

Finding the Narrow Gate

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Preacher: Lisa Pike

[0 : 00] Awesome. Thanks, Daryl. Well, let's pray as we hear God's word spoken tonight. Lord, we thank you so much that you are a father who desires to speak to us.

And Jesus, we just thank you for the Sermon on the Mount and the words that you spoke to the disciples many years ago that we can read today and apply to our lives.

And I just pray that right now, as we look at this passage in more depth, that your spirit would be here and that your spirit would transform us according to God's will and make us more and more like Jesus each day. In his name we pray. Amen.

Well, please keep those passages open because we will be referring to them as we look tonight at this Sermon on the Mount. First of all, I just want to fill you in a bit on what's been happening in Matthew because we've come in at a little bit of an obscure place.

Jesus has been teaching on a mountain for what appears to be quite some time. And what I want you to do now is actually a little bit of an exercise. I want you to take the Bibles out if you haven't got one.

[1 : 04] And you think that means you too. So if you can find one, that would be awesome. And I want you to open it up to page 788. And we're just going to flick back.

Now, when you're at Bible college, they teach you many things. But one of the things that they teach you, I suppose, in preaching class is that you really, your sermons can't have too much stuff in it.

You shouldn't have more than maybe three or four points because people generally, it's just too much information. You know, for those of you who are teachers, you don't understand the same. You can't just download all this information to the classroom or whoever you're teaching because it's just too hard to follow.

So the Apostle Paul learned this lesson when he was preaching in Acts and a guy fell asleep and fell out the window because he preached after midnight. And he died. The guy died.

He came back to life. So that's lucky, but it's not lucky. It's God's will. But maybe Paul was doing a similar thing to what Jesus has done here in the Sermon of the Mount in that he's just said a lot of things.

[2 : 10] I just want you to turn actually to page 785 to chapter 5. And we're going to flick through this Sermon of the Mount quickly and just have a look at some of the key points he's making, just the heading.

So in chapter 5, he starts, section on the Beatitudes. Next page. Sold and light of the world. The law and the prophets. Things concerning anger. Things concerning adultery. Divorce.

Oaths. Retaliation. Loving your enemies. Versus concerning almsgiving. Prayer. Fasting. Treasures. The sound eye. Serving two masters. Not to worry.

Next page. Judging others. Profaning the holy. And now we get up to this passage here. Ask, search and knock. So Jesus has said quite a few things already in the Sermon of the Mount.

He's coming to a close. And that's important because he's going to summarize the Sermon on the Mount within this passage. And then he's going to move on and talk a bit about discipleship. But that's what's been happening.

[3 : 06] Now we're going to, as any good sermon has, look at three different points from this passage. You'll see them there in the Bible. It's verses 7 to 11. Verse 12.

The golden rule. And also verse 13 and 14. The narrow gate. I'm just going to read verse 7 and 8 for you again. Ask and it will be given to you. Search and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened for you.

For everyone who asks receives. And everyone who searches finds. And for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Well, this passage is really focusing on prayer in the disciples' lives.

He uses three metaphors for prayer. The asking one, the seeking and the knocking. It's not like Jesus is introducing three different actions that you have to learn how to do.

Or that, you know, for the knocking you have to work out which door you're supposed to knock on. It's actually all metaphors for prayer. And that's explained a little bit later in the passage. But it's worth pointing out that this ask and search and knock is something that you don't just do once.

[4 : 08] It's something that you're supposed to do and keep on doing. So really what you could say is, ask and keep on asking and it will be given to you. Search and keep on searching and you'll find.

Knock and keep on knocking and the door will be open. Now I want you to think quickly. What the last thing was that you prayed for persistently until it was actually answered.

I was thinking about this today and I could think of a couple of things, but I struggled to think of examples. Because when it comes to persistent persevering in, you know, persevering prayer, that's not something I'm very good at.

And I've been looking at prayer a little bit in the last month and I've come to realise that I'm not alone in this. I've been reading some books and other people find this hard too. And maybe you are someone who finds persistent prayer very difficult.

I think it's because we really are people who live in a microwave world. We want to zap things and we want them to be hot. Pretty instantaneous, you know. You might put your cup of milk in the microwave, hot chocolate, and in a minute it's warm and you can drink it.

[5 : 15] And we actually think the same way about prayer. We want to ask for it and we want it to happen. Whatever it is, we don't want to have to persist in it and be patient in prayer. That's just way too tedious.

And also I know for myself that it's hard to be persistent in prayer. Because if I pray for something and it doesn't get answered straight away, I might pray again. If it doesn't get answered then, I just get really disheartened.

I get really down. I'm like, I start thinking stupid things like, well maybe God doesn't, he can't hear me at the moment. Maybe I have to, you know, pray louder or maybe I should just not pray at all because maybe he doesn't want to listen to me.

Or maybe God's angry with me at the moment and he's sort of, you know, shut me out from the whole prayer world and I can't pray. Or maybe God's too busy, you know, for me to pray to him.

He's got other things on his mind. Well, those thoughts are really very ridiculous. They're rubbish actually. And I don't know if you've ever fallen into that trap of thinking those things when prayers aren't answered instantaneously.

[6 : 19] But I'm going to show you, or we're going to have a look at the rest of these verses and see why those thoughts are just so crazy. And we shouldn't think like that. In verses 9, we'll read verses 9 to 11 with me quickly.

Finally, is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if a child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him?

Parents, you'll be able to understand this a little bit better than myself or perhaps probably the youth who are here. But we can all understand it on some level. Parents, if your children ask you for something that may, you know, that is good, you're not going to potentially give them something that may hurt them or something that is bad as a substitute for it.

You're actually going to give them that good thing. If they desire a good thing, you want to give it to them. I can understand it in the capacity that I have very cute puppy dog at home. And when he wakes up in the morning and he's crying for his veterinary approved science diet breakfast, he's crying for that.

I'm going to give it to him because it's good for my dog to eat breakfast. And it's good for him to eat that breakfast as opposed to, I don't know, a chocolate bar or something. So I want to give him that. That's what he's asking for. I'm going to give it to him.

[7 : 42] I'm not going to give him a piece of plastic or rat sack. Sorry, Paul. I'm not going to do that. Because he wants a good thing and he can't get it himself.

So I'm going to give it to him. Well, the logic follows then from that passage. If humans, even us, if we can give good things to our children, how much more will our Father in Heaven give good things to those who ask?

Well, the word evil is quite strong here to use. You think, that's a bit harsh, God, Jesus saying that, you know, if you who are evil know. But if you think about it, it's comparing Jesus or comparing God, our Heavenly Father, to us.

And so that's strong language, but it's true. Comparing us and our motivations and our actions compared to God's, they are evil compared to, you know, God's holy, righteous motivations and desires.

And so if we can give good things to our children, how much more can God? Well, there are some disclaimers for this passage.

[8 : 42] And I just, I want to make this very clear. This is not a formula for you to get whatever you want in life. Okay? Just ask and keep on asking and you'll have whatever you want or searching or knocking.

It's not going to work. Look, I've tried it before and I have used it in illustrations before, but I thought of another illustration of it today. When I was in high school, my dad drove a bomb of a car.

It was very embarrassing. I went to a private school in Hamilton and most people had at least cars that worked properly, if not something a little bit, you know, above average. And my dad was a school teacher.

So not only would he drop us off at school, he'd actually park at the school where I had to go and hang out with my friends all day. And after school, usually what would happen is my dad would get in the car to take us home.

And he'd have to turn the car over several times to make it work. It just wouldn't start. And every day I just, you know, under my breath would just pray, please God, make it start straight away.

[9 : 43] Because as soon as it doesn't turn over straight away, it's a choking sound, and there's this terrible screeching sound that it makes. I don't know if you have cars that's like, whee! And everyone just turns around, can see that it's your car, and you're in the car, and it's just so embarrassing.

Because I didn't want to draw any attention to the car that was a bomb. And so I used to pray that it would just happen, you know, it would turn on straight away. Or if I was really lucky, one day when I came out of class, there'd be a brand new car there that would work.

A beautiful car that I wouldn't be embarrassed about. But it didn't happen. And I was persistent every day, I think, probably. I prayed that. So the question is, why didn't God answer that prayer for me?

It's because this is not a wish list. And I think what we need to do with this passage is we need to define what good means. Because we see that word good, Father in Heaven give good things, and we think, yeah, I know what's good.

I know lots of good things for me. Yummy, yummy chocolate, and I don't know, all sorts of things that are excellent. But they may not be the things that God thinks are good. And Paul actually spoke about this a couple of weeks ago from Romans 8, if you remember.

[10 : 57] And if we think about this word good, we're really thinking about things that God has in mind for us in our life, living for him, becoming like Jesus, and things for our salvation.

So that's what good means. It's not just something that, you know, might be an instantaneous buzz for you or things that might please you in a second. It's things that are actually really good for you. Do you know what I mean?

Like really good, long-term good, not just right now, but also in the future, for eternity, actually. And that's really great. It's really great that we have a God who would want to give us good, good, healthy things, healthy things for our spiritual life and for our walk with him.

And you see, the emphasis in this passage is not obtaining a recipe for prayer that'll work every time. But the emphasis is on the fact that we can be confident that when we ask God for things, for good things, he will give them to us because he loves us and he wants us to have those good things.

So when you're thinking about prayer and what you want to ask for, and maybe, you know, you might get distracted or you may not persist in prayer, I want to encourage you to let this be your motivation.

[12 : 11] You have a heavenly father who wants to give you good things. He wants to give you good things for your walk with him each day. So let that be a motivation as you, you know, continue to ask and seek and knock.

And let it be a motivation to be persistent in prayer. Well, we're going to move on to verse 12 now. And this will actually tie in very well with prayer as you read this verse because it seems impossible to do.

Verse 12 says, In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you. For this is the law and the prophets. Well, it's such an easy verse to read, isn't it?

So quick, so nice, but so very, very difficult to live out in actual life. Just have a quick look at it again. In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you.

Now, Jesus has been quite clever here in this sort of summary verse, which is really summing up what he said so far on the Sermon on the Mount, but also the law and the prophets.

[13 : 14] So, you know, everything that has been God's sort of revealed will so far. And he's clever because what he does is he knows that deep down, every single person wants to be treated like royalty, don't we?

That's why when I go on a honeymoon in a couple of weeks' time, Phil and I are going to pay quite a bit of money so that we can be treated like king and queens, people serving us, treating us specially like royalty, because we just want to be treated nice.

You know, we want people to love us. We want people to serve us. We want people to treat us with compassion and mercy. And we want all these things from people. But the catch is, from this verse, that if you want to be treated like that, you've got to treat other people like that.

And that's very, very difficult to do. That means if you don't want people to gossip about you at school, then you shouldn't gossip about other people.

And it means that if you want people to forgive you when you stuff up, that you have to forgive others as well. And it means that if you want people to be generous towards you, you know, you might forget your lunch or something at school, and you know, you want your friend to help you out, so you've got some money to go to the canteen, then you also have to be generous to other people.

[14 : 30] If you don't want to be cheated on, don't cheat on others. I could go on and on and on. Oh, this verse is very confronting, and it doesn't really leave much room to move, because at the start of the verse, it says, in everything.

It means in every single part of your life, every single moment, every single context. You know, when you're at home with your family, and your sisters, or parents, or children, or whoever else is at your dog at home, are annoying you, and you don't want to treat them well, you have to think about this verse.

When you're at school, and your friends, you know, it's really tempting to sit with your friends and talk about people behind their back, or whatever it is. You have to think about this verse. On the sporting field, when the umpires just aren't calling it how they should.

You know what I'm talking about. It happens all the time. Think about this verse, the way you treat other players, the way you treat the umpires. At work, when people, when your boss isn't being fair, or when the employers aren't just working hard enough, think about this verse.

Well, the thing is here that Jesus has to remind us of this, because it really doesn't come very naturally to us to think about putting other people first, and think about what other people would like.

[15 : 52] The WWJD bands, which I know have come up in numerous sermon illustrations, whilst I've been here, I still think need to be revised according to this passage. It's not quite as catchy, but I'm thinking the HWILTB bands might work.

It says, how would I like to be treated? Yeah? Just wear them around each day. Can you remember this verse? And it's not quite as catchy, but this might help us to think daily, how do other people want to, how do I want to be treated, and that's how I should be treating others.

I want to give you a moment, just to think about that in your life. Think about which context you find this hardest to live out. You see, this verse catches it out each time, because we actually find ourselves to be quite hypocritical.

We expect one thing from other people to be treated one way, but then we don't give it back. So I want you just to think for a moment, just in silence, about the context where you find this most hard to do.

Well, I hope something has come to mind.

[17 : 06] The good news is that verses 7 to 11 come in handy here. The one about prayer? Because God actually desires us to love others, and he desires us to do to others as we would have them, as we would have them do to the verse.

God desires that. And so when we pray that God will help us to do that, he's going to answer your prayer. So when you pray, God, I'm really struggling to forgive my friend for doing this thing.

Help me to forgive them. He's actually going to, he's going to answer your prayer. You can be confident of that because that's a good thing. Or when you're finding it hard to be generous with your money or your time, you can pray.

Ask God to make you generous because he wants you to be. You know, all of these, whatever context you just thought of then, you can actually pray to God and ask him to empower you in that situation because it's a good thing.

Wanting to live out verse 12 is an excellent thing, and he's going to help you do that. So please pray in those situations where you find it difficult. We're going to move on to the last little section, verse 13 and 14.

[18 : 20] I'll read it out for you again. Enter through the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the road that is, the road is easy that leads to destruction. And there are many who take it, for the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life.

And there are few who find it. Before I get into explaining this passage, I need to clarify a couple of words. Now, this may be boring, but please stay tuned in.

In verse 13, where it says the word hard, and verse 14, where it says the word easy, no, sorry, 13 says easy and 14 says hard, it doesn't really correctly capture what, what the passage is about or what this verse is about.

But, you see, the word easy in verse 13 is actually another word for wide. Okay, so you could read like in the NIV, you could read something like, for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction.

Okay, so it's not easy, doesn't really capture it. Broad is sort of a better thing. Or the same in verse 14, the word for hard, it's supposed to be another word for narrow. So you could say something like, the narrow is the gate and constricted is the path or the road.

[19 : 37] It's a little bit more accurate. Now, why is this important? Well, the idea of this passage is not that following Jesus each day is going to be extremely hard or extremely difficult or extremely easy for those who choose not to follow Jesus.

Although, sometimes we would find it hard in our daily life to live for Jesus, absolutely. But this passage isn't really talking about the ease or the, you know, how difficult it is if we choose to follow Jesus.

It's actually sort of, I suppose, looking at the width or the, how many people can fit on this road or walking along this road or entering this path. So the road that leads to life is not the way where most people are going.

It's not the common road. It's not the way of the crowd. It's not the popular way. And in Jesus' day, it wasn't the way that the Jewish leaders and the teachers were encouraging people to go.

Jesus commands us here to enter through the gate, which seems quite simple. But he needs to draw our attention to it. Because at the end of it, at that verse, you can see there are few who find it.

[20 : 44] There's actually an element of searching or finding this gate. So this narrow gate is not something that is just sitting before you, glaringly obvious, that everyone's like, oh, narrow gate.

Actually, I don't want to go through the narrow gate. I might choose, you know, this big, broad one. It's actually hard to find. It's, you know, it's narrow compared to the broad gate. That's, you know, glaringly obvious where most people are going.

The narrow gate is small. It's, it's something you have to search for something that is, it's difficult to find. And that's why Jesus has to sort of encourage us or give us a command to enter.

It's not obvious. That's why. In fact, if you go along in life and make no decisions, you're not going to go through the narrow gate. You're going to go with everybody else because everyone else, it's just going along the flow.

So if you decide to never make any decisions about, you know, following God or not or other things, by default, you're going to end up going through the broad gate. That's just the way it is.

[21 : 41] Now, this is really important in our day and age, particularly for people, I would say in high school, but for each person, there are so many different religions and there are so many different options to choose.

And I know that, you know, I've had conversations with some of the youth throughout my time here going, how come Jesus is the only way? You know, my friends are Muslim or my friend believes this, you know, how come, you know, those ways aren't right?

Or, you know, there's this way to follow or there's this way. And it's true. There are so many options. There are so many different ways. And that's why this passage is very important to read and understand at the moment.

Because if you don't choose to find the narrow gate and enter it, you're heading for destruction. Okay, the consequences of this passage are huge.

If you go down the broad path and you go through the broad gate, you're heading for destruction. But if you enter the narrow gate and walk along this constricted path, then you will find life.

[22 : 48] Life is at the end. Well, the consequences really should challenge us to think about how we live our life. Because the passage here talks about a gate, but there's also this concept of a path.

It's also a concept of daily living or walking along something. So it's not just a one soft decision. Yeah, okay, I'll decide by the narrow gate. It's actually an ongoing thing as well.

A choosing to live, you know, along the right path. And I'm going to spell it out pretty obviously to you, if you haven't worked it out already. Jesus is the narrow gate or the way that we attain life.

Okay, we know in John 14 that he says, I'm the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me. Jesus is the only way that you can get to the father, that you can receive eternal life.

He's the only option. There's no other way that you can end up in that eternal salvation. And same with our life each day. Not only do we have to choose Jesus to believe in him at the start, but every day we have to choose to believe in Jesus and follow him and live his ways.

[23 : 55] Because at the end of that, guys, is life. It's so awesome. It's life. But if you don't choose, you take a back seat, just going along for the ride, you're going to end up where most people are going.

Now, what that should do for you, if you're a Christian, is give your heads up and go, right, narrow gate.

Need to, need to keep choosing that, need to be there. But also to go, man, most of the people around me, work, school, friends, are going in the wrong direction. They're going in the path that leads to destruction.

And that should cause us angst and grief. Because we don't want to see people who we love end up in that direction, going towards destruction.

So this passage should encourage us to take stock for ourselves and say, which way are we going? Which gate are we entering? But it should also give us a heads up and go, whoa, we need to point this gate out to our friends.

[24 : 55] We need to pull up and say, hey, get off the wide road. Do you know where that's going? Because most people don't think about it. Most people don't know where that's going.

You've got to give them a heads up and say, guys, there's only one way to life. And you've got to choose it. You've got to step off that wide path and believe in Jesus. So this should urge us to talk to our friends.

It should urge us to pray. You know, it should give us a real desire to be witnesses for Jesus each day. What I'm going to do now is I'm going to reread verses 7 to 14.

And because there's, you know, quite a few different points in this sermon, because it's the Sermon on the Mount. I just want you to think, you know, what are the things maybe that God has said to me in this, through these verses, or what are the things that I need to take home from tonight or think about during the week?

What is the maybe one thing that sort of stood out? I'm going to read through. And as we do that, I just want you to think about that. I'm going to pray. And then there's going to be a time for you to have a bit of reflection, to have a think about this.

[26 : 02] We'll have a short DVD that talks about that choice. So you're going to follow the crowd, where everyone else is going, or you're going to follow the way of the cross, the narrow gate.

And then the band's going to sing a musical item for us. So this is a chance for you to spend some time with God. Please use it in prayer and just thinking about the things that are said in Matthew.

And then we'll stand together and sing some more songs. So I'm going to read through this passage again. Ask and it will be given you. Search and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened for you.

For everyone who asks, receives. And everyone who searches, finds. And for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone?

Or if a child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him?

[27 : 02] In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you. For this is the law and the prophets. Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction.

And there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life. And there are few who find it. Let's pray. Lord, we do thank you for these words.

And we just ask, even now in this time, as we spend reflecting on what's been said, I just pray, Lord, that you, by your spirit, would really challenge us and encourage us and convict us in areas that we do need to be changed in.

Lord, may your spirit be here moving powerfully, that we might be people who not only hear your words, but actually obey them. People who put them into action in our daily lives. People who love following you, Jesus.

And people who want to be more and more like you each day. Amen.