

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 19 November 2023. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Two Gates

Matthew 7:13-14

In his book, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*, Nabeel Qureshi tells the story of how he came to know Jesus Christ as His Saviour. He had been brought up in a devout Muslim home; and he believed the teachings of Islam with all his heart. However, during his years in medical college, he met a Christian named David Wood, who genuinely cared for his soul. David went out of his way to befriend Nabeel; and soon, they became best friends.

As the years of medical school rolled by, David and Nabeel passionately tried to convert each other. However, little by little, Nabeel found himself unable to refute the Scriptures. Finally, after about four years, Nabeel was at a breaking point. He knew, in his head, that Christianity must be true; but he feared to break his parents' hearts by becoming a Christian. Finally, in agony, he asked Allah (or the Christian God, whichever was the true one) to show him, by way of a dream, who he was. As it turned out, Nabeel had three astoundingly vivid dreams, which all pointed to Jesus as Saviour. In one of these dreams, he saw a strikingly beautiful, yet exceedingly narrow door, set in a brick wall. (When Nabeel wrote down the details of his dream the next morning, he specifically described it as a "narrow door.") In the dream, Nabeel was standing just outside the threshold of this narrow door; and as he looked into the house, he saw many people sitting at tables, with delicious, elegant food set before them. However, they were not eating yet. Instead, they were all looking to their left, as though they were waiting for a special speaker to arrive. Nabeel saw his friend David sitting at a table; and he asked David, "I thought we were going to eat together?" David's response was, "You never responded."¹

When Nabeel told this dream to David, David immediately knew what Scripture the Lord wanted Nabeel to read. He told Nabeel to turn to **Luke 13:24**, and to read it. As Nabeel looked at the heading just above this verse in David's study Bible, he saw the words, "The Narrow Door." Astonished, Nabeel began to read the passage; and the first words that he read were, "***Strive to enter in at the strait gate***"! He found this passage to be a warning to the people of Jesus' day, who had remained indifferent toward Him, and were, by their non-commitment, rejecting Him. Jesus was warning the people that one day the door to the Kingdom would be shut to them, because they would not respond to His invitation. Well, thank God, Nabeel decided, shortly after this incident, to enter through the Narrow Door of Jesus Christ, by faith!

Luke 13 is not the only place in Scripture where Jesus used the analogy of a "door" to describe salvation. As we will see in this morning's message, Jesus used the "door" analogy in His Sermon on the Mount, as well. As Jesus was wrapping up the Sermon on the Mount, He contrasted the way of salvation to the way of destruction; and He used several powerful images to make His point. He spoke of two trees; two kinds of fruit; two kinds of prophets (wolves and sheep); two different judgments; two foundations; two ways; and two gates. This morning, we will examine these two ways, and these two gates. The title of this message is *The Two Gates*.

Read Matthew 7:13-14.

¹ *Ibid*, p. 268.

I. The wide gate (v. 13)

Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has shown the contrast between fake, phony righteousness, and true righteousness. He has stated, again and again, that God demands inner purity of heart, and not merely *outward* righteousness, such as the kind that the scribes and the Pharisees put on for show. Christ has made it very clear that in order to enter the Kingdom, you must become broken and **“poor in spirit.”** You must acknowledge your spiritual bankruptcy, and your great need of God’s righteousness. In short, you must be *saved* by repenting of your sin, and trusting in *Christ alone*.

As Jesus spoke these words, He was primarily addressing His own followers—those who were already children of the Kingdom. To those who were already saved, the purpose of this sermon was to show them what their lives, as believers, should look like. However, as Jesus was preaching, He knew that there were some in His audience who were not truly His disciples (people such as Judas Iscariot, for example). To those who had made a *profession* of faith in Jesus, but who had not truly repented and committed their souls to Him, Jesus is now giving an invitation...and a warning. Christ makes it clear that there are *only two* possible gates to enter, only *two* possible paths to travel, and only *two* possible eternal destinies: and therefore, we had better be very sure of *which* path we on!

Here in **verse 13**, Jesus *commands* us to **“enter in at the strait gate.”** This is not an “option” for those who think they might want to “try out” the Jesus way. No, it is an *imperative command*. You *must* enter the **“strait** (literally, “narrow”) **gate”** if you want to enter the glorious Kingdom that Christ has prepared for those that love Him.

Now, think about that for a moment. If Jesus *command* us to **“enter”** the strait gate which opens to eternal life, what does it imply? The very fact that Jesus had to *command* us to get onto the path of eternal life implies that *none of us* is on the road to eternal life to begin with! *No one* is “born” a Christian! It matters not how religious a family you may have been born into, or how religious an upbringing you may have had: *you*, personally, must **“enter”** that strait and narrow gate of salvation! *You* must humble your soul before God, and make the conscious choice to receive Christ’s offer of forgiveness of sins, and eternal life with Him. Until you **“enter”** the gate to life, you are, by default, on the road to **“destruction.”**

My friend, if you have not entered the “strait and narrow gate,” Jesus’ warning here in **verse 13** should strike fear into your heart, and shake you to the core of your being. Think about what Jesus is saying! According to the Lord Jesus Christ, you don’t have to do something “really bad” to get onto the way that leads to eternal destruction: all you have to do is to keep going the way that you *have been going* since the day you were conceived! You see, we *all* crossed over the threshold of the gate to destruction on the day we entered this world. **Psalm 58:3** says, **“The wicked are estranged** (meaning, “estranged from God”) **from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.”** **Job 5:7** says that man is **“born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.”** By the way, scientists have discovered that there *literally* is a little “fireworks” display of zinc that happens at the moment when a mother’s egg makes contact with the sperm enzyme. There *literally* are sparks at the moment of conception! Yet, from the moment when those sparks fly upward at the moment of conception, trouble begins. That word **“trouble”** comes from the Hebrew word *amal*, which means “anguish, sorrow, or suffering.” We have all inherited anguish and sorrow on account of our sin—not only in this life, but in eternity to follow. Because we have inherited the sin nature of our father Adam, we are naturally under God’s condemnation. We *all* passed through the “door” to the pathway of

destruction when we were conceived in our mother's womb. King David wrote, "***Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.***" We were all conceived in sin in our mothers' wombs, and were set on the path that leads to eternal destruction. And what, exactly, does this destruction consist of? Is it "annihilation"? Is it simply "ceasing to exist"? I wish I could say that such is the case: but it is not! God Word makes it plain that this "destruction" is a never-ending, conscious torment in the flames of the Lake of Fire!

Read Revelation 20:11-15.

My friend, if you think that I am using "scare tactics," please realise that *I did not make the terms*: God did. I am merely coming to you as a messenger this morning, to tell you what God has clearly said: and woe is unto me if I withhold that warning, or fail to make hell as hot as God has made it! If I were to skim past **Matthew 7:13-14**, and fail to point out to you that "destruction" means "eternity in the Lake of Fire," then I would have blood on my hands! I *must* deliver God's warning to you. *God* says, in His Word, that "***the wages of sin is death***"; and, as we have just seen, God defines "death" not only as physical death, but as *eternal* death—eternal separation from the presence of the Lord, in a place of never-ending torment. Jesus said that hell is a place where the "***worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.***" This is the end of the path for every soul that enters this world. It doesn't matter how good you look outwardly to others. It doesn't matter how accomplished or successful you are in this world, or how nice a house or car you have, or how much money you have, or how attractive you are, or how much others admire you. It doesn't even matter how "good" or "religious" you are. The fact is that you are still a sinner; and the *minimum wage* for your sin is eternity in the Lake of Fire. If you have not entered the strait gate of salvation, then you are still on the path that leads to destruction.

Now, there are several things that I would point out to you about the path of destruction. We've seen that this path *begins* at conception; and we've seen that this path ends with an eternity in the Lake of Fire. But what about everything in between? What is this path of destruction like, as one travels through this world? Well, Jesus described this path as "***broad,***" and "***wide.***" Why is it "***broad***" and "***wide***"? Because it is the *natural* way of the flesh. I remember speaking once with a woman who was living with a man outside the bond of marriage (what the Bible calls "fornication"); and as I endeavoured to share the Gospel with her, the subject of adultery and fornication came up. Her response to the Bible's warnings against fornication was, "Well, it's just *natural*. It's the most natural thing in the world." My friends, she was spot-on right! Fornication and adultery *are* natural—just as *all* sins are. Lying is natural. Stealing is natural. Blasphemy is natural. Drunkenness and drug abuse are natural. Hatred and anger are natural. Rage, and even murderous thoughts, are natural. Covetousness and love of money are natural. Some sins, such as homosexuality and transsexualism, are *not* natural; yet, the desire for even these sins is developed easily enough, as one goes through a process of twisting, perversion, and hardening of the heart against God.

However, licentiousness, sexual depravity, alcoholism, drug abuse, and other such sins are only a couple lanes in the "superhighway" that leads to destruction. Yes, the path to hell is filled with countless millions of perverse, profane people, such as the members of the rock band AC/DC, who foolishly bragged that they were on "The Highway to Hell"; yet, such fools occupy only a few lanes of the highway. The fact is that there are *thousands* of lanes in the Highway to Hell. The path to destruction is also filled with *religious people* of all stripes—both non-Christian and professing "Christian." There are many people who were born and raised in Independent Baptist churches, and who were even baptised into membership, who

were never truly saved, and who are still on the Highway to Hell. That is why Jesus warned that “***Many there be which go in***” at the gate that leads to destruction.

Remember, *who* is on the path to destruction? *Everyone!* (Except, that is, for the very few who *have gotten off* the path of destruction, and *onto* the path of life.) Countless millions of sincere people of all religious persuasions are convinced that they are on their way to Heaven (or to whatever their idea of Paradise is), because they are “good” and “sincere”; but they have no idea that they will one day lift up their eyes in the torments of hell. As they pass through this life in their lane of the superhighway to hell, their way *seems* right to them. A rock singer from past decades once sang, “How can this be wrong when it feels so right?” In the context of the song, Barbara Mandrell was justifying the sin of adultery; yet, that question, “How can this be wrong when it feels so right?”, is the attitude of every sinner—including those who are on the path of false religion. Pride (including *religious* pride) blinds our hearts, and makes us *feel* that we are right, when, in reality, we are tragically wrong. Just as countless airplane pilots down through the years have died in airplane crashes because they doubted their instruments, and trusted their own senses, so countless billions of souls end up in hell, because they trusted their own senses, and refused to heed the “instrument” of God’s Word!

Read Proverbs 12:15 and 14:12.

This past week, as my wife and I were inviting a lady to our church, the lady politely said, “Well, we all need to have faith in something, don’t we?” In essence, she was saying that it doesn’t matter *what* you believe in, as long as you are sincere, because those “positive thoughts” will pull you through hard times, and make you feel better. Now, in a sense, she’s right! Placing your faith in a false hope *can* motivate your mind and body to heal to a certain extent, and *can* make you feel better! Many studies down through the years have shown that placebos (fake medicines, which people only *think* are medicines) actually result in people’s feeling better! A well-known psychologist named Dr. Irving Kirsch concluded, after years of observation, that antidepressants do *not* really help people with depression at all. (In fact, they are very harmful, and have often been shown to result in *increased* depression, and *increased* suicide.) Yet, harmless placebos usually result in people feeling much better. Why? Because people *believe* that that placebo (which, they were told, is an antidepressant) will help them; and because they *believe* that it will help them, it actually does! They are literally trusting in a *lie*—a false “saviour,” if you will; yet, the lie helped them to *feel* better! Even cancer patients who go to fake “faith healers,” and who are told that they are now “healed,” sometimes feel better, and have no pain for several days, because their *faith* in the healer causes their body to release powerful endorphins, serotonin, and dopamine, which take the pain away. However, the heart-breaking reality that they were *not* really healed hits home days later, when the awful pain comes back.

Faith in a false hope may cause physical healing to a degree—perhaps to the point of full recovery (depending on how serious the condition is). However, a false hope *cannot* remedy the condition of spiritual death and condemnation. Those who are trusting in a false way of salvation, or in a false Jesus, are still under condemnation; and though their outward morality (such as not stealing, not cheating on their spouse, working hard, being honest, or doing a good turn to others) may result in a better and happier life, it *cannot take away the condemnation of sin!* They are still lost; and the moment they die, they will be in hell!

My friends, we are *not* all the children of God; and there are *not* thousands of ways to Heaven. There is only one Way to become a child of God, and only *one* Way to Heaven; and Jesus is that Way! This brings me to our second point this morning.

II. The strait gate (v. 14)

(Read Matthew 7:14 again.) Until you enter this “strait gate” that Jesus spoke of, you will remain on the way to destruction. Should this message be making you afraid, you have need to be—because the *fear of God* drives men to repentance and salvation. When **Jonathan Edwards** preached his sermon “Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God” in Enfield, Connecticut, in 1741, the people were so afraid, that some of them grabbed onto the pillars in the sanctuary, for fear that the ground might open up beneath them, and they might fall into hell! However, the good news is that they didn’t remain in that miserable condition. Most of the people in the church that day repented of their sin, and of their dead, worthless “religiosity,” and believed on Jesus, and were saved; and their lives were filled with peace and joy from that day forward! I remember the day when *I* realised that I was on my way to hell. I literally shook with fear! However, the fear all went away when I understood the wonderful grace of Jesus, and realised that Jesus had already paid my sin debt completely, on the cross! On that day, I asked Jesus to save me; and peace and joy flooded my soul. “’Twas grace that taught my heart to *fear*; and grace my fears relieved; how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.”

Now, there is another Scripture in which Jesus urged people to enter in through “the Door.” In fact, it is the very passage that God used to speak to Nabeel Qureshi’s heart. Let’s look at it.

Read Luke 13:23-30.

In this passage, Jesus used a powerful word picture to warn people that they *must* enter the Kingdom. In this word picture, the “**strait** (or “narrow”) **gate**” represents Himself, as the Door to the Kingdom of Heaven. The “house” is Israel; and the **feast** taking place inside the house represents the joy of the 1,000-year Kingdom. In **Isaiah 25** the Bible says, “***And in this mountain (Mt. Zion) shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.***”

And so, we have a **Gate**, which represents Christ as the Door to the Kingdom. We also see a **feast** going on inside the house, which represents the joy and gladness of the future Kingdom age. However, we also see a sobering reality. Jesus said that there will be many people who will **be refused entry into the Kingdom**. Jesus was warning the Jewish people of His own day that many of them will miss out on the Kingdom of Heaven. *Why* will many of them miss out on the Kingdom, when they, as Jews, were supposed to inherit the Kingdom? It certainly isn’t because they weren’t invited to the feast, or because the Door wasn’t open to them. Jesus Christ *is* the Door; and all who believe on Him may enter that Door. Jesus said, “***I am the door: be me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.***” Jesus spent 3 ½ years inviting the people to believe on Him, and be saved! The problem isn’t that they weren’t invited: the problem is that they were indifferent, and declined to receive the invitation. Many came right up to the threshold of the Door, but never entered. A good example is the rich young ruler.

Read Mark 10:17-27.

During the 3 ½ years of Jesus' ministry, many people just like this young man came right up to the threshold of salvation. However, they were unwilling to give up the good things of this world, or their **reputation**, or their **family**, or their **sinful ways**, in order to be followers of Jesus. Many came right up to the Door, but failed to enter. Tragically, there came a day when the Door was "shut" to those who refused (or who hesitated) to enter. It mattered not that they, as Jews, were intended to inherit the Kingdom. It mattered not that they had stood in the presence of the Son of God while He taught in their streets, or that they had eaten the bread that He had miraculously provided for them by the Sea of Galilee. The invitation had been given to believe on Him; but they refused! Someday, these people will, from the torments of hell, see their godly ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, enjoying the feast in the Kingdom, while they themselves are not able to enter!

My friends, even though Jesus gave this warning to the Jews of His day, it applies to every one of us. We must take warning! It matters not whether you be Jew or Gentile: salvation is freely offered to all! Jesus came to be the Saviour of all men. The Bible says of Jesus, "***And he is the Saviour of all man, specially of them that believe.***" Salvation is freely offered to all who will receive God's gift of eternal life, by simply placing their faith in Jesus.

Read Revelation 22:11-17.

The Kingdom of Heaven is prepared for all who will receive it. However, the Door to the Kingdom will not be open forever! There will come a day when the Door will be shut; and when that day comes, those who stood idling outside the Door will no longer be able to enter. It won't matter that you sat under the preaching of the Gospel in a Bible-preaching church, week after week, and year after year. It won't matter that you had close family members or friends who were genuine, born-again Christians. It won't matter that your name was recorded on a baptismal role, or that your name is recorded in an old family Bible. It won't even matter that you knew Scripture by heart, or that you tried to do a "good turn" to others whenever you could. If you pass out of this life without personally repenting of your sin and receiving Jesus Christ, your cry of "Lord, Lord, open unto me" will never be heeded.

Jesus said, "***Strive to enter in at the strait gate.***" But what does this mean? First, I'll tell you what it does *not* mean. To "***strive***" does *not* mean to do good works in order to earn your salvation. There is no good deed that you could possibly do to merit salvation. **Ephesians 2:8-9** says, "***For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.***" **Titus 3:5** says, "***Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.***" **Galatians 2:16** says, "***Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.***" Salvation is a free gift which Christ purchased on the cross, in full, with His own blood. It cannot be earned or bought by any effort of our own. To "***strive***" to enter into the Door of the Kingdom simply means to "***make every effort to accept the invitation.***" It means that in order to receive the invitation of salvation, you must count the cost of being Jesus' follower, and decide that He is worth it. In **Luke 14**, Jesus told a parable of a man who began to build a house, but was not able to finish, because he had not counted the cost beforehand; and people began to mock him. Likewise, Jesus said, "***Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.***" To "***strive***" to enter the Door means that you must be willing to be ridiculed, or even forsaken, by friends or family, on account of your faith in Jesus. Jesus Himself said that He came not to bring peace on earth,

but a sword of division. Jesus said, ***“For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.”*** To ***“strive”*** to enter the Door means that you must be willing to let go of your pride and self-righteousness, and your insistence that you are a “good person.” To ***“strive”*** to enter the Door means that you must be willing to turn from your sinful ways, and to let Jesus Christ be the Ruler of your life. You must be willing to give up the reins of your life, and to die to self, and let Jesus be Lord. Jesus said, ***“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”*** Fear of **family**, fear of **friends**, **religiosity**, **pride**, **self-righteousness**, love of **sin**, and love of **your own life**, are like “chains,” binding you in fear or lust, and keeping you from entering the Door of salvation.

Now, in the **Luke 13** passage that we just read, the **“gate”** is a picture of *entrance into the Kingdom*. It refers to the *destiny* of those who are saved. To go through the “Door” of Jesus Christ is to enter the glorious 1,000-year Kingdom (*and into the Heavenly New Jerusalem, in the eternal ages to follow*). Inside that Door is joy, gladness, and feasting at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, with all the resurrected saints of past ages! Yet, is this **“gate”** in **Luke 13** the same as the **“gate”** that we read about in **Matthew 7:14**? It is: except that in **Matthew 7:14**, there is one additional thought. Let’s read it again, and see what that thought is. (**Read Matthew 7:14 again.**)

Do you see the difference between the **Luke** and **Matthew** passages? In **Luke 13**, the gate opens *directly to the Kingdom*. In this sermon, Jesus is emphasising the *eternal destiny* of those who are saved. However, here in **Matthew 7**, the “gate” opens to a *path*; and the path leads *through this life*, toward the ultimate destination of the Kingdom. This path is a picture of *discipleship*. It is a picture of being a “learner” of Jesus Christ. It is a picture of *the Christian life*; and the Christian life is characterised by *obedience* to the Lord. That’s why this gate is described as “strait,” and the path as “narrow.” The way of Christ truly *is narrow*. Christ does not save a man so that he may continue to live a sinful life, and do whatever he wants to do. Christ saves us so that we might now live a *holy* life of service to *Him*.

You see, keeping Christ’s commands is *not* what saves you: it is simply the way that you are expected to live after you *are* saved. Living a holy life is the *evidence* that Christ has entered a person’s life, and saved his soul. The “strait and narrow way” is not a way of religion, self-improvement, or self-reform: the Way is *Christ Himself*. The moment you believe on Jesus, you enter into “eternal life.” Jesus said, ***“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”*** You’ll notice that “eternal life” begins at the moment you *believe*, and not at the moment you enter the pearly gates. Having “eternal life” does not mean “going to Heaven”: it simply means *having a relationship with God*. The moment you believe on Jesus, you receive the gift of eternal life (a relationship with God the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ); and this relationship continues on forever, past the veil of death, to the Resurrection Day, and on through the countless ages of eternity.

Read John 10:9, 14:1-6, and 17:1-3.

Conclusion: My friend, have *you* entered the strait gate of Jesus Christ? Are you saved? Perhaps you are struggling in fear and confusion right now, and are feeling very uncomfortable. If so, don’t shrug it off, and dart out of here as soon as the service is over, so that you can fill your mind with distractions of this world, and forget your discomfort. What you are feeling is the conviction of the Holy Spirit. He is

wooing you and drawing you to Christ. If you will take Jesus at His Word, and ask Him to save you of your sin, and to be your Lord and Saviour, He will heed your plea. Don't wait for a more convenient time, because you don't know when the Master of the house will shut the door. ***“Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”*** To those who are saved already I would ask, “Are you living a pure and consecrated life for the Lord Jesus?” Are you keeping your lamp trimmed and burning brightly? Let Him have full control of your heart, Christian! When you stumble, confess your sin, and stay in close fellowship with Him. Stay close by His side as you walk in the narrow way!