

The Two Roads

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[0 : 0 0] Now let's turn to the passage we read in Matthew chapter 7 and especially verses 13 and 14. Enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. Life can be so complicated in many different kinds of ways, and I suppose what adds to the complications of life is the fact that we have to take so many decisions about things.

There are so many choices. Many of you as students or people who are training, you've got to make decisions, perhaps some of you very soon, about what kind of work you're going to do, what kind of jobs you're going to attempt to apply for, and what others you're just going to leave out altogether.

All kinds of decisions, and every day we make decisions that affect how we're going to live, and will affect perhaps the kind of things that will happen that day and perhaps for many days to come.

We know how important it is that we make the right decisions on so many occasions. Many of our choices, I suppose, are quite trivial ones, like what kind of tie we'll put on today or whether we'll put a tie on at all.

Other decisions might be very far-reaching indeed. And today I want to focus with you on the most far-reaching of all choices.

[1 : 5 2] That is the choice that our Lord Jesus presents us with here in these words. Now this choice, as it's presented here, is not an isolated choice in the Bible.

Rather, it's expressing in yet another way, in yet other words, in yet another picture, the same choice that confronts us, the same choice that the Bible confronts us with every time we open its pages.

Because the Bible, above all else, is a challenging book. The Word of God to us, challenging us to choose, and to choose one of two ways.

Now in that sense, we're shown that life is perhaps not just quite as complicated as we might sometimes try to make out.

Because so often, God is telling us, the choice itself, the basic choice, is rather simple.

[3 : 0 3] Perhaps the effects of those choices might have all kinds of complicated results, but the choice itself is a simple one. It's not a choice, in this instance, between many different kinds of choices.

But it is a decision simply between two ways. He describes it here as two roads. Two roads, a broad road and a narrow road.

And each of those roads has got an appropriate entrance to it. The broad road having a very wide entrance to it. And the narrow road having a very small entrance to it.

So Jesus, by these words, is bringing home to us, in a very straightforward and down-to-earth way, the fact that there is just one important choice.

There will be many other smaller choices connected with this one. But unless we get this one right, then we can't really be following his way at all.

[4 : 16] I'd like to look with you at those two choices that he lays before us. The two roads, we may call them just quite simply, sin road and salvation road.

Because that's really the way they're presented to us in Scripture. Sin road, we're thinking here about the wide gate and broad road that leads to destruction and many entering through it.

First of all, then, the entrance to that way, to that road. What Jesus is getting across to us here is that the way onto this road is quite easy.

It's not difficult to find. Now, you know how difficult it is sometimes to find a particular road you're looking for. Perhaps here in Aberdeen you've been given an address, street name, and perhaps it's a small out-of-the-way one.

It's difficult to find. But, for instance, if you're going to be down in the south of Scotland and you're about the M9 or the M8 there, if you're approaching any of these big roads, you'll see large signs saying motorway.

[5 : 32] You can't really mistake it. The way onto those roads is quite easy because there are so many signs pointing that way. Now, Jesus is saying something like that here.

He's saying that the way onto this road, sin road, is quite easy. There's no special effort required.

There's no special qualifications required. It's not a matter of being very good or very bad. It's not a question of being very clever or very stupid.

In fact, it's dead easy to get onto this road because, quite simply, the Bible tells us we are already on that road.

We are already, if you like, kind of predisposed towards that road. We're told quite clearly in the Scriptures that we are born in sin and shapen in iniquity.

[6 : 37] We have got already this twist to us because we are part of a sinful, fallen human race.

And therefore, it's quite easy for us to go that way, just as easy as it is to find your way onto a motorway. Sometimes it's not so difficult. It's not so easy to find your way off a motorway, but it's dead easy to find your way on.

And that's what Jesus is talking about here. The only qualification to be on this road is that we are sinners.

And of course, the Bible assures us quite firmly that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. The only qualification to be on this broad road is that we have disobeyed God.

We're out of line with his plans and purpose. So it's quite easy to be on this road. And so, Jesus says, those who enter onto this road, there are many.

[7 : 43] It's quite easy. No special effort is required. And then also he says that the way is wide.

The wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction. This road that he describes people traveling along, it's a broad road.

There are very few restrictions on it. And again here, obviously the picture of a motorway comes to mind. You know when you're on a small road, a narrow road, well, you sort of tend to be a little bit, perhaps more careful.

When you're on a motorway, well, everything seems so easy. A lot of the sort of normal rules that you have in driving, you tend to sort of forget about them because there's this broad road, there's plenty of room, there's plenty of space for all the cars and lorries.

And, well, I suppose there are a few basic rules, but you tend to forget about them because it all seems so easy. There's plenty, plenty room. And in a sense, of course, isn't that the modern ideal?

- [8 : 55] And perhaps that's why a motorway so sums up our modern civilization. This way where it's so easy and so broad and there's room for everyone. No restrictions or very few.
- Well, it sounds great. Nobody to tell you what to do. No limits imposed upon us. Well, obviously on the motorway, there are things like speed limits, 70 miles an hour and so on.
- But that sounds very appealing, that kind of way, that kind of road. And, of course, that is the kind of road that really in our own sinful hearts, we would really want to have.
- a kind of road where really it would be possible for us to do anything. Really to do what we wanted to do.
- Now we know, we know even from the comparison of ordinary tarmac roads, that you can't have that kind of road, can you?
- [10 : 02] You can't really have a road that is so broad and so accepting of every kind of lunatic that you can do what you like. It's impossible.
- There must be certain rules. There must be a certain kind of lifestyle demanded of people even driving on an ordinary road.
- Otherwise, there is absolute chaos. And, of course, sometimes we know there is absolute chaos when people disobey the more simple rules like slowing down to a reasonable speed and fog, for instance.
- But, of course, the demand of the human heart, the sinful human heart, is to really try to ignore that kind of reality and say, well, I want to live just the way I want to.
- I don't want there to be restrictions to hem me in. In other words, what the human heart is saying, I don't really want the universe the way it is. I want a different kind of universe.
- [11 : 03] I want a kind of universe where nobody suffers really when they do wrong. I want a kind of motorway where nobody gets hurt if they drive too fast or if they don't slow down for fog.
- In other words, the human heart is wanting the impossible, wanting a universe that never was, does not exist, and never will be. Because we live in a universe as created by God.
- A universe where human action has consequences. Where human sin produces results, inevitable results, apart from the grace of God.
- And this way that is broad and seems so appealing, Jesus assures us in the last section what he says about the broad road, that its destination is destruction.
- This broad road that seemed so appealing, that was so easy to get on to, that seemed to be so wide, plenty of room for everybody, its destination is destruction.
- [12 : 17] now I think perhaps today we're beginning to see something of this beginning to penetrate to people's minds, that you cannot really do what you want to do and get away with it.
- to reject all rules, even God's law, and get away with it. We're beginning to see that when we adopt the stance of, well, I want to do what's self-satisfying to me, I want to do what pleases me, I want to do what fulfills me, then we get all kinds of problems problems in society.
- It's a little bit like you're driving along the motorway again, you're sort of half-lulled yourself in a almost kind of sleepy condition, everything seems so easy, and then suddenly up ahead you just see brake lights coming on, and you realize there's trouble, there's destruction up ahead, because people have not really been paying attention to what they were doing, people have not been obeying the rules, and there's been a pile-up on the motorway.
- Well, I think perhaps we can see some of those kinds of signs, perhaps sometimes written very large in the problems of society today, perhaps in the very small fine print of our own experience, but we can see something of what Jesus is talking about here, even in this life.

Today, we can see some of the catastrophic results of people following their own way, everyone turning to his own way, turning away from God's law.

[14 : 20] For instance, if we have the general kind of permissive attitude that, well, there aren't really ultimately absolute standards of right and wrong, well, should it be any surprise to us when we get our rise in vandalism and petty crime and in more serious crime itself?

The more that society gives the impression, well, it doesn't really matter ultimately about right and wrong, well, the more problems we're going to get in those kinds of areas.

And this is tied in not only to that kind of laissez-faire attitude towards morality, it's tied into other, more deeply philosophic developments, such as what are we as human beings?

And if we've been taught, as we have for so long, that man is just some kind of complicated animal, well, is it any surprise to us, or should it be, when we discover some young people behaving as animals, or should we say worse than animals?

it shouldn't really surprise us if we really believe those things that have been taught in our society for so long.

[15 : 39] But here, as in other places, we are seeing something of those signs, those warning lights, like the brake lights coming on, warning us of destruction ahead.

We see something of the tremendous breakup of families in our own day. And again, perhaps here, people are still kind of very unworried by those developments, so that they quite accept quite blithely the fact that one in three marriages will break up.

And this kind of development going on and on, and nobody asking the question, well, is there some radical solution to these kind of problems?

or are we just going to accept a society that is more and more fragmented, where people will not really know, perhaps, who their real father or real mother is, or if there is such a thing as a real father or a real mother?

How can we ever expect anybody to really know what the fatherhood of God means in such a society? authority? How can we expect anyone to really know and to really understand the authority of God's word, or any kind of authority in such a society?

[17 : 07] So here we are presented with something in our own, the developments of our own society, of this kind of destructiveness at work.

work. then we have the fact that so often we have around us the evidence that prosperity is kind of slipping through our fingers, the kind of prosperity that perhaps people have set their hearts on having, discovering that, well, when you get the kind of prosperity that you once wanted, that no longer satisfies.

And even those things that you have set your heart on, they themselves seem to decay and become much less interesting once you do have them.

That kind of destructiveness that Jesus himself spoke of, the destructiveness of the moth and the rust corrupting. Evidence from our own life, from this world, of the truth of what Jesus says here concerning the destination of sin road, destruction.

This road, Jesus is warning us, leads inevitably to this destruction. And it leads to a destruction far worse than we can ever imagine.

[18 : 37] when the Lord Jesus Christ himself talks so much of the destruction of human life after death, the destruction of the soul that has disobeyed God and does not want God to rule over it.

That destruction that is talked of in terms of the fire that is not quenched, the worm that does not perish. these things continuing, not just in this life, but throughout all eternity.

So then the Lord Jesus here warns us most solemnly in these words, as in many other places, concerning the destination of the life that is lived in opposition to God.

That destination, Jesus says, is hell. But then also Jesus speaks of salvation road, another road, another kind of road, one that perhaps doesn't seem very attractive at first, but one that is very different from the other.

We notice that this road has a very small entrance. Small is the gate for this road. road. Now here we're thinking of a road that's rather difficult to find.

[20 : 05] Perhaps like a small winding country road. Perhaps it's not even signposted very well sometimes. And yet this is the road that we have got to find.

It emphasizes to us that this road is in some ways difficult to find. Now we must be careful of what we say about this because in other places the Bible makes it quite clear that the way of salvation is easy.

Easy in the sense that it is easy to understand. Easy in the sense that it is simple and straightforward once we grasp what God is telling us about ourselves and about himself and about what Jesus did.

But there is a sense in which there is a difficulty about it. a difficulty in finding it and also a difficulty from then on in going that road.

It's not an easy road. It's not a sort of road like a motorway where everything seems to be so straightforward. Very difficult road.

[21 : 16] You've got to keep your wits about you all the time. But first of all Jesus is saying here it's hard to find. it's a small entrance to it.

As he says and talking in similar terms in one of the other gospels, you've got to strive to enter in at this narrow gate. What he's saying quite simply is it's quite easy to be on the other road, the broad road.

You're just that way anyway. We all are. That's the way we're born into the world. You don't need to expend any effort to get onto it. You just slide onto it.

But you have to strive to enter in at the narrow gate. You have to really get to grips with what God is saying to you in his word.

You've got to be wide awake. You've got to be stirred up that you're going to find this way and that nothing is going to stop you from finding this way.

[22 : 18] You. And then also the fact that it's a small entrance reminds us that to get onto it, to get onto that road, we've got to bow down.

I think that's the idea here of a small gate. It's not just that it's sort of narrow in that way, but it's like a gateway through a city wall that's small.

Something like what Jesus said, perhaps using the expression it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into the kingdom of heaven.

Perhaps what is being meant there is that just as a camel had to, would really have to go down on its knees almost to get through one of these small entrances in the city wall and he would have to take off or rather all the burdens would have to be taken off him.

So Jesus is saying there has to be a humility, there has to be a bowing down in getting onto salvation road. He's saying to us that we really can't walk in sort of tall and proud thinking that we're donating something to God but rather we have to come humbly acknowledging that we have sinned against God and there's nothing we deserve from God.

[23 : 47] There's nothing that is our due apart from judgment for our sin and what we receive from God by way of salvation is a gift unmerited, undeserved.

We've got to bow down. And so along with that we really can't take any great baggage along with us, any great baggage of our good works or our own merit or our own ideas but because it's a small gate we just squeeze through simply as we are.

And that is the way God wants us, just as we are, just as we are, just asking God to accept us simply as we are, as sinners who need to be forgiven, who need to be accepted by him, who need to be cleansed and given new life.

And then also we notice that the way, the actual road is restricted. Again, it doesn't look very attractive, does it? Not like the broad road, it's a narrow road, it's a narrow path and always on a narrow path or narrow road you've got to be alert.

You've got to be always making sure you're keeping on that road, not sliding off into the ditch. You've got to keep your wits about you. And on that road there's not room for every kind of view.

[25 : 17] There's not room for every kind of practice. The narrower the road is, the more careful you have to be and the more sure you're going to be that you're following the highway code.

Well, that's just a picture of what it's like on this road. salvation road. The road that you enter onto when you become a Christian is a narrow road in the sense that it is the road that is to be lived in accordance with what God has commanded in his word.

Not according to our own ideas. But once we discover that, once we make that discovery, we discover that it's not really a narrow road in the sort of negative meaning of that word at all.

Once we actually begin to follow God's way, we begin to discover that we can gain enjoyment and fulfillment that we never imagined before.

It's like, for instance, you could be whizzing along on a motorway somewhere, totally unaware of the great width and beauty of the country around you.

[26 : 29] And compare that with, say, striving along a narrow country lane and you begin to notice things around you, things that you wouldn't have noticed before, small little things and it's easy to stop, to pull into the side of the road and to see those things.

That's the kind of picture that's given to us in scripture of God's way. We begin to see the universe, the world as it really is and not as we perhaps imagined it to be.

And that enjoyment and depth of fulfillment is far greater than would ever be possible on the broad road. And then finally, Jesus says that the destination of this road is life.

Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life. And only a few find it, stressing the fewness because of the difficulty of getting onto that road.

But that destination, the destination of that road is life. Now, the Bible makes it quite clear that the life is not something just away at the end of the tunnel, so to speak.

[27 : 37] But the life begins immediately you enter onto that road. Life begins, if you like, at the gate. We're told that whoever has the Son, in other words, whoever believes in Jesus, has eternal life.

We have life if we believe in Jesus here and now. But also the destination of this road is life. It's not a kind of road like the other one that seems very broad to begin with, but narrows down eventually to hell, to the confines of a single soul in agony.

way. But it's a road that broadens out from that narrow gate, broadens out throughout this life, the kind of fulfillment I was talking about, but broadens out beyond that, to all the woods of the new heaven and the new earth, the new universe that God is going to create, in which only righteous people, in which only saved people, will live that kind of life.

God is offering to us here. life. Now, of course, everyone, everyone wants life, however we understand that expression.

And everyone would want, in one way or another, the great things that are offered in the Bible concerning life, to live forever, to live the kind of breadth of existence that is offered to us in the gospel.

[29 : 14] But the problem is the gate and the way. That is where people feel, ah, this gospel that the Bible seems to be offering to us is a very restrictive thing.

It seems to be something that is intolerant. well, this way that is being offered in the gospel is a restricted way.

It is an exclusive way. And there is no getting around it or no denying it. And it's a fool who would try. Because Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No man comes to the Father except by me. just one way and another way. But that is the way that we have to start on.

That is the gate that we have to go through. And that is the way that we have to follow through this life. If we are to have here and now the life that God promises and to have the eternal life beyond death that he promises to all who believe in him.

[30 : 26] Now then, obviously, we come to realize that here Jesus is presenting us with those two choices. Those two ways. He describes them.

The way to get on to them. The way itself. And the destination. But notice, he urges a choice. He says right at the beginning, enter through the narrow gate.

And that is what the whole purpose of preaching the gospel is. It's not just to describe the two ways, but it's to say, to reiterate this invitation of Jesus, this command of Jesus, enter through the narrow gate.

Now we know, as we noticed at the beginning, what it's like to make choices. And we know how momentous some choices can be. There's one part of the motorway system in Glasgow that has always struck me as reminding us how important, how momentous choices can actually be.

There's a part where you're going through, you've come over the Kingston Bridge in Glasgow and you're going through a kind of sort of tunnel. And suddenly, very suddenly, the motorway diverges, one of two ways.

[31 : 53] And you see, there's no middle way. The middle way is a blank wall. And you have to decide. Sometimes people decided almost in a split second which way they were going to go and they suddenly realized they were on this point where they had to decide.

Now that's what it's like every time we hear the gospel proclaimed. There are two ways set quite clearly before us. But we must choose. We must choose.

And we are never assured that there will be another opportunity later on of a forking of the way and we can choose one way or the other. But we are assured that now there is this opportunity.

So Jesus was saying to them there and then in the present tense, enter through the narrow gate. weeks, don't leave it off till tomorrow, don't leave it off till next week or when you're older or when you think you're in a better frame of mind.

You have all the arguments that the Lord Jesus Christ brought before men here. What greater evidence can you require? And he is asking you to enter through that narrow gate and find life.

[33 : 07] Let us pray. O gracious Lord, we have to confess our own foolishness and frailty.

Lord, we have to recognize that our words or even our ideas are insufficient to really express or think about your great gospel of grace to us.

but we pray, Lord, that you would use your own words, the words that you have condescended to speak to us in our own terms and in our own language, that you would use these and take away from our service together here all that would be merely distracting and and just trash, just human, human rubbish.

but gracious Lord, may each one of us be conscious of your divine voice speaking to us, offering us yet again life and hope and liberty.

Lord, we ask that you would bless all those who are maybe very conscious that they stand at a crossroads. Grant them, Lord, to choose life.

[34 : 25] And we pray for each person here today who has already chosen life and yet knows the conflicts, the difficulties of walking that narrow way.

Lord, strengthen us and keep us walking along that way. Enable us, Lord, to help those who fall, who stumble.

We pray, Lord, that you would encourage us, that you would enable us, also, to be drawing others onto this way in which we have decided to go, from which we will not turn back.

We ask these things in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.