

2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters

Sermon Series - Focus on Truth

Sermon Title - The Narrow Gate

Sermon Text - Matthew 7:13-14

Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

Introduction:

“Worthy is the Lamb!” Thank God that Jesus was the Worthy Lamb! The perfect Lamb of God! The Innocent Lamb of God, without any sin whatsoever! Jesus lived a perfect life and was therefore able to be the perfect and complete sacrifice for your sin and my sin and for the sins of the world! He only asks that we admit that we have sinned, believe Jesus died to save us from our sins, and to call upon Jesus to save us from our sins! Folks, that's the gospel, the good news, the way of salvation! There's a world out there trying to complicate everything and trying to confuse people by offering all kinds of alternatives to the truth of God's Word. And the sad thing is that in a day and time when we need the truth more than ever, people are being drawn and pulled away from the simple truth that God has a deep love for a sinful, lost and lonely world and wants to save it! Let's pray and ask God to speak to our hearts today! Pray!

Why is the word truth so important when it comes to the Gospel or the good news of Jesus? Because if the gospel is just a fairy tale, just a feel good story, just a religious superstition, among many, then it has no real power to cleanse the past, transform the present or change the future! Truth matters and is core to everything about the gospel. There may be some here today who are just not sure about this whole Jesus thing. I simply ask you to consider the truth claims of the gospel message today. In His famous sermon on the mount, Jesus gives us a simple truth that is very deep, and rich in meaning and absolutely important that we understand. Today's message is about the truth of the narrow gate. Jesus said...

Matthew 7:13 “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.

Matthew 7:14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

In these two verses we find several very important concepts that lead us to the truth. The first is...

Jesus' Instruction

Matthew 7:13 “Enter through the narrow gate...

What is the narrow gate? The narrow gate is Jesus. In fact Jesus had once told His disciples this...

John 10:7 Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.

John 10:8 All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them.

John 10:9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture.

John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

John 10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Jesus had also told His disciples this...

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Now this is where many people have a problem with the Gospel. The exclusive claims of Jesus. What I'm about to do is called apologetics.

APOLOGETICS: reasoned arguments or writings in justification of something, typically a theory or religious doctrine.

First of all, let me say that Apologetics is in no way apologizing for belief in God, the Bible, or the Good news of Jesus Christ. The original word, apologia, was a Greek word and was the term used when a defendant in court gave his defense. Christian Apologetics is a reasoned argument that gives the rational reasons we believe what we believe. I don't believe God ever intended for our faith to be blind faith. We trust God implicitly, completely, absolutely, totally, wholeheartedly, utterly, unconditionally, and unreservedly, but not blindly! Truth be told, people who live without faith are the ones who are living life on the blind side. When they walk out the door in the morning, they simply hope things will work out good for that day. In fact they'll tell you there's nothing sure in this life. They are simply carried along by life's circumstances and do not see an eternal purpose for anything. Some non-believers are respectful of people of faith, they just disagree. Others can be cynical and even mean spirited towards people of faith. God's Word says...

1 Peter 3:14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened."

1 Peter 3:15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

1 Peter 3:16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

Again, the problem for some comes with the exclusive claims of Christ and the belief that there are some absolute truths. Some simply do not believe there is such a thing as absolute truth. I asked a guy one time, who felt this way, if he was sure there were no absolute truths. He said "yes I'm sure!" And I said, "absolutely sure?" Isn't it amazing that people in every school of thought believe in absolutes? Physics, medicine, mathematics, biology, but they say there can be no absolutes when it comes to spiritual truth. Here's my point: In mathematics, you can't just

make up what you want the answer to an equation to be. There's a right and wrong answer. We could have never put a man on the moon without the absolutes of physics.

In Washington D.C. there is a Bureau of Weights and Standards. They actually have literal examples of what they consider to be an ounce, a pound, a pint, a gallon, an inch, a foot. It's an absolute standard we base measurements on. Why is it that we are told about absolute standards in every school of thought, but are then told there can be no absolute standards or absolute truths when it comes to spirituality. When it comes to religion we are told that anything goes. It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you believe. Is that rational? And yet when you try to discover spiritual truth and determine what is right and what is wrong, you are told "you're being irrational and judgmental." Once again, without reliable things like mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, and scientific method, much of our advancement in aerospace, computer technologies, medicine, and a host of other pursuits in life would not be possible! I believe very strongly that our spirituality must also have a foundation or core that is based on truth, if it is to be effective, and helpful not hurtful. There have been a lot of things done down through the years in religion that were not based on truth, but false ideologies which have caused great harm to individuals and to humanity. So I can tell you that there is truth and there is false when it comes to the spiritual realm and this is the most important school of thought in which to get truth right! Your spiritual well being in this life, as well as your eternity depends on it! And if there is spiritual truth, and I believe there is, then we have to seek the truth. It's too important to just believe whatever and hope you're right. There's way too much at stake.

I've said this before, but when I get on a commercial airplane, I pray the route the air traffic controller gives our pilot is not just a blind guess in the dark. I hope they've based their directions on real, empirical data that knows where the other planes are. Why would I roll the dice with my soul? Down through the centuries people have tried to find a way to God. Do you remember the Tower of Babel? People thought they could build a building and reach Heaven. There's just something about working our way to heaven that seems to satisfy our human pride. "I did it, I accomplished my goal, I won, I achieved, I made it." And for most every other religion, except Biblical Christianity, it's what you do for God that gets you to heaven or to a higher spiritual level. But in Biblical Christianity it's not what I do for God but what God did for me when He sent His One and Only Son Jesus to die on the cross for me, that's what gets me to heaven! When Jesus came, He changed everything. He taught us that God was not a capricious, mean spirited God who could not be approached or touched, just waiting to zap people. Instead Jesus showed us the heart of God. Richard Koenig put it this way in his book, "If God is God..."

"God's participation in human pain is vastly more than an expression of sympathy. Here truth outruns drama. In Jesus Christ God overcomes suffering through suffering; He destroys evil by being made evil's victim. The crucifixion of the Son of God ends in the triumph of the resurrection on the third day...We may shake our heads in amazement that God would clothe His power in weakness as he does in Jesus Christ, placing Himself entirely under the conditions of human life, subject to all life's evils. That is all right, for wonder and amazement are appropriate reactions to the mystery of God's self-imposed weakness, which is His power."

So Jesus' instruction for us is to enter the narrow gate. Now let's look at the truth we gain from...

Jesus' Insight

Matthew 7:13 ...For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.

Such powerful insight from Jesus! It's easy to follow the world's ways! It's wide open, it's popular, and it seems like everyone's doing things the world's way. You know the line, "But everybody's doing it!" To which my dad once asked me, "if everybody's jumping off a cliff, are you going to jump off the cliff?"

Matthew Henry said this about the wide gate...

"You may go in at this gate with all your lusts about you; it gives no check to appetites or passions. It is a broad way; there are many paths in it; there is choice of sinful ways. There is a large company in this way."

Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott, *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Mt 7:12.

Back in Jesus' day there was a similar situation to which we are facing today. There was a truth crisis in the area of spirituality! There was a prevalent spiritual worldview called Gnosticism which was somewhat like the humanistic philosophies of today, although Gnosticism incorporated highly superstitious views of spirituality combined with an elevation of human wisdom. Theologian R.E.O. White, has one of the best descriptions of Gnosticism I've ever found. He says Gnosticism is...

"...combined philosophic speculation, superstition, semi-magical rites, and sometimes a fanatical and even obscene cultus....The body, the tomb of the spirit, may be rigorously suppressed or indifferently indulged as irrelevant to the life of pure spirit."

So these Gnostics thought they had superior wisdom and so they concocted their own "truth!" This led many of them to believe that the body was purely evil and only the spirit mattered. Therefore they "logically" decided it didn't matter what you did with the body, as long as your spirit was right. So they decided they could indulge in the most immoral behaviors with the body, because it was evil anyway and it didn't matter! This led to unimaginable depravity! Any similarities with our culture today? When people try to create their own super spirituality apart from God's truth and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, things can go bad very quickly. It's the wide gate, the wide road that leads to destruction and many enter through it! The spirituality of many of the people of Jesus and Paul's day was based on human philosophies, human reasoning, human traditions, and a salad bar of human religions! The surrounding culture had adopted a weird mix of secular and religious philosophies! They had basically decided they

could make up their own truth to suit their wishes and whims. Paul warned his young apprentice Timothy about this...

2 Timothy 4:3 For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

2 Timothy 4:4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

Here's what's at stake: your morality, your principles, your ethics, your meaning in life, your purpose in life, your inspiration for life and your hope, or lack thereof, for eternal life. Because many people reject the possibility of absolute truth, or revealed truth when it comes to spirituality, they are left with conjecture, superstition, various philosophies, or just plain old guessing! Parents, without a foundation of established truth, you send your children out into a big, confusing, and even deceptive world, without the benefit of a baseline of truth! Let me just say this, even if your children eventually decide to go a different direction than the Christian foundation you gave them, they still have that baseline of truth in their hearts and minds. Many young people today are looking for truth in all the wrong places. Many are swept along by the famous personalities they follow on social media, the Youtuber's, the Instagramers, TicToc, Snap or whatever the newest social app! Others are carried along by the latest trends of hollywood. These things are so artificial and are based on fads, temporary popularity, and are media driven. There are many paths that lead to destruction and that's the truth. Jesus wants you to get on the road that leads to life! Let me just do a little more apologetics for you.

Our faith, our love and our hope find their reality in the truth of God's Word! You see, genuine Christianity is not based on fads, popularity, superstitions, opinions, feelings, experiences, or philosophies, but on the revealed Word of God that has come to us in Holy Scripture! It comes down to this: If there is no revelation, then all we are left with is speculation! But the truth of the Gospel, the good news of what God has done for us through Jesus on the Cross, is found even in the Old Testament through the many detailed prophecies which Jesus fulfilled as the Messiah! More than 100!! When Paul wrote his letters to Timothy and to various churches, he would have had access to the writings which comprise the Old Testament, but the New Testament had not yet been written in its entirety or collected together. The Gospel truth, and the word of truth that Paul was teaching was still being taught and passed along through the testimony of the disciples and the followers of Christ! Paul's own letters would eventually be brought into the canon of Holy Scripture! These amazing, God inspired truths have been written down and preserved for us in The Holy Bible! Now someone might say, "But Pastor Larry, other religions have books too!" And to that I would say yes they do, but there's a big difference! Most of those books can be traced back to one individual, usually the founder of that religion. The founder of Christianity, Jesus, never wrote a book! A book was written about Him by others. There are 66 books of the Bible written by around 40 authors, written over thousands of years. So many of those writers did not even know each other! So no possibility of collaboration. When you take that into consideration and study the absolutely amazing consistency, cohesion, reliability, and intricate detail that run throughout Holy Scripture, it becomes extremely difficult to dismiss the Bible as just another religious book! And when you study Biblical history, it's also

amazing the painstaking, and meticulous way in which the books of the Bible were vetted and verified to be authentic and allowed into the canon of Holy Scripture! Many who have sought to prove the Bible was not a divinely inspired book, upon investigation, have come to embrace the Bible for what it claims to be! And what does it claim to be?

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

2 Timothy 3:17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So with that in mind let's look at the truth of...

Jesus' Imagery and Indication

Matthew 7:14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Why is the gate small and the road narrow that leads to life and why do only a few find it? The reason is this...We can't work for our salvation or do enough good to earn it, but we must make the decision to turn from wickedness and allow Jesus to save us from the evil that seeks to destroy us. The Gospel is simple to understand, but not easy to follow! Why?

The gospel says that we must humble ourselves to Admit we are wicked sinners in need of a Savior!

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

The Gospel says we must humble ourselves to Believe that Jesus died on an old rugged Cross to do for us what we could never do for ourselves, save us from our sins!

Colossians 2:13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,

Colossians 2:14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

Colossians 2:15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

The Gospel says we must humble ourselves and Call upon the name of the Lord for salvation!

Romans 10:9 If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

Romans 10:11 As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame."

Romans 10:12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,

Romans 10:13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

A child can understand the gospel, because it tells us that we don't have the power to save ourselves, but like a stubborn child who is determined to do things without anyone's help, many people would rather pridefully say, "I've got this! I don't need God! This faith thing, this God thing, it's just a crutch! Well let me put it this way, I've been crippled by sin, and yes, when it comes to my spiritual condition, I need Jesus to be my crutch! Without him I'm not only crippled, I'm paralyzed, and worse, I'm lost, and dead in my sin! I need Jesus to be my way, my truth, my life! I need Jesus to raise me from the dead spiritually by giving me a new heart, and by beginning the process of renewing my mind daily and allowing me to begin living a new life! A life filled with purpose, meaning, and the joy of the Lord!

We don't work for our salvation, we receive it as a gift and again that's a hard concept because it involves laying down our pride, taking up our cross and following the Lord! You see the decision to believe in Jesus by turning from sin and allowing God to give us the gift of forgiveness is a commitment. And the truth is, our world doesn't really like the word commitment! And once we allow Jesus to become our Savior we face a daily decision whether or not we're going to allow Him to be Lord of our life. That requires self-denial and obedience and the world really doesn't like those words either. But here's what you need to know. Jesus said the small gate and narrow way leads to life!

It comes down to the kind of life you want to have. Choices have consequences! Anyone here willing to deny that? I had a dear friend tell me something the other day and I wish I could have recorded it. It was powerful. He loves Jesus, but he's been through some really hard things because of past bad choices. With tears in his eyes he said something to this effect: "The world is suffering the consequences of their sin and they think God is punishing them. It's not God! When we mess up and walk away from God and embrace sin, God is not angry at us, He is broken for us! He is standing there crying as we walk away from the light into the darkness, because He knows what's at the end of that road and He wants so much better for us! But there's this thing of our human free will that God will not violate. And if we make the decision to walk away from God's love and help His heart is broken!" Such powerful words from my friend! But we must understand it's a decision to trust Jesus and let Him be the gateway for you to enter into a relationship with God the Father! And here's something to remember, the earlier you make this decision in life, the better! You can be saved late in life, but you'll look back and wish you would have had Jesus along for the ride. He could have helped you make some better decisions and avoid some self made problems, and He could have been there for you for other tough things that just come along with living in this old world! Either way, life is better with Jesus in your heart and by your side! But I want to give you an example of how you can come to Christ at any stage of your life and how to walk through the narrow gate and get on the narrow road

that leads to life both here on earth and in heaven for eternity. But once again, in our world today, so many want to just do their own thing and depend on their own good works for salvation! You know, the old “well I’m just as good as the next guy, and maybe better!”

I was talking to someone else just yesterday and they put it this way...”To save yourself you would have to do something greater than Jesus did on the cross, and you can’t do that! It’s impossible!” Folks, that’s solid doctrine right there! God’s been speaking to me this week through other people in some powerful ways! I’ve been listening. When someone tells me something and it lines up with Scripture and doesn’t contradict or violate Scripture, I figure God’s trying to get my attention, so I pay attention! Here’s what God put on my heart from that conversation...

It only takes a mustard seed of faith to move a mountain and I know it takes way less than a mustard seed to move God’s heart to save a soul! And when people ask me those tough questions about who will be saved and who will be lost in the end, I just tell them that I trust God’s heart and wisdom on that. If a person gets to heaven they get there because of the blood that Jesus shed on the old rugged cross! He’s the way, the truth and the life! How God applies the blood of Jesus to someone’s sin account is above my pay-grade! I’ll just keep trying to tell people about the love of Jesus and encourage all that I can to get to know Him and let Him change their lives here on earth and for eternity! So let’s look at the thief on the cross. He didn’t have time to live a different kind of life! He didn’t have a chance to be water baptized, he didn’t have time to go back and make amends for the wrong things he had done! There was no chance for him to do more good than bad, because he was about to die and he had lived a lifetime of bad! Talk about a death bed confession, it’s just that he was not in a comfy bed, he was hanging on a cross beside Jesus. And what a lot of folks don’t realize is that according to The Gospel of Matthew both thieves had been hurling insults at Jesus but had a change of heart.

Matthew 27:44 In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

But something happened with one of them and he only had time to do one thing. Trust Jesus! He didn’t really have time to get on the narrow road, he just had time to get through the narrow gate! And how did he do that? We find out in Luke’s Gospel...

Luke 23:39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

Luke 23:40 But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence?”

Luke 23:41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

Luke 23:42 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Luke 23:43 Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Did you see it? The thief on the cross **Admitted** that he was a sinner.

Luke 23:41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

Did you see it? The thief on the cross **Believed** in Jesus!

Something obviously happens between verse 41&42. He believes! Why do I say this? Because he wouldn't do what he did next if he didn't believe. What does he do next?

Did you see it? The thief on the cross **Calls** upon the name of the Lord Jesus!

Luke 23:42 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Did you see it? The **Amazing Grace** of our God?

Luke 23:43 Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

I believe Chris Rice's song, "Untitled Hymn" sums up the gospel message and it's the message that Northshore Church, without apology, desires to share with the whole world!

“Weak and wounded sinner, Lost and left to die, O, raise your head for Love is passing by,
Come to Jesus, Come to Jesus, Come to Jesus and live,

Now your burden's lifted, And carried far away, And precious blood has washed away the
stain... so Sing to Jesus , Sing to Jesus , Sing to Jesus and live,

And like a newborn baby, Don't be afraid to crawl, And remember when you walk sometimes we
fall... so Fall on Jesus, Fall on Jesus, Fall on Jesus and live,

Sometimes the way is lonely, And steep and filled with pain, So if your sky is dark and pours the
rain... then Cry to Jesus, Cry to Jesus, Cry to Jesus and live,

O, and when the love spills over, And music fills the night, And when you can't contain you joy
inside... then Dance for Jesus, Dance for Jesus, Dance for Jesus and live,

And with your final heartbeat, Kiss the world goodbye, Then go in peace, and laugh on Glory's
side... and Fly to Jesus, Fly to Jesus, Fly to Jesus and live”

Jesus wants us to know His truth! One of the amazing things about Christianity is that it is not a secret society holding on to secret and hidden truths! God has always wanted people to know the truth and as such He has commissioned people down through the years to proclaim the truth and to make it known. Paul the apostle put it this way...

Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Let's pray!