

So we are drawing near to the end of our series in the Sermon on the Mount. I wonder what you have been making of it? In recent weeks we have been thinking about keeping our word, loving our enemies, not worrying, not judging others. Now the danger of doing this is that we can get into a mindset of thinking that all we need to do is a little improvement here and there and we will be OK. In these last verses Jesus shows us that Christian discipleship is much more radical and yes we should be growing up into him who is the head and taking those steps forward in his way but as Jesus points out here those steps are based on a radical choice.

In these last verses he presents clearly what he has been suggesting throughout the sermon on the mount that there are only two ways to live, the way of Jesus or the way of the world. In these verses he presents that choice in terms of two roads, two trees, two claims and two houses. This morning we look at the two roads and the two trees and then next week Gordon will complete the series.

### **1. the fundamental choice v13**

It is that time of the year again where parents of children who have just started in year six at school are trying to decide where to send their children for their secondary school education. The choice is bewildering. I think last summer when we did the leavers assembly for the year six pupils at Four Lanes School and for Great Binfields picture here we had about 12 different schools to which the youngsters were going. Now that is one heck of a choice. When ours were that young where we lived it was effectively one school take it or leave it – well actually take it there was effectively no choice.

Such decisions are not easy and partly because they could affect our children's lives.

However here Jesus sets out for all of us a much more fundamental choice as he speaks of two gates, two ways and two destinations.

The ways and destinations are in one sense chosen as a result Jesus says of the gate we enter through.

His encouragement to his disciples sitting listening to him on that hill, to the others who were there and to us centuries later is to "Enter through the narrow gate".

It is only as we carry on reading that we see that through this gate we set off on a road that leads to life as opposed to destruction.

Not being the sharpest tool in the box I often find myself being 'confused of Chineham'. However, I feel that this listeners must have felt like 'confused of Capernaum' at this point because what Jesus said here seems to have no context. They must have asked what gate should we enter in by? What does he mean?

We are better placed to understand in that we have the rest of what Jesus said and the rest of the Bible to help us. In John 10 we read how Jesus described himself as the gate. He was talking about

the gate as a way in to security and rest, which is heaven. So the claim Jesus was making was that he is the means of access to heaven. So in John 10:9, "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture."

This is the fundamental choice Jesus called those disciples to make on what basis are you going to set your life and your hope of heaven? He encouraged them to choose him.

Friends I would from the bottom of my heart encourage us to do the same. I would plead with you if you have not already done so to "enter through the narrow gate" that is to accept Jesus as your Saviour and Lord. Being a follower of Jesus, a Christian is not a matter of a little change here and there be it in loving enemies or keeping our word. It is a fundamental change in who rules our lives and Jesus here calls us to enter through the narrow gate that is accept him as our Saviour and Lord. When we do that it sets us on a road and towards a destination but before we look at those things and especially at the destination as the reason why this is so important let me ask straight up – have you entered through the narrow gate? Have you said yes to Jesus being your Saviour, are you living with Jesus as your Lord?

This is the fundamental choice we have to make. No other choice in life is as important. No other choice in life has such far reaching effects. If we ignore the choice we have made the choice for as Jesus said, "he who is not for me is against me". There is no neutrality here.

Think of it. Jesus called those listeners then and us today to "enter by the narrow gate".

## **2. the narrow road v14-20**

In v14 Jesus speaks of the road being narrow even as the gate is narrow and that "only a few find it". I see in those words and the comparison with the broad road with many on it a warning to the listeners that in choosing his way is not necessarily choosing the easy way.

So while he encouraged them and us to enter by the small gate onto the narrow road he was using those terms to say the choice to follow him will not necessary result in the easiest of paths.

The Christian life, following the way of Jesus can be a struggle.

**a. We struggle with the nature of the road.** It is narrow that is we can't just live how we might want. Back in the Old Testament God used his law to set his people apart from the other nations. To show that they were different. The road was narrowed by the law and for us we may feel that the road is narrowed by God's word. We have seen that going through the sermon on the Mount as we have heard the encouragement not to get angry with others, not to look with lust at someone, to keep our word and so on. It seems restrictive especially in our world today where standards of morality seem to be dictated to us by the media. It can seem very often that if we are seeking to follow Jesus we are on a restrictive path and going against the flow of the world. The nature of the road also is that not many are on it. How true that is. It is suggested that only 10% of the UK population go to church each Sunday. If we are Christians we are very much in the minority and we may wonder at

times can so many have got it wrong? Outside of church in our families, with our friends and definitely at work we can find ourselves isolated as followers of Christ. So yes we struggle with the nature of the road being narrow and sparsely populated. But then I think back to the series we did on Isaiah and to Isaiah 35 when we looked at the way of holiness and saw that we enter that way through the cross and more that it is a way of joy, “they will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads.” (Isaiah 35:10).

On Weds at Discipleship Explored some of the group were talking about feeling bad at having missed church and while they recognised they could catch up with the sermons on line they missed “the joy of worshipping together”. The road may be hard and a bit lonely so we need to come together to be encouraged to go back out and live for Jesus.

**b. we struggle with our own nature.** One of the reasons following Jesus can be hard is because we all want to fit in, to be part of the crowd but Jesus says that following him may bring just the opposite. Being a follower of Jesus will mean we are in the minority, we are different with a different mindset, different motivations and different goals.

**c. we struggle with siren voices.** I love the film Jungle book and the part at the end where the child Mowgli is heading towards the man village and Bagheera the panther is urging him on while Baloo the bear is calling him back. Here Jesus warns his disciples in v15 about the siren voices of the false prophets. That is those who want to make the narrow way broader and easier and whose voices appeal to us as we struggle with the nature of the road and our own nature.

A couple of years ago at a clergy event we were discussing a passage from the Bible which clearly spoke of the judgement that is to come but one clergyman said something like “I don’t like to think of judgement. I can’t think that this is what Jesus meant.” Now he is not alone many clergy and other Christians struggle with the idea of judgement and so water it down with the idea that all will be saved. That may make the path a bit easier we don’t have to say difficult things to people and we may be better liked but it makes what Jesus is saying here a nonsense. There will be many along the way who come with their ideas and those ideas may seem plausible because they will fit in with what we want to think and how we want things to be but we have to hold to the word of Jesus. But then we may well ask –why?

Why should I choose the small gate and narrow way? Why should I battle on when the road seems tough and I seem to be one of very few on it? Why should I ignore those voices which tell me to take an easier way?

### **3. The true goal v13&14**

It is because of the goal towards which we are heading. Let’s go back to v13&14 “wide is the gate and broad the road that leads to destruction..... but small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life”

It could not be plainer. There are, Jesus says, only two ways in life one leads to life and one leads to destruction. Yes the small gate and narrow road may be tough but the goal and the end is eternal life. The broad road that many take may be easier and may be more populated but it leads to eternal destruction, to hell.

Friends here is the truth from the lips of Jesus.

Over the years as I have talked to people about the Christian faith and about heaven I have heard many times the expression of “pie in the sky when you die”. It is a derogatory term for the Christian hope. Then I prepare for a funeral and listen to a family talk about their loved one and what a good person he or she was and that while they didn’t bother about church, and it goes unsaid they didn’t bother about God, yet still they imagine their loved one in heaven. Their loved one has walked the broad path along with so many and yet expect it to lead to life. That my friends is a true pie in the sky when you die attitude. That is the epitome of wishful thinking. Please do not imagine that I enjoy standing here and saying this. I would rather say that everyone will go to heaven but you know that would offend our human ideas of justice. More it goes against God’s justice. If we will all go to heaven irrespective of how we have lived then why did Jesus come to earth and die?

But he did come and he did die and as such he opened the gate into heaven for all who will trust in what God has done for us through the cross. Jesus calls us to enter through the narrow gate. He knows the gate is small and the road is narrow but he also knows that this is the way, the only way to eternal life.

Jeremiah speaking to God’s wayward people used this analogy, “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls” (Jer 6:16)

That is what these words of Jesus call us to do. They call us to recognise that there is in a sense not a cross roads but there are two ways before us. One is the road so many people will travel, a broad and easy way but which leads ultimately to our destruction. The other path leads through the gate of Jesus and his cross to a harder path, the path that Jesus himself trod but it leads to eternal life.

There is a choice of two and only two paths, so which will you choose? I know many of us have chosen the narrow way but if you are here today or listening to this on download then let me urge you to choose that small gate and narrow path, to choose to follow Jesus on the road to life eternal.