

## **Matthew 7:13-14 – “Two Gates, Two Pathways, Two Destinies”**

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**Intro:** “The Road Not Taken” is a favorite poem by Robert Frost, in which the poet muses over the choice he’s made in life, wondering if he’s taken the best pathway. It goes like this: (etc.) Did you hear the uncertainty in his question? Has he taken the right road? Would the other road, had he chosen it, have taken him to a different, perhaps superior destiny? Ever wonder if you’ve chosen the right Pathway? Entered through the right Gate? Are heading for the best Destiny? If so, Jesus has something to say to you this morning. Listen with your heart to what the Spirit is saying today.

**Proposition:** Jesus calls His disciples to radical self-examination. Who are you trusting? What pathway are you following? What destiny are you choosing?

Today our study will concentrate around three ideas: Two Gates, Two Pathways and Two Destinies. Let’s begin with a look at the text:

**Matthew 7:13–14 - 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.”*

Two Gates: Narrow and Wide – Jesus began His discussion by proposing that there are two contrasting Gates one can choose in life. There is a “Narrow Gate,” He said, and there is a “Wide Gate.” Obviously, He wasn’t talking about literal gates one can encounter at a specific GPS location, but rather is speaking of two gates that lead to two different pathways in this life and two distinct destinies in the next life. This is urgent stuff we must have an answer to! Who or what are these Gates? There is no mystery here: the Narrow Gate is Jesus, Himself. The Wide Gate is your natural self. Jesus removed all doubt about this when He said to us in **John 10:9** – *“9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture,”* and then once again when He spoke in **John 14:6** – *“6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* Jesus, then, is the only doorway, the only Gate, by which anyone can get to His Father. The other Gate, then, the Wide Gate, is our natural self without Christ. It is the gate we all inherited as a birthright because of Adam’s sin and the one we all choose to enter by nature. What does this Gate consist of? It means that we always think that we can be our own savior. The Bible tells us that *“The fool says in his heart, there is no God,”* (Ps. 14:1; 53:1), which one of my old pastors taught me to understand as, “The fool says in his heart, there is no god but me!” This is the default attitude of heart and mind we are all born with. It causes us to be willful, selfish, vain and proud. Most of us are astute enough to recognize that these are faults and paper over their most egregious exhibitions, but in our most honest moments we admit that we’re subtly or openly self-centered at heart. Why is this? There are at least two causes: We are blind to our own sinfulness; and we are blind to the heinousness of sin in God’s eyes. We do not deal honestly with ourselves about our actions and our motives. We always give ourselves the benefit of the doubt. Others may be liars, but our fibs are OK because we meant well, we tell ourselves. Others may be greedy, but we ourselves don’t covet. Others may be lustful, but our desires are really OK, because our spouse doesn’t really meet our needs anyway. Let’s face it: we always give ourselves the benefit of the doubt. We are blind to our sinfulness. We are also

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blind to God’s hatred of sin. It is probably impossible for us to describe in common language how deeply offensive sin is to God. We are inured to sin, but God is not. The things that we do without being much bothered, lying, lusting, coveting, God hates with a perfect, white-hot passion. They nauseate Him. They disgust Him. They provoke His wrath. We think nothing of such things, but God cannot abide to live with those who do them, so for our own protection, He has cast us out of the Garden, separated us from Himself. We count ourselves righteous, but we are only righteous in our own eyes. Fortunately, God has mercy on sinners; He is unwilling that any should perish and wants all to be saved, and that is why He has prepared for us another Gate, the Narrow Gate, Jesus. God begins our journey to the Narrow Gate by opening our eyes to sin and to our sinfulness. He shines the spotlight of His Word on our hearts and the Spirit of God pierces us with conviction. Perhaps you are experiencing that right now. Pay attention. God is offering to save you. Our journey to salvation begins when we humble ourselves and cry out to Jesus, admitting our own inability to save ourselves, and entering in at that moment by the Narrow Gate that leads to life. God’s only pathway for our rescue runs through the Narrow Gate of Jesus.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Which Gate are you trusting? Self or Jesus?

[ILLUSTRATION] When men and women fall in love, you do not find it strange when they desire to enter the covenant of marriage. Each has seen in the other something winsome, attractive, worth giving up their own self for. Love is the greatest motivator of self-sacrifice. Some will lay down their lives for their country, their spouse or their children, driven by a love that overwhelms self-interest. In this same way, love is the greatest motivation for entering into Life by the Narrow Gate of Jesus. If you realize how deeply offensive sin is to God; and you recognize that you are a helpless sinner; how could you not fall in love with a selfless Savior who laid down His life to save yours?

[APPLICATION] What motivates your life? Jesus and His love for you, or your love of yourself? Who is the most significant person in your life? If your heart tells you that the answer isn’t Jesus, perhaps it’s because you don’t yet realize who He really is. You may know Him as a historical figure, or as the head of the religion you profess to believe in. You may be familiar with the facts of His life. But has what you know about Him invaded the deepest part of your being – your heart? If not, perhaps you have yet to see your own sinfulness and how deeply offensive your sin is to God. Until we are gripped by these things, Jesus remains simply a nice Bible story to tell our Children. But He is so much more than that! In spite of our sinfulness, He loves us and has sacrificed Himself to save our souls. Have you entered in by the Narrow Gate?

Two Pathways: Hard or Easy – The Narrow Gate of Jesus leads us to a Pathway, a way of living, that Jesus describes here as “hard.” It is Hard because it requires us to die to self, the very thing our old nature despises to do. Our pride wars fiercely against this. Many people mistakenly believe that putting one’s faith in Jesus will usher in a time of unalloyed peace in the believer’s life, but this is far from true. The moment we put our faith in Christ, the moment we enter in at the Narrow Gate, we become a target for the believer’s three greatest enemies: the World, the Flesh and the Devil. Christ expects us to follow His commands. The new life He

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implants in our hearts urges us to obey. But the World around us works fiercely to lure us back into its grip. Our old nature, the Flesh, puts forth a thousand desires we know we shouldn't give in to. Our adversary, the Devil implants his lying suggestions, doubts and fears in our minds and hearts. We follow the commands of Christ which are unnatural for the unredeemed man, but satisfying though challenging to the saved. The pathway we are called to follow is one of constantly laying down our lives so Jesus can be exalted in them rather than ourselves. That is the Hard Pathway to which Jesus calls His followers. By contrast, the Easy Pathway seems more natural, less problematic. We give in to the crowd around us; adopt the world's mores, listen eagerly to the devil's lies. We “follow our hearts” even though its desires we know are contrary to God's will and our minds rationalize why that's OK. Oh, our conscience sometimes bothers us, but usually not for long. And the more we suppress its voice, the quieter it becomes over time. Sin doesn't much bother those who have chosen the Wide Gate. The real fight with sin only begins when you've chosen the Hard Pathway.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Which Pathway are you treading? Hard or Easy?

[ILLUSTRATION] In Frost's poem, he asks the reader, “I took the pathway less traveled; was it a wise choice or wasn't it?” Our reply might well be, “How are we to know?” You must have someone who understands the Gateways, Pathways and Destinies to be able to answer Frost's question. Without a competent guide, our answers to the question will be mere speculation. This is why Jesus' words to us in these verses are so essential: He is the only one who really knows the answers to our questions. If we are to enter by the right Gate, and tread the right Pathway, we need someone to direct our steps who genuinely knows where we are going.

[APPLICATION] Who directs your path? Jesus and His commands, or the world and its pleasures? These are the only two possibilities, you know. The common way of navigating life for those who do not know the Savior is to listen to our own thoughts and desires, then decide which pathway is best for us. Opposed to this is the Christian way of navigating: We listen carefully and prayerfully to the Words of Christ and watch for His Spirit's movement in our heart. When we do that, we receive the help we need. The world's way of navigating can never be adequate because sin has corrupted our ability to reason, and contaminated our ability to desire what is best. Because of this the ideas of culture and the mores of the society around us dominate our pathway. We continually choose that which displeases God and satisfies our flesh. We are slaves to the old ways and can only become free by entering in through the Narrow Gate and following Jesus along the Hard Pathway. Who is directing your path?

Two Destinies: Life or Destruction – The Gates and Pathways Jesus speaks about lead to (and foreshadow) distinct destinies. The Narrow Gate and the Hard Pathway leads to Life, Jesus tells us. It is important for us to realize that there are two aspects to the Life Jesus is talking about. When a person passes from death to life by putting his or her faith in Jesus, a new life is implanted in the soul. This work of grace that only God can do causes us to long for communion with Jesus and obedience to His commands. This is one iteration of the Life we receive from Christ; one which works its way out in the here and now. Often we overlook this

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Kind of Life in our relief that we have been promised the second kind: Eternal Life with God in the future. But our Salvation isn't just about bliss in the hereafter; it's about the power to overcome sin in this present life also. Opposed to this, the Wide Gate and the Easy Pathway leads to destruction, and this also has present and future aspects. We don't have to search far afield to notice the present aspect, do we? Think about it! Why do people do things that hurt others? Why are men so violent, not just as nations, but as individuals? It isn't just a question of senseless mass shootings, or deadly drug addictions. We wound our spouses. Treat our children as irritations and inconveniences. Despise our bosses. Disdain our politicians. Forget the poor. Divide along racial, ethnic and religious lines. Why is our world so messed up? The answer is sin. Sin lies at the base of every human ill. And none of us are exempt from its presence and power. When we come to Christ and this new kind of Life invades our being, we begin – perhaps slowly at first, but begin nevertheless – we begin to experience victory over the power of sin in our lives, and this foreshadows our eternal destiny. Every victory over sin is an affirmation that heaven is our destiny. In the same way, when we refuse the Narrow Gate, disdain the Hard Pathway and tramp thoughtlessly down “Easy Street,” we are foreshadowing the Eternal Destruction that awaits those who rebel against God. Jesus has been honest with us. There is an opportunity today to enter this new kind of life that changes our eternal destiny. But if we reject His kindness, Destruction awaits. Eternity cut off from God, from goodness, from joy; eternity in conscious suffering.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Which destiny are you approaching? Life or Destruction?

[ILLUSTRATION] Charles Dickens, in his classic story, “A Christmas Carol,” puts these words into the mouth of a terrified Ebenezer Scrooge as Scrooge contemplated his final destiny: “Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends.” Scrooge had waited, literally to the last minute to confess what he already knew: the Pathway you walk today foreshadows the Destiny you will receive tomorrow.

[APPLICATION] Is the Gate you have chosen, is the Pathway you are on today, foreshadowing your Destiny tomorrow? It is. Where does your heart, in this moment, tell you that you are heading?

**Conclusion:** The majority of people in this world never deviate from the Wide Gate and the Easy Pathway that leads to Destruction. Ending in disaster is easy – you must simply do nothing. Stir yourself! Enter by the Narrow Gate; take the Hard Pathway that leads to Life. Don't leave things hanging, as Frost did in his poem. Decide today to enter the Narrow Gate, to tread the Hard Pathway that leads to Life.