

Session 7

THE NARROW GATE

Matthew 7:1-27

Memory Verse

“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”

– MATTHEW 7:24, CSB




The Narrow Gate


THEOLOGICAL THEME: We have a choice: We can choose to do what seems right to us, and follow the easy path the world recommends, or we can wisely choose to walk the narrow path by living the way Jesus teaches.

CALL TO ACTION: Jesus preached the greatest sermon ever told. He taught of a kingdom whose values are the opposite of the world, reminded us that we can only serve one master, and encouraged us to focus not on our actions or our stuff but our hearts. Take this week to reread the entire Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) each day and sit at the feet of the Master.

Have you ever seen the movie “Beauty and the Beast”? When Belle’s father, Maurice, heads off to the fair with his new wood-chopping invention, he thinks he knows the way. But when he finds himself in an ominous wood without a clear path to his destination (even admitting to himself that he should have already arrived), he finds a fork in the road with two choices. He ultimately steers his reluctant horse down a foggy path that leads to a pack of ravenous wolves and lands himself in the Beast’s enchanted castle jail. He went the way he thought was best, but the path was the wrong one.¹

In life, we choose a path, too, and the choice is much more important than the one Maurice makes. Jesus taught about this in our passage today. One path is narrow and hard but leads to eternal life in Christ Jesus. We take this path when we live for Jesus, follow His commands, and seek to live like He would live. The other is wide and easy. We take this path when we do what we and the world think is best instead of what God teaches. This path leads to destruction.

 Think about a time in life when you had to make an important choice between two things. What happened?

 What types of daily choices are we presented with in the Christian life?


Session Summary

Jesus continued His instruction on how to live with a command for relationships: Don't judge other people. We don't have the right or the perspective to do this, and many times, when we do, we have faults of our own we are ignoring. Rather, we should do for others what we would want them to do for us, always acting out of love and humility, while also addressing the sin in our own lives.

When we pray, God hears and answers (even if not always in the way we might be hoping). As our perfect Father, God knows what is best, and He will give it to us. He gives us what we most need in salvation found in Christ.

Jesus's teachings on how to live raise a few questions for us. What path are we choosing? The easy one the world chooses, or the hard and narrow one that Jesus's teachings set us on? Are we building our lives on the firm foundation of faith in Jesus, or the shifting sands of our own desires?

1. Do Not Judge (Matthew 7:1-6)

 What point was Jesus making in these verses? Does this mean we should never address the sin of another?

 Why is it important that we first address the sin in our own lives? In what way do we operate blindly if we don't do this?

In the Sermon on the Mount so far, Jesus gave guidelines on how His followers should live. In this passage, His teaching addressed an aspect of how we should behave in our relationships: “Do not judge” (v. 1).

To be clear, Jesus was not saying we should never address sin. Instead, he was warning against hypocritical judgment. Jesus’s taught that when we judge others, we will be judged the same way. For some of us, that is an unpleasant thought. If we are harsh with others, we can expect to be judged harshly by God.²

Jesus taught that we should love one another like He loves us (John 13:34-35). Jesus loves us sacrificially, even when we fail. He sees through outer appearances and looks at our heart. When we judge others while sin persists in our own lives, we are in sin.

Jesus painted a very effective picture with His splinter and beam analogy. How ridiculous would it be if someone with a beam in their eye loftily criticized someone with a small splinter? It is laughable! It is equally ridiculous when we judge another and criticize them (or talk about them behind their back) for a fault we perceive, while failing to address our own sin.


Scripture does give us a model for confronting sin in others (Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1-2). But this effort should always be undertaken with a “gentle spirit” (Galatians 6:1). In His teachings in Matthew 18, Jesus taught that if our efforts to help fail, “let him be like a Gentile and a tax collector to you” (Matthew 18:17). Think about how Jesus dealt with Gentiles and tax collectors. He ate with them when it was taboo. He dealt with them gently. He taught them simply. Considering Jesus’s teaching, we are to remember that before we confront sin in others, we should not ignore our own.

The things that are “holy” and “pearls” (v. 6) that Jesus referenced in verse 6 refer to the gospel and His teachings. A wild dog would take sacrificial meat and tear it to pieces, without any understanding of its importance. In Jewish custom, “pearls” were important spiritual teachings. A pig (an unclean animal by Jewish standards) wouldn’t know what to do with literal pearls. They would trample on them.³

This seems to be a warning against wasting on our time with people who are continually hard-hearted. We are taught to share the gospel with everyone, not making judgements about where we might find fertile soil. When we try to reach someone who treats the gospel like a dog treats meat or a pig treats pearls, we should move on. Perhaps a seed was planted for the Holy Spirit to water and make grow, but we may not see the harvest.

 **Application: How do we struggle with the type of judging Jesus warned against in this passage?**

2. The Door Will Be Opened (Matthew 7:7-12)

 **What does it look like to ask, seek, and knock in relation to the things of God in our lives?**

 **What does Jesus's illustration of a parent and child teach us about our relationship with God and His care for us?**

Scholars interpret the beginning of this passage differently. Some interpret it as teaching about prayer.⁴


Have you ever felt like you couldn't, or shouldn't, pray for something? Jesus's teaching around prayer paints a different picture. When we pray, God hears, and He answers . . . He just doesn't always answer with a "yes" to the exact thing we are asking for. Like a parent knows not to say "yes" to a child asking to eat ice cream for every meal, God knows what is good for us. When we ask for something that is not good, He instead offers us the good things He knows we need. If we, as fallen, imperfect humans can do this for our children, how much more does God?

Others interpret this seeking and knocking as speaking to those seeking the kingdom of God.⁵

Everyone who seeks God's kingdom will find it, and when they knock on the door to the kingdom, they'll be welcomed inside with the gift of salvation. This path is open to anyone who looks for it. In God's kingdom are the good things He, as a perfect parent, desires to give us (His gifts are so much better and more valuable than any we could receive from human hands).

In Luke's account of this teaching, the gift in mind that the Father gives to us, His children, is the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13), the priceless gift of God's presence all believers receive when they accept the gift of salvation.

This passage ends with a powerful teaching about relationships: "Whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them" (v. 12). There was a similar teaching that existed in that day, but it taught an inverse of Jesus's "Golden Rule": You should not do to others what you did not want done to you. Jesus taught a higher standard. Do for others what you would want someone to do for you. To "do not," you can isolate and stay in our own lane. What Jesus taught a higher standard. Jesus's way gets messy. It happens in community. It requires you to watch out for others and open your eyes to the needs around you that are in your ability to meet. It makes you go out of your way. It requires love, humility, and action.

 Application: Where is God calling you to do for others as you would have done for yourself?

3. The Road That Leads to Life (Matthew 7:13-27)

 What stands out to you about the difference in the two paths and the two foundations described in these verses?

 How do we build our "house" on the rock daily (vv. 24-27)?

This concluding section of the Sermon on the Mount holds powerful truths about the Christian life.

Like a small, uphill path compared to a wide, flat road, the Christian life is hard. The way is narrow, and the path is difficult. It stretches us and sets us on a path that is counter cultural. It requires us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus. This teaching in Matthew is one of many teachings in Scripture that speak about the hardship that exists in the Christian life (John 16:33; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12-13). Our culture promotes an easier path: If it is not hurting anyone, do what you want to do. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus called us to a higher standard than “you do you.”

The enemy desires to get us to veer off the narrow road that leads to life. Jesus tells us to be on guard against this. False teachers water down Jesus’s teachings to make them palpable to the current cultural moment. Some seek to intentionally lead astray and achieve their own personal gain. We should both examine the words we hear taught but also look at the fruit the teacher produces. Is it good or bad? Do they mimic Jesus in their actions, or do their actions model the world’s way? Living in this way is wise and discerning.

An important note: We are most able to spot false teachings and bad fruit when we know the truth of Christ’s teachings. We work to deeply know and understand God’s truth not just by sitting under good teaching, but by digging into His Word ourselves. God meets us there and teaches us. The Holy Spirit guides, corrects, and helps us make changes to live more like Jesus. The importance of this discipline cannot be overstated.

Note the authority Jesus spoke with in verse 21. He is the divine Judge, and one day we must all stand before His judgment seat and make an account for how we lived (2 Corinthians 5:10). He sees past our outer veneer and looks at our hearts.

The true disciple of Jesus hears His teachings and follows them. They conform their lives to Him. They spend time with God in prayer and meditation and by reading His Word to determine His will and they follow it. They build their lives on the firm foundation of faith in Jesus. This is true wisdom. When times are good and without trouble, our foundation may be harder to see, but when the

storm comes (and it will), our foundation is revealed. Do we stand firm on the foundation of our Lord, or does everything collapse because our foundation was built on anything else?

What foundation will we choose—the firm foundation of Jesus, or the flimsy foundation of our own desires and control? One is wise and one is not. In this closing teaching, Jesus sums up His entire sermon: The wise will follow Him, the foolish will not.

? **Application:** What are the ways we build our lives on a given foundation daily? What is the foundation you are building on now?

Conclusion

Going all in as Jesus's disciple requires us to take action. We can't just study His teachings but do nothing. We must deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Jesus (Matthew 16:24) and the way He directs us to live. This requires us to give up control, but when we do that, we build our lives on the firm foundation of faith in Jesus that won't be shaken, even when storms come our way.

What path are we taking? The wide path promoted by our culture, or the narrow and hard one that leads to life? Jesus leads us down the right paths (Psalm 23:3). If we aren't on the right path (the narrow road), the hard truth is we aren't following Jesus.

Where is our foundation built? Is it on the sandy soil of our own understanding and wisdom? Have we wrestled for control in our lives and done what seemed right to us (Proverbs 14:12) instead of seeking obedience? Or have we denied ourselves and instead built the foundation of our lives on the rock of our faith in Jesus? The sandy soil may seem okay for a while, but it won't stand the test of time. Only the firm foundation of Jesus can withstand life's storms. We have a choice. Which will we choose?

❓ Where do you struggle with judging others while failing to address the sin in your own life? What sin do you need to deal with now?

❓ How are we able to practice the Golden Rule in our church and alongside one another with our community?

❓ Where is God speaking to you about the foundation you are building your life on now? How do you need to respond?

Memorize

“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”

- Matthew 7:24, CSB

References

¹Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, directors. *Beauty and the Beast*. Walt Disney Pictures, 1991.

²Charles L. Quarles, “Matthew,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1511.

³Ibid.

⁴Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 106. ; NIV Bible Speaks Today: Notes (London: IVP, 2020), 1308.

⁵Charles L. Quarles, “Matthew,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1511.