come to me. Come to me all you who are weary and heavy burdened. Come to me all you who are hungry and thirsty. Come to me. I am all that you need. I will give you rest, and living water. Just come to me.”

But when we die, or if Jesus comes back to earth first, the time for coming to him will be over. And to those who have not come to Him by that time, he will say, “Depart from me.” And there is only 1 place that you can go and not be in Jesus presence. And that place is called Hell.

C. Any work done outside of relationship with Jesus is sin

It’s interesting that Jesus doesn’t just say, “depart” but He says, **“...depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.”** The New Living Translation says, **“Get away from me, you who break God's laws.”**

This might be the most disturbing part of the whole passage: this idea that we could do good things and still have Jesus say our good deeds are worthless. I mean, “okay, so we didn’t get into heaven, but couldn’t Jesus at least say we did some good things?” How do we explain this?

It’s like this: when Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment, He said, the first and greatest commandment is to love God with everything you are and everything you have, and he added, and the 2nd is to love your neighbor as yourself. Now, we talk a lot about loving your neighbor as yourself, and obviously by the emphasis Jesus puts on it, it is important. But men and women, I’m going to tell you as plainly as I know how this morning: listen, if you get one thing out of this message this morning, hear this clearly:

The first and greatest commandment, to love God with everything we are, is first and greatest for a reason and here is the reason: because if you are not loving God with all of

your heart, soul and mind, then ultimately it does not matter what good things you do, or how many neighbors you love and serve or how much better the world is because you passed through, when you die, you will realize that your life was pointless, meaningless, and that all the great, helpful things you did were worthless, and in fact were actually sin in God's eyes, because: you did good things, but you ignored the most important thing. Loving your neighbor will never make up for disobeying the command to love God.

Hear me clearly, [PAUSE]. If, you, do, not, know, Jesus, then, it, does, not, matter, what, good, things, you, do, they, are, worthless.

See, we are supposed to be doing good things, but the good things that we do must flow from our relationship with Jesus, not in place of it. God doesn't accept us because of the good things we do, He accepts us because of our relationship with Jesus, and then He calls us to do good things.

D. Those whose relationship with Jesus causes them to do the will of God will enter

Now we left out one phrase that I said we would come back to and here it is: **“Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”**

So who are those who will enter the kingdom of heaven?: Those who do the will of God. Those who have a relationship with God, and who prove that they have that relationship by listening to His Spirit and obeying. These are the ones who will enter the Kingdom. We'll talk more about God's will in just a minute.

E. Balance: we were created for good works

There is one more thing I want to cover before we end with some points of application. We've been talking about how it's not about good works. And that is true. But there is a balance to this also. Once we have that relationship, God will begin to move us into doing His will as our relationship develops.

Ultimately, we need to avoid the extremes and stay balanced. One extreme says, “I don't need a relationship with God, I will just do good things and that will save me.” We've already seen that that is not true. Another extreme says, “Well if I have a relationship with God, that's all I need, I don't need to do anything else.” But that is not true either. Let me show you why.

When we became a Christian, the only reason God didn't take us to heaven right away is because He has work for us to do on Earth. And guess what? Some of the things he wants us to do are: healing the sick, prophesying, casting out demons and doing amazing miracles and mighty works in his name. Ephesians 2:8-10 really ties these 2 concepts together: **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”** The Bible is clear: we are not saved by good works...but we were created to do good works.

We saw a few minutes ago a group of people that Jesus tells to “depart”. There is another group that he says that too that we need to look at. It's a whole 'nother sermon, but let me draw 1 conclusion for us today. The passage is in Matthew 25 and if you don't recognize it, I encourage you to go back and read it sometime.

But Jesus is again talking about the day of judgment and He says that he is going to separate people to his left and right and to one group He'll say, “Come into heaven with Me” (That's my paraphrase) because **“I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink...I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to**

me.” And the people say, “Jesus, when did we see you like that and help you?” And Jesus says, “**Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.**”

And then to the other group he says, “**Depart from me...into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink...**” And this group says the same thing, “Jesus, when did we see you like that and not help you?” And Jesus says, “**Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.**” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Matthew 25:32-46

Now that is a long story to say this: there is a balance to the Christian life. We must keep the first commandment first and 2nd commandment second...but we must keep both. If we neglect the first and greatest commandment, then it doesn't matter if we keep the second or not. But if we really have a relationship with Jesus, he is going to move us toward keeping the second commandment because it's His heart to reach out to others through us.

APPLICATION:

If we step back and look at the big picture, we see in this passage that Jesus has given us 3 examples of pretenders: the false prophet, who appears to be a sheep, but is really a wolf, the do-er of good things who believes he is a Christian, but really doesn't know Jesus, and next week we'll talk about the foolish builder who built his house on the sand, it looked great on the outside, but in the end it was worthless because it was washed away in the flood because he ignored the foundation.

But God doesn't want us to be pretenders; He wants us to be real. We've heard some strong words today, but what do we take away from this message?

1. Examine which path you are on. For some it's obvious, for others it's subtle.

The first thing is that we need to examine which path we are on. **Proverbs 14:8** “**The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways...**”(NIV) They think about where they are going. Wise people ask, “Does the path I'm walking lead to a place that I want to go? If I keep heading this way, will I like where I arrive?”

In 2 Corinthians Paul tells us to, “**Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.**” 2 Corinthians 13:5. And Paul is talking to Christians here and saying, “Be sure. Be certain. Make sure you are on the path that leads to life. Make sure you are not just playing games.”

Here are some questions to ask: Are you loving God more than anything and everything else? Now that may look different for each of us. I can't prescribe what that relationship is going to look like. But I can tell you that if you are not spending time with God, if you are not listening to God and obeying what He says to you, then you may not have the relationship you think you have.

And then after you've answered the first question: are you loving your neighbor as much as you love yourself? And are you loving your Christian brothers and sisters better than you love yourself?

2. How to find and walk through the narrow gate.

So maybe you examine yourself and realize that you are still on the wide, easy path, that you have never walked through the narrow gate, but you want to, what do you do?

Jesus said that He is the gate or the door. In John's gospel Jesus compared us to sheep and he says: “**Truly, truly, I say to you, I am door of the sheep...If anyone enters by**

me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.” John 10:7, 9 Jesus is the only way to enter into relationship with God. He is the narrow gate that we must enter through.

And the good news is this: as long as you are alive on this earth, that gate is still open to you. In the Old Testament book of Joel God says, “**...even now...return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love...**” Joel 2:12-13 Even now. Even now, no matter what you have done, no matter what your life has been like in the past, even now, return to the lord and he will accept you with open arms. But don’t delay, don’t put it off, because none of us know the day we will die.

3. How to “do the will of God”: obedience

So you’ve examined your life, you’ve walked through the narrow gate, what now? What did Jesus say? “Only those who do the will of God will enter the kingdom of heaven” And how do we do the will of God? One word comes to mind: obedience. Obedience.

Obedience demonstrates a number of things. First it shows we have a relationship with God. Then it shows we are hearing from God. Last it shows that we love God enough to do whatever He asks us to do. And what is the will of God for our lives? Well there are some general things God requires of us and there are more specific things he may ask each one of us to do. I can’t help you with the specifics other than to tell you to listen and obey.

The general things are things that are stated in the Bible: We saw some of these on the screens at the beginning of the message. God desires that we enter into a relationship with Him through His son, Jesus, that’s salvation; then he desires that we allow his Holy Spirit to make us more like Jesus in every way, that’s sanctification; then He wants us to be doing the good works he created us to do.

4. Is there assurance for our salvation?

At this point some of you may be wondering: “So, is there any assurance for our salvation or do we have to live in constant fear of whether or not we are on the right path? Can we wander off the narrow path or not?”

Well, without going into another sermon on “once saved, always saved” let me just say this. God is the one who saves us; we don’t save ourselves. And God is able to keep those that He has saved. Our responsibility is to examine ourselves, and ask God to keep moving us closer and closer to him.

Yes, there is assurance of our salvation...if we know Jesus.

“...God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.” 1 John 5:11-13

Some of you are thinking, “Jeffrey, why are you being so harsh with us? Why so blunt, why are you making us question our salvation? Can’t you be easy on us? My answer to you is, “No, I can’t”. And do you know why? The Bible says that as a teacher, I am going to be judged on what I taught. (James 3:1) And so I know that one day, I’m going to have to stand before Jesus and give an account of what I taught you about God’s word. And so is Jonas. And so are any of you who teach others. And so I can’t: I can’t stand here and tell you to just say you love Jesus and then live however you want. I can’t tell you to just come to church on Sunday and help your neighbor once or twice and I’m sure everything will be fine. I can’t tell you those things, when God clearly says that is not true, when he says there

is a depth to the Christian life that goes way beyond the things we do and say. [PAUSE] Do we know Jesus?

CONCLUSION:

I know that we like to have happy endings to our sermons, but sometimes they don't work out that way. The truth is: there is no happy ending to this message or to our lives...unless we know Jesus and He knows us. I wish I could tell you to come to church on Sunday and be nice to your neighbors and everything will be okay, but that's not what Jesus says. So I'm going to let you decide how this message ends for you. Some of you know Jesus intimately, and there is no question in your mind about it. But some of you need to wrestle with this today and maybe for the week to come.

I do want to end with one final illustration and maybe this will help you understand God's plan a little better.

Example story: Imagine a Dad with a bunch of kids, maybe 5 or 6. And the kids are growing up and the Dad sits them down one day and says, "Hey kids, I want to talk to you about something. You're all getting older now and there are some things that I want you to do. So I'm going to make a deal with you. Here's the deal: Over the next time period I want you to start spending a little more time with me and getting to know me better. And I want you to be very careful to obey me and to do the things I ask you to do. I want you to spend more time you're your mom and get to know her better and I want you to start serving your brothers and sisters better and really learn to love them. And if you do these things wells, then there will be a reward for you at the end: I'm going to take you to Disneyworld."

Well, the kids are very excited, the time goes well, and before you know it, they are all at the airport waiting for their flight. Well, at the airport, another kid overhears these kids talking about Disneyworld, and he thinks, "Boy that sure sounds better than where I am going; I'm going to Detroit." And so the kids line up at the gate the Dad is handing a boarding pass to the flight attendant for each of his kids. All of a sudden there is another kid in line. And he says, "Hold on, who are you." And the kids answers, "Hi Daddy, I'm a really good kid. I've been really good this year and done lots of things you would be proud of, and I'm ready to go to Disneyworld."

Well what is the Dad going to say? "You may be a great kid. You may do some really good things. But you're not my kid. I never knew you, depart from me. I'm not taking you to Disneyworld." Now Disneyworld is kind of trivial compared to Heaven, but the reality is, this is how God has set up the world: If we are in relationship with Him, there are rewards, and if we are not, there is judgment.

But please know that God loves you. And he wants you to be connected to him in relationship through Jesus. And he wants you to show that relationship to others by doing his will and being obedient to his commands. And even though that path is hard and difficult, there are great rewards, both now, and in eternity for choosing to walk down it.