

**Matthew in Biblical Perspective:
A Royal Manifesto of the Kingdom from the King –
Life Choice #1: Death or Life?**

Matthew 7:13-14

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October 10, 2010 – Morning Sermon

In this study we enter this last section on the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7 where our Savior is bringing us to decisions, decisions, decisions. The first one is life choice #1; death or life? Matthew 7:13-14 says 13 *“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. 14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.* The grass withers, the flower fades. This is God’s Word and it abides forever, by His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

As we come to this last section of the Sermon on the Mount, there are four sermons to take us through this last section and we’re kind of swimming up stream here. We are swimming upstream culturally because this is going to be a very simple yet Lord willing, profound four sermons. We are in this series of twos. There are two gates, two ways, two destinations, two trees, two fruits, two lives, two houses and two foundations. That’s what we’re going through. This study is life choice number one, death or life? In the next several studies there will be another two choices. This study will look at two dates, two ways and two destinations.

So what do I mean by upstream? Am I saying there are only two choices? We live in a culture of choices. Yesterday when I walked by the TV I heard an ad saying for \$17.95 you could get 24 sports channels. How are you going to watch 24 sports channels? If you have DirecTV you can get over 800 channels. I went to this restaurant the other day to eat and after a while I said to the waitress, “I’m not making any more decisions.” I was asked how I wanted my food cooked, I had to choose between 15 vegetables and 13 dressings for my salad. I just said, “Bring me something, I’ll eat it.” We have choices all over the place. I know I’m probably harkening back to the simplicity of my childhood. When I was growing up and you wanted to buy a car there was a Ford, a Chevy or a General Motors. Then of course they started complicating things because they decided to make a Buick, Oldsmobile and a Pontiac. So now we started getting complicated all of a sudden. By the way, the Buick, Oldsmobile and the Pontiac we’re really all the

same cars. The only difference was one had two holes, one three holes and the other four holes and we thought we had a choice.

Jesus is getting this very simple for us. This one is really heavy upon my heart. I want you to understand that there really are only two choices. It is either Christ and life or not Christ and death. That's it. You might say, "Harry I'm not ready to make the choice." By saying that, you have just made a choice. I want us to understand what Jesus is saying here so I want to be very clear. The great news here is that there is life and we who are in the bondage of sin and death, when there was no way for us to escape, God loves you and made a way. That way is His Son Jesus who is The Way, the Truth and the Life. No man can come to the Father but through Him so eternity is not a multiple choice test. It's really a true or false test. Jesus has declared the truth and

you're going to decide whether you believe Him or not. That will be your decision and all of time and eternity is in the balance. There will be many decisions you make in life that you'll make wrong and you'll survive. In fact, in some of them you'll still thrive but this is one decision that if you make it wrong you won't survive.

So what is Jesus telling us here? I'd like to sum up our myriads of studies up to this point in this last section of the Sermon on the Mount. He has told us how we're blessed with the Gospel, how we're saved and changed with the beatitudes. Then there was the Gospel ministry of salt and light, the changed life of exceeding righteousness and practicing righteousness. What He has given to us is that in the Kingdom of God there is a Christ centered, Gospel empowered, Gospel driven, Spirit filled life and in that life, the Lord works within you to cause a revulsion and hatred of sin and a love of godliness. God works inside of you not only to make you right through the shed blood of Jesus who pays for our sins and the righteousness of Christ that brings us to heaven, but He also works inside of us where He gives us a hatred of sin and a love of godliness. He starts to grow us in His grace and knowledge and there are two things that are drawn out of this. It's amazing. One is we hate sin, we love godliness, and God does this in such a way that even though we hate sin we're attracted to sinners because we want to win them and we begin to attract sinners by the way that we're living as God is putting this grace and truth in our life with boldness and humility.

That is only possible by first of all having a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ and then you have to have a right view of God in that relationship because now that you are in Christ and Christ is in you this thrice Holy God is your Father. Have you noticed that when Jesus is correcting our prayer life, our life, the way we practice our life, the purpose of our life, the meaning of our life how many times He brings us back to God who is now our Father? So He invites us to pray to God has our Father and to know that your Father loves you. When you are asking for gifts He'll give you good gifts, even when you think you're asking for good gifts and you're not He'll give you the right gifts in your life. He'll

do it at the right time in your life. He will be at work in your life for His glory and your good. Not that all things are good but all things work together for good because your Father is at work in your life. You have to have a right relationship with Him so that this God is not your Judge now but your Father because His judgments fell upon His Son to save you from your sins.

Now that this God is your Father you have to have a right view of Him that His omnipotence, omniscient, His love, His benevolence and all that He is and does is now oriented because of the gift of His Son on your behalf to be at work in your life and that affects the way you live, pray, read the Word and deal with the people that don't know Him, the way you deal with sin in your life, the way you confess sin in your life. Everything in your life is affected by this relationship and your view of God as your Father through Jesus Christ, His Son, your Savior. So this life has been brought before us by Jesus and now Jesus comes to the conclusion of this sermon.

He is calling us to decisions. This first one is life and death. It begins with a command. Matthew 7:13 starts off with a command that says "Enter by the narrow gate..." In the Greek language, the original language, that is an imperative. I want to draw something out here. In the last study Jesus said, "Ask, seek and knock" which is how He is teaching us how to pray to our Father. A side note here is the way 'ask' is spelled – A S K – Ask, Seek, Knock. It's an easy way to remember that, now if we could just only do that. Ask, then seek, then knock is a command but it's also given as a command in a tense that it's not something you do once but it's something that you keep doing. Ask, keep asking, seek, keep seeking, knock, keep knocking. Draw into that vibrant relationship. God speaks to you now in His Word so you come to Him asking, seeking, knocking and you keep at it persistently, intentionally and you even raise the level of intensity from ask to seek to knock. Having said that, this command isn't like the ask, seek, knock command because this command is in a different tense. This one is "Enter..." and it's a command that is for a once in a moment decision. It doesn't say "Enter and keeping entering..." If you don't enter then that's a decision to go through another gate. "Enter the narrow gate..." that's the command.

Then He draws this out so what I'd like to do is look at the choice, either life or destruction and He lays it out for us with these series of twos. First, He says there's a narrow gate to a hard way with few travelers. The end of that choice is life. Over here is a wide gate with an easy road and lots of travelers are on this road. Its end, destination, is destruction and death.

Let's look closer at the narrow gate. What do we know about the narrow gate just in these two verses? First of all, it's narrow. Some might have a King James Version of the Bible that says "straight" in place of narrow. So it's a straight gate. There is another couple of words we get from this called a 'straight jacket.' The point I'm trying to make is that it's narrow. How narrow? It's really, really narrow

where only one fits through at a time. That's it. It's narrow. When you come through that gate there is room for you but only you and no baggage. Another thing about the narrow gate is that when you go through it you end up on a hard road. It's not an easy road. The third thing is when you get through the narrow gate you end up on a hard road but it ends up at life. One other point is the narrow gate that leads to the hard road that leads to life, very few find it. Therefore the travelers on it are fewer in comparison to those who make the other choice. You do have companions though and you only go through one at a time but there are companions so you are not by yourself but there are not as many as on the other road.

Over here is a wide gate. The first thing you see about the wide gate is that it's wide. It's wide open with people crowding through it, whole groups go through it, individuals go through it and it has all kinds of beckoning signs. When you get in it you think, "Look at this easy, wide way." There are no cares, no concerns and you can do what you want to on that road. It has no confinements to it. That gate has no confinements to it, the road has no direction to it and look at the teeming population that's on it. This thing isn't new. If you go back to the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 30 it says "I have set before you life and over here is death, choose life." In Joshua 24 it says "This day I have given you life and I have shown you the way of death, come and live and choose this day life." Psalm 1:1-6 says

1 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; 2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. 4 The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; 6 for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

It is either the way of disobedience and death or the way of trust and follow life. It's all through the Scriptures and now Jesus is bringing us to this point where He is telling us what the Old Testament is telling us where He is the Way of Life. I'm the Path. I'm the Gate. I'm the Life. All other choices and there is a wide variety which offer you an easy road of self absorption, self gratification and thoughtless living, which is an easy way but its end is death. There are many companions. That's why Robert Frost wrote his famous poem "The Road Less Traveled" after reading this passage. The wide way is well traveled. The other road is not well traveled. That easy way which is highly populated ends up in death.

I want to give you five takeaways on what Jesus has said to us here. I don't think there has been any time in my life where my basic sermon outline of life takeaways that are takeaways for life have been more apply named that these

because this is life or death. This is time and eternity. Your life, your immortality and where you spend eternity is at stake on this decision. What you have to determine today is whether Jesus is telling the truth or is He a liar? He said, "Enter by the narrow gate" so I'm going to give you five takeaways from this study.

The first one is an inescapable fact. What Empire was in place when this was written? It was the Roman Empire. One of the great blessings in God's providence is when the Gospel goes out there's this thing called Pax Romana known as the Peace of Rome. Paul can travel almost anywhere because Rome has got the world by the throat. You could go anywhere you wanted to because Rome was well known for building roads so you could get around anywhere and everywhere. There was a very famous statement that came out of this era known as "All roads lead to Rome." Now this is what Jesus is saying in this same period. "All these roads may lead to Rome but not all roads lead to heaven, only one. The only way you get on that road is to go through this Gate." It has one entry point and that's it. That one entry point is a narrow gate and few find it. Those that walk into it find out that this is The Gate.

Jesus had obviously struck a nerve with this because sometime after He preached this sermon they came back to ask Him a question about this. He answered their question on this point of His sermon with a parable. I want to show you where that happened. It's in Luke 13. They come back and ask Him a question about this gate that is so narrow and they said "You said only a few are going to be on it?" Jesus has preached the sermon and He is going around in His three year ministry and this is what happens. Luke 13:22-30 says

22 He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. 23 And someone said to him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" And he said to them, 24 "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25 When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' then he will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' 26 Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' 27 But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!' 28 In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. 29 And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. 30 And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

What is He saying here? By the way, you are in that parable. You are those who came from the north, east and west that He has invited to the table through the narrow door. He said there are going to be some who will get up and rise and

come again and then they will want to enter. He will say then that it will be too late. They are asking Him how many people, "Are there few?" He is saying, "Your concern with how many and what you need to be concerned about is, have you gone through the door and the gate, that's what your concern should be. It shouldn't be of how many." There will be many, but in comparison to those who reject it will be fewer. However the real question is, have you gone through The Gate or The Door? Are you there? In other words, you can't have the Christian life and Christian blessings of eternal life without coming to the Gate and Jesus is telling you "I am the Door. I am the Gate. I am the One that you are to come into." Notice how He doesn't say "Admire the Gate" or "Ponder the Gate" or "Contemplate the Gate" or "Consider the Gate" but He says, "Enter the gate and only one can come through at a time." When you come through you can't take any baggage with you. It's not you and your religion or you and holding onto sins or you and holding onto power or money.

One guy said to me after the first service, "Harry, it's kind of like going to the airport and you see that pile of stuff there that they have to leave behind before they go through the security gate." When you come to Jesus there is a pile of stuff. You let go of your sins, your religion if you think that's getting you to heaven, you let go of your baptism, you let go of your good intentions, you let go of your righteousness which is like filthy rags, you let all that stuff go. As the hymn says, "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling." I'll quickly go through the last four takeaways but this is the crucial one because there is no way without going through the Gate and there is no destination of life without entering the gate.

One might say "Harry I haven't gone through the gate yet but I haven't said 'no.'" Yes you have, because Jesus says "if you're not for Me then you're against Me." No decision is a decision. So where are you right now? My heart longs for you to know the Savior who has come into this world that you might have life evermore and I don't want you to fall prey to Satan's subtle false advertisement. The wide gate over here is very wide. It has an entrance point where sex is life or life is sitting in a dark room with a computer screen and viewing those things that are actually destroying me. I understand how easily it is to fall into that trap but it's a lie from Satan. Here's a wide gate. I'll just let men use my body like a play ground. Maybe that's life. Or my marriage is expendable. My vows before God don't mean anything. Real life is in my next marriage partner or my next marriage. There's a gate I can go through. Or if I just had more money, that's a gate I can enter. Satan does not put over the gate "Here is the wide gate. Take it and you end up in Hell." No, he has false advertising all over the place.

Jesus is the only One who tells you the truth. It's the narrow gate, hard way that leads to everlasting life. Satan will lie to you because he's the father of lies but don't buy it. The emptiness of using a marriage partner, or of abusing someone else's body or of money or of power is piled up outside the narrow gate, repent and leave it to follow Jesus. One might say "I'm not going to let it go." Yes you

will. As you step into eternal condemnation you leave behind the gilded toys of dust, like the empty certificates we hung on our wall thinking that made us somebody or our newspaper clippings or our trophies. Those things are gone and they are empty but here is life before you today. It's Jesus Christ who loves you, frees you from your sins and who will be with you all the way to eternity.

Here are the last four takeaways. The second takeaway is there is not only an inescapable fact but it's also accompanied by an inescapable conclusion. The inescapable conclusion is how do you know who has gone through the gate? They are on the hard way. When Jesus talks about the judgment He always brings out the lifestyle of His people. He says, "Here's the way you live, here's what you did." He is not doing that because the way we live gets us to heaven, He does that because those who have come to Him have a changed life. When you go through the gate you go to the hard road. One might say "I don't know if I want to get on the hard road or not." Well, here's an easy road, it's empty, it's vanity, it's nothing but here's the hard road.

In a sense other than the matter of eternity I didn't have any problems. When I became a Christian I had all kinds of problems. How can I hold to the Christian truth with conviction and courage and be humble and compassionate? How can I be humble and compassionate yet be bold for Christ. I need the Holy Spirit to pull that one off because that one is really tough. How can I walk believing God that when I give Him the tithe in worship the 90 percent is more? That's a hard lesson for me to learn. How about the challenge of the Christian life? The challenge of the Christian life is grace and truth, love and truth, humility and boldness. It's very easy for me to be bold and be an arrogant religionist or I'll be humble and be a coward and never speak up but hey I'm humble, see how humble I am. I never say anything for Jesus. The Christian life is a challenge.

The cost of the Christian life is great. It cost me my sin. It cost me all kinds of things. God says, "Salvation is free, discipleship costs." It will cost you your life. In fact, people say to me all the time, "Harry, if I come to Jesus am I going to be sent as a missionary somewhere in Africa or South America?" Well, praise the Lord that you'll probably find more Christians in those two places than you do here now, but I don't know where you'll be a missionary but let me tell you if you come to Jesus you will be a missionary. You will be either a missionary or a mission field. It's one of the two and that's going to cost us. Jesus says, "If you'll follow me the world is going to hate you, persecute you, deliver you up. Now, I'll be with you, I'll protect you and I'll take you through it and by the way, a lot of My people have been killed for Me but they were able to handle it because when they went through the gate they had already died." They died unto themselves to live unto Christ so they were ready at that moment on that hard way.

When you go through the gate there's a hard way and the inescapable conclusion is that it's a challenge to live the Christian life. It's a challenge to follow the call of Christ and to follow Him in the Christian life and it costs to live

the Christian life. It costs me my sin, my religiosity, my hypocrisy, my arrogance and it will cost me all of those things if I'm following Christ and that's not easy. It's so much easier to make it all about me, at least for me it is than to make it all about Christ.

That brings me to an unsettling reality which is the third takeaway. The inescapable fact is that you don't get to life without going through the gate. If you come through the gate the inescapable conclusion is that there's a hard road in this life that leads to eternity of the challenge, cost and call of the Christian life and Jesus isn't pulling any punches on it. Then that leads me to an unsettling reality and that's this. Except in times of Gospel awakenings and revivals Christianity is not the majority opinion. I'll be outnumbered in my classroom. I'll probably be outnumbered on my athletic team. I'll be outnumbered in the Rotarians or the various civic organizations or my neighborhood. There's few on this road and many on that road. There are a lot of people that will be saved but in comparison there's a much bigger population on the wide way so I am now apart of something that very seldom is the cultural consensus. It's countercultural and therefore I will not be loved because of my love for Christ.

On the Gospel, the Gospel is a scandal because people do not want to be told "You need a Savior. You can't save yourself. My religious road is good enough to get to heaven and you have to come to Christ because Christ is the way, the truth and the life." People don't want to hear that. Therefore if I hold fast to Christ, to His holding on to me, then I will not be in the majority opinion, but I want to walk in a manner that is pleasing to my Savior, while attracting those that hate the One I hold to that they might yet be drawn to Him. They will be more than happy for me to say "Jesus is a way, a truth and a life" but if I'm faithful to report with humility that He's the Way, the Truth and the Life and no man can come to the Father but through Him, then my expectation is not the applause of men, not the acclaim of men, there won't be write-ups on me but it will be the off scouring of the earth. That leads me to the fourth takeaway.

The fourth takeaway is the clarity statement. I want to make something very clear here. Gate – way – destination, the gate is Jesus and not Briarwood, not the Presbyterian Church in America, not baptism, not church membership but the gate is Jesus and you come to Him personally. It is a narrow gate where only one fits through at a time. There are no group plans here. You must personally come to Christ. Understand that the gate leads to a hard way and the hard way is following Jesus. Jesus will give you the strength and the power and He'll be with you all the way. There will be few travelers other than His people that are with you but He will be with you. You have Him as your companion all the way and all the days. He will never leave you nor forsake you. So the gate is Jesus. The way is following Jesus and life is Jesus. That is what makes heaven, heaven. He says, "I go to prepare a place for you so that where I am, there you may be also." You and I will be with Him forever.

There are some frightening words to me in the Bible and here's one. "God gave them over to the desires of their heart," those are frightening words to me. Here is another one. "Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness, I never knew you." Here is another one that we'll be covering in a few weeks and that's "Many, many will say to Me in that day 'did we not prophesy in Your Name, did we not do miracles in Your Name, did we not cast out demons in Your Name' and I will say to them 'depart from Me you workers of lawlessness, I never knew you. You haven't come through the gate. You went to religion and even used My Name to do religious things but you didn't know Me. I never knew you. You hadn't come to Me. You tried to go the way without coming through the gate.'" And it doesn't say a few will be deceived but it says 'many, many' will be deceived. Proverbs 14:12 says "*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death (destruction).*" So we have ways that we would go that are wide and easy even in the name of religion but the way is Christ is the gate. Following Christ is the hard way. He will be with you and then you will be with Him forever in a new heavens and a new earth.

Here's is my last thought, takeaway. Everyone chooses life or death. You have heard me say this many times – all you have to do to have life is believe in Jesus but I want to tell you that there's another edge to that. All you have to do to have life is to come to Christ but all of your life must be Christ. There are no negotiations. There is no Jesus plus... Jesus is all for life and you'll find Him sufficient for ever more in your life. Choose this day whom you shall serve. If Jesus is Lord and Savior come to Him.

A man sat in my office not long ago and said "Preacher, I'm just not going to be a Christian." I said, "Well, my friend I'm going to pray for you." He said, "Preacher, don't get too upset because I actually think Jesus is a good teacher." I knew he was trying to mollify me, to help me out here, to keep my job or something. I just couldn't help it and said "Jesus is a what?" He said, "He's a good teacher I just don't believe in this Christianity thing." I said "Why would you think Jesus is a good teacher? Why would you believe something that stupid, that ignorant? If Jesus isn't who He said He was then why in the world would you think He's a good teacher? He calls you to repent and trust Him alone and if you don't there's a hell to pay and a heaven to lose and if you do there's a heaven to gain and a hell to lose and He's the way, the truth and the life, so why would you ever believe someone like that is a good teacher, if what He is saying you think is not true? He would be a maniac, a megalomaniac or He is who He said He was. If He is who He said He was then there's no greater place to be than through that gate and on that way."

So I invite you to surrender to the One who came and died for your sins. I invite you to surrender and I have chosen my words carefully. One might say "I'm not going to surrender." Oh yes you will, you will either surrender to Jesus for life or you will surrender to sin and its wages are death. I would not neglect to do what Jesus has just done to give you an opportunity to make that commitment to

Christ today. If you have never done that than may I invite you to Christ as Lord and Savior. He is ready to receive you. Come to Him. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. If you are ready to surrender your life to Christ then say "Lord, I turn from my sin. I leave that at the gate. I turn from my righteousness, it's like filthy rags and I leave that at the gate. I turn from myself and I leave that at the gate. I come to You. You are my life. You died for my sins and You rose again. Thank You that You are ready to receive me. Now walk with me as I follow You on this hard road. Oh the joy of living with You and for You for at Your right hand are pleasures evermore." Father, I know that many who are reading this have already surrendered to You, would You this day give them thanksgiving that the narrow gate which is hard to find, they found it because You found them. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see. We praise You Jesus, in Your Name, Amen.

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