



The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.  
Matthew 7:13-29

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English Standard Version

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## *“The Way of the Kingdom”*

The 21<sup>st</sup> Sermon in a series on the Gospel of Matthew entitled  
*“The King and His Kingdom!”*

### **Matthew 7:13-29**

*“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. <sup>14</sup> For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*

<sup>15</sup> *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. <sup>16</sup> You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.*

<sup>21</sup> *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> On that day many will say to Me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and cast out demons in Your name, and do many mighty works in Your name?’ <sup>23</sup> And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness.’*

<sup>24</sup> *“Everyone then who hears these words of Mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. <sup>26</sup> And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. <sup>27</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that*

house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

<sup>28</sup> And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at His teaching, <sup>29</sup> for He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.”

*Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us the Scriptures and making us Your people. You have brought us to this amazing Gospel to learn more about your Son, Jesus. We ask You this morning to give us the grace to understand Your teaching here. Help us to honestly consider whether our way is narrow or wide, hard or easy. Help us to know whether we're really following You and just following our own ways. So by Your Spirit open this Gospel to us and help us to see Jesus, and, as always, for this we need Your grace. Give us the desire to learn from You this morning, in the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.*

### **INTRODUCTION: Choosing Life or Death! <sup>1</sup>**

Meet Edwin Thomas, a **master** of the stage. During the latter half of the 1800s, this **small** man with the **huge** voice had few rivals. Debuting in *Richard III* at the age of fifteen, he quickly established himself as a **premier Shakespearean** actor. In New York he performed *Hamlet* for one hundred consecutive nights. In London he won the approval of the tough British critics. When it came to tragedy on the stage, Edwin Thomas was in a select group.

When it came to tragedy in life, the same could be said as well.

Edwin had two brothers, **John** and **Junius**. Both were actors, although neither rose to his stature. In 1863, the three siblings united their talents to perform *Julius Caesar*. The fact that Edwin's brother John took the role of Brutus was an eerie foreshadowing of what awaited the brothers two years later.

For this John, who played the assassin in *Julius Caesar*, is the same John who took the role of assassin in Ford's Theatre. On a crisp April night in 1865, he quietly stole into the rear of a box in the Washington theater and fired a bullet into the head of Abraham Lincoln. Yes, the last name of the brothers was Booth — Edwin Thomas Booth and John Wilkes Booth.

Edwin was never the same after that night. Shame from his brother's crime drove him into retirement. He might never have returned to the stage had it not been for **a twist of fate** at a New Jersey train station. Edwin was awaiting his coach when a well-dressed young man, pressed by the crowd, lost his footing and fell between the platform and a moving train. Without hesitation, Edwin locked a leg around a railing, grabbed the man, and pulled him to safety. After the sighs of relief, the young man recognized the famous Edwin Booth.

Edwin, however, **didn't** recognize the young man he'd rescued. That knowledge came weeks later in a letter, a letter he carried in his pocket till the day he died. A letter from General Adams Budeau, Chief of Staff to General Ulysses S. Grant, thanking Edwin Booth for saving the life of **the son** of an American hero. The boy Edwin Booth yanked to safety? **Robert Todd Lincoln**.

How **ironic** that while one brother **killed** President Lincoln, the other brother **saved** President Lincoln's son.

Edwin and James Booth. Same father, same mother, same profession, same passion — yet one chooses **life**, the other, **death**. How could that happen? I don't know, but it did, and it does.

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<sup>1</sup> The Introduction is taken from "Paul Harvey's *The Rest of the Story*" by Paul Aurandt, page 47 and "He Chose the Nails" by Max Lucado, pages 48-56.

Though their story is dramatic, it's certainly not unique. **Abel and Cain**, both sons of Adam. Abel chooses God. Cain chooses murder. **Abraham and Lot**, both pilgrims in Canaan. Abraham chooses God. Lot chooses Sodom. **David and Saul**, both kings of Israel. David chooses God. Saul chooses power. **Peter and Judas**, both deny their Lord. Peter seeks mercy. Judas seeks death.

**In every age of history, on every page of Scripture, the truth is revealed: God forces us to make choices.** And no one delineates this more clearly than Jesus Himself. According to Him, Here in Matthew 7, we can choose ...

- a narrow gate or a wide gate
- a hard way or an easy way
- the crowd of the many or the collection of the few
- to build on the rock or the sand

And ultimately those choices will determine if we're to be numbered among the sheep or the goats of Matthew 25, which ends with **Matthew 25:46**, "*And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*"

Jesus Christ, like any good preacher, is nearing the end of the Sermon on the Mount, and He's making His teaching here very personal. And now He gets very, very tough. He's saying, "My teaching is not to be **praised** but to be **practiced**. My teaching is not to be **commended** but to be **carried out**." And He demands this because He believes the Word of God has to be set loose in our lives so it can transform us. Do you understand that? Do you come to hear a sermon? Do you come to read the Bible? Do you come to look at Christ's teachings expecting a little inspiration or just a little bit of guidance?

In reality, you have a tiger by the tail, because **Jesus Christ has never, ever** told anyone something so you might just know it. Jesus gives you nothing just to be known. Jesus only gives us truth so it will come into our lives and revolutionize and transform us. That's why He's talking the way He is here. He's bringing it home. He's setting us straight.

Now most people who preach this text spend four weeks or so on it. James Montgomery Boice spent six weeks. I'm obviously not doing that, and that's because I think each of these contrasts is essentially about the same thing. And that's **following** Jesus versus **not following** Jesus. And so, with that in mind, I'm going to spend most of our time this morning on the first contrast, which is that ...

#### **v. 13-14: THE WAY IS NARROW OR WIDE** <sup>2</sup>

*"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. <sup>14</sup> For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*

At this point Jesus talks about the narrowness of the gospel. Now you may think I'm going to enjoy preaching on this, but I want to be liked just as much as you do. It is very hard to urge people **to be narrow**, and yet Jesus has deliberately chosen a word we **dislike**, a word we **despise**, as a way to characterize what a **disciple** of His should be like.

The last thing in the world we want to be called is "**narrow**." You can call me a lot of things, but don't me call **narrow**. If you want to be mean to somebody you can say anything,

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**2 The Exposition of the text is largely adapted from the Sermons, "The Straight and Narrow" 6/10/90 and "Authentic Christianity" 2/28/93, both by Dr. Tim Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY, [sermons.redeemer.com](http://sermons.redeemer.com); Logos Bible Software 4: *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*.**

but you know if call them, “*narrow-minded*,” the person says, “Don’t say that. Don’t tell me that.” To a degree that’s healthy, of course. Because God forbid we ever be like the Pharisees who reduced the gospel to a set of regulations. God forbid we’d ever make the gospel into something that can be confined to a bunch of rules. Yet there must be some way in which Jesus Christ is saying we have to be **narrow** or He wouldn’t have chosen that word. He says, “If you want to follow Me, **you must take the narrow gate.**”

Christianity is narrow in a particularly **vital way**. It’s narrow in that it demands **focus** and **authenticity** and **intensity** and **commitment** and **discipline**. Anybody who has accomplished anything in life knows that **the narrow gate** is the way to excellence. You want to be a good doctor? It means for an awful lot of years you do nothing but study, and in your residency you do nothing but prepare to be a doctor. You’re absolutely **narrow**. You’re focused. You’re intensely committed, even if you don’t want to be.

In his book, *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell poses a provocative question: why do some people succeed, living remarkably productive and impactful lives, while so many more never reach their potential? And he gives several answers, but one of them is that it takes 10,000 hours of doing something to become an expert at it.

**10,000 hours of focused, intense practice.**

You want to be a world-class musician? You’d better give it 8–10 hours a day of focused, intense practice for a long, long time. That’s **the narrow gate**. But it’s the only way to the freedom of great performances. You want to make money? You have to intensely look at investment opportunities. You must look and look and discern and discern and only go after the best, most authentic investment opportunities and get rid of the phony and the bogus ones. You want to have a world-class corporation? Quality, Quality, Quality. You have to constantly go through the narrow gate of quality if you want the life of prosperity.

That’s the way it’s always been, and Jesus says in spiritual things you have to do the same thing. Most of us are quite willing in every other area of life to understand that ... unless I go through the **narrow gate** of physical conditioning; I’m never going to have the excellence of physical health. Unless I go through the **narrow gate** of musical practice; I’m never going to have the excellence of musical performance. We all understand that, but when it comes to religion we back off. Jesus says, “You can’t back off, because the fact that you find the **narrow gate** leading to excellence in all of these other areas is because I built the universe like that.”

In the area of most importance, our relationship with God, the condition of our soul, it’s the same thing. Jesus tells us here that there are two ways **and only two ways in spiritual matters**. Then He describes those two ways, and He tells us how to be on the right one. And that’s what we’re going to do. It’s as clear as you can get. There’s just nothing gray about this. This is black and white. “Two roads. Here’s what they are. Here’s how to be on the right road.”

First, there are two roads. What does that mean? Jesus is teaching that there is no neutrality. In spiritual things, no one’s on the fence. No one’s stagnant. No one’s standing still. He’s saying there are two roads and they go to two different destinations. That means if you’re on the right road you’re going toward life; if you’re on the wrong road, every second you’re on that wrong road you’re going away from life. No one is on the fence. There’s no neutrality. There’s no stagnation. We’re all moving one way or the other.

So first He says there are two **and only two** ways. Then second, Jesus describes what those two ways are like so you have an idea about which one you’re on. What are the two ways? The one is **wide** and the other is **narrow**. Listen so you understand which way you’re on.

According to Jesus, everybody in this room is on one or the other. Everybody. No neutrality. No gray areas. Two roads.

First, what does Jesus tell us about **the wide road**? Number one, the road is wide and **most people are on it**. That's a **startling** thing to say, and He means it to be **startling**. Most of you drove here. If I said, "By the way, there's a policeman out there towing away an illegally parked car," some of you might get a little nervous. But if I said, "By the way, there's a policeman out there and they're towing away most of the cars in the parking lot," a lot of you would jump up, right? When Jesus says, "Most people are on **the wide road**," He means for it to be **startling**. He wants you to say, "Wait a minute." Here's the gospel: The gospel is **you must** be born again. The gospel is **you have** to come to God and **you have** to make an about-face in your life, **you have** to cleave unto Jesus, **you have** to receive His life into your life, and **you have** to take **a whole new direction**.

Many people, when they come and hear people say what I just said, take comfort in knowing that most people think that's **narrow**. Most people believe that. Most people believe that this whole view is really off base. You take comfort in being in the majority. You take comfort in the idea that most of society thinks we're crackpots. Jesus says, "Listen, that's one of the ways you know you're wrong. The majority has always been against Me, and if you're in the majority in your religious views, don't name My name. Don't you dare claim My name if in any society **you're in the majority**." That's what He's saying. He says most people are on **the wide road**, so look out. That's the first thing.

The second thing we find out about **the wide road**, besides having the majority on it, is that it's **an easy road**. **The wide road is the easy road**. Why do we call it **the easy road**? Here's why: **The wide road** is the road you're born on. **The wide road** is the road that unless you are struggling with an act of the will to change yourself and to change the direction you were born in, you're on **the wide road**. In other words, if you've never really done anything of a major religious nature in your life, if you've never made any major religious decisions, you're on **the wide road**. You're born on it. It's **the easy road**. It's the road downhill.

Now, I should tell you something about the word **narrow**. It's very clear that what Jesus is saying is **the narrow road is a hard road**. It hurts. The word **narrow** literally means to be strangled. The word **narrow** means to be smothered, to be pinched, to sort of be stuck in a pipe. All you claustrophobe's immediately start to get goose bumps about it.

Well then, what's the narrow way? Here's what Jesus says about the narrow way: **It's narrow. It's so narrow**. First of all, when Jesus says His way is the narrow way, He means there's only room to get on that road **one at a time**. You can't come in a crowd. You can't come with your family. You've to deal with Him personally. The narrow road means that knowing Jesus is **utterly personal**.

Jesus was always getting personal. Nicodemus sits down with Him and wants to have a nice theological discussion, and what does Jesus say? **Boom!** "*You must be born again.*" The woman at the well sits down and she tries to have a discussion. She says, "Well I'm a Samaritan and you're a Jew, and we have a lot of disputes about whether this is a place where Samaritans or Jews can worship, or maybe we both can worship here," and Jesus will have none of it.

Jesus says, "Oh my dear woman, listen to me. You want to have this polite conversation about theology. Let's talk about the five husbands you've had and the man you're living with right now. Don't you see? You want to talk about theology and you can't even manage your own life." We have to get personal. We have to get specific. How are **You** relating to God?

Can **You** get yourself right with God? We want to talk about general beliefs or general church affiliation or general civic behavior or general moral behavior. Those are all general things.

The gospel says, “How are **You** dealing with Jesus? Do **You** know Him personally? Have **You** come to grips with what’s between you and Him?” Every person who has ever come to Jesus Christ has had to come to grips that there’s something between you and Him. Do you know what it is? If you don’t know what it is you haven’t come to Him. You have to deal personally, not generally. It’s not good enough to be religious or moral in general, or get a little inspiration. Do **you** know Him personally? That’s what it means to say the way is narrow.

Secondly, the way is so narrow because not only is there room on there for **only one person** at a time, but there’s no room on this road for **anything but you**. You have to get rid of everything else. Some of you may want to say, “I’d like to come, but I don’t want to get there ahead of my family or my friend or my parents or my spouse or my lover,” or whatever. “I can’t get there yet because I have other people who aren’t ready to come with me.” There’s no room on that road for anybody but you. You have to come ... **all by yourself**.

And while you’re trying to figure out which road you’re on, Jesus then hits you with a warning. And it’s a warning about false prophets who look good but will do you harm. And He tells you to look at them closely because you can tell if they’re true or false because ...

#### v. 15-20: THE FRUIT IS GOOD OR BAD

*“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. <sup>16</sup> You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.”*

Second, Jesus says, you will have lots of teachers. You will have people who come and say, “I am a spiritual teacher, and you must follow me.” But Jesus says you have to discern the true from the false because not all of them can be trusted. Now for the sake of time, we’re going to skip over most of this. Partly because it’s not that difficult for the average person to see, of course, there are true and false religious teachers.

But note the vivid illustration Jesus uses. He says there are many people who set themselves up as a spiritual teacher, and they say they’re sheep, that they’re sweet and they’re kind and they only care about them, but underneath, they’re wolves who want to use and manipulate their followers. Most of us know that’s certainly true. So in a sense, let’s not belabor that point and move on to the next major point in which Jesus tells us each one of us, each woman, each man ...

#### v. 21-27: THE MAN IS WISE OR FOOLISH

*“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> On that day many will say to Me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and cast out demons in Your name, and do many mighty works in Your name?’ <sup>23</sup> And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness.’”*

Third, most radically, most disturbingly, Jesus says there are lots of people who think they’re Christians, who call Jesus ‘**Lord,**’ but not all of them are authentic Christians. Some of them are self-deceived. Some of them are counterfeit. And He says, verse 23, “*On that day.*” Now whenever Jesus talks about **that day**, He’s talking about the last day, judgment day.

Then He tells a parable about the **MAN** who is wise or foolish, starting at verse 24, *“Everyone then who hears these words of Mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. <sup>26</sup> And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. <sup>27</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”*

What’s He saying? It’s possible for people who call Jesus **‘Lord’**, sitting alongside of each other in the same church, who on the last day are going to find out that some of them ... **He never knew** ... ***Never Knew***. As we read this, little beads of sweat start to pop out on our foreheads if we know what we’re reading.

You see, the sign of authentic Christianity is **the grasp of the grace of God**. Look at the two houses. Two houses are both built, and they look the same. Do you know what those houses are made of in the parable? You see, this parable comes right after the people who have said, *“Lord, Lord, didn’t we do all these things?”* What things? Orthodox doctrine ... Service ... Teaching ... Ministry.

In other words, both of these men are taking all their **moral efforts**, all their **religious activity** (that’s what the houses represent), but the difference between the two is the one bases the whole house **on the rock**, Jesus Christ, the other house is on **the sand**, which means the other house is its own foundation.

If you look at your orthodoxy, if you look at your emotional involvement, if you look at your service for God, and you notice your life isn’t going very well, and you’re like the psalmist in **Psalm 73:13**, and you say, *“In vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.”* I worked my fingers to the bone for this God and what does it get me? Lots of things aren’t working out for me. I’ve tried so hard. I’ve been good, and therefore, God should answer my prayers. I’ve been good, and therefore, I should have His favor. I’ve done these good things, and therefore, God should accept me,” then Jesus says you’re like the foolish man who built his house on the sand, because your foundation, your obedience, your moral efforts, your religious activity is its own foundation. And, verse 27, *“And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”*

What does it mean to build your house on the rock? It simply means to admit that a person can only be a Christian by the grace of God alone. Paul says in **Philippians 3:8-9**, *“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ<sup>9</sup> and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.”* Do you see what he just said? He said, “My legal and moral righteousness was faultless, my legal and moral record was faultless, but I counted it all as loss so I could gain Christ and be found in Him, not with an acceptability of my own based keeping the Law, but an acceptability which comes through Christ.” “Until I’ve counted my efforts as loss ...” That means, “Until I see them as inadequate, until I realize I’m saved strictly and completely by the grace of God alone, then and only then have I built my house on the rock.”

So what do you do with all this? Well, you can’t do much with it until you face one more issue. And that issue is simply whether ...

### v. 28: HIS WORDS HAVE AUTHORITY OR NOT <sup>3</sup>

There is one last thing that I would draw to your attention in this passage. This passage asserts, in no uncertain terms, that the Lord Jesus is the divine Son of God, that He is equal to God in power and in glory, and He is the only way of salvation. Matthew tells us that when Jesus finished this sermon, the crowds were astonished. That is recorded in verses 28 and 29, “*And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at His teaching, <sup>29</sup> for He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.*”

Do you know the sad thing that Matthew doesn't tell us? Matthew doesn't tell us that they **believed** on the Lord Jesus Christ. They were **astonished** by His teaching. They were **flabbergasted** by what they'd heard. They had never heard the sermon the likes of which they had heard from the Lord Jesus. But they didn't embrace Him by faith. It's possible to hear faithful preaching of the Gospel, and not embrace Christ. But Christ in this passage makes it clear that at the last day, one's eternal destiny will depend on whether He knows you and whether you know Him, or whether you don't know Him and He doesn't know you. He says that there will those who call “‘Lord, Lord,” and He will say, “I never knew you.”

Which forces us to ask ...

#### **APPLICATION: *What Does This Mean in Terms of Salvation?***

All through the Sermon on the Mount we've said there are really two foundations on which you can base your life. You can either believe that you're competent and wise enough to run your own life and to make decisions **or** you can believe that only God is competent to run your life and make the decisions. Those are the only two foundations on which to build your life, and they're both faith foundations. So what does that mean in terms of our own lives? Well, first we need to ask what does this mean in terms of salvation?

Well, **the wide road is the easy road**. It's the first foundation. We're all born into believing that we're competent to run our own lives, and unless by an act of the will you have worked to deny and to change that natural inclination to keep control of your life, if you have never with all of your might tried to break your own grip on your own life (That takes a tremendous act of the will. It takes repentance. It takes going to God. It takes effort), then you're on **the easy path** and you're on **the wide road**.

How do you know you're on **the wide road**? Here's how. Wide-road thinking goes like this. We've all heard of people who say, “I really think that your understanding of Christianity is tremendously narrow. I have room for all faiths.” What Jesus is saying is that's very broad thinking. That man says, “I'm a broad-minded person.” Of course. The Bible says that's broad-minded thinking. That's wide-road thinking. It leads to destruction.

Buddhism has its eight-fold path, and the Koran has its five pillars, and Hinduism has karma. What Jesus is saying by saying there are two roads and only two roads is that every other religion **is essentially the same**. In other words, He's saying, “The society is right about all the religions **but Mine**. They all have essentially the same focus.” The Buddhists say, “Here's how to reach for God.” Then the Muslims say, “No, no, no. **Here's** how to reach for God.” Then the Hindus say, “Oh no, no, no. **Here's** how to reach for God.”

Jesus comes along and says, “Stop reaching. Here's how **God** can reach down to **you**. Stop your reaching and recognize that I had to die for you.” All the other religions really believe that your situation is not so desperate that you can't reach God if you pull yourself together and

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<sup>3</sup> This section is adapted from the sermon “*Two Ways Contrasted*” by Dr. J. Ligon Duncan, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, 10/12/97, [www.fpcjackson.org](http://www.fpcjackson.org).

you bring all of your powers of concentration to bear and you get your life together and you follow this path.

Jesus says, “Christianity is **utterly different**. Your situation is too desperate for that. You need to have somebody come in and pay the price for you, to do the work for you. Here’s how God reaches you. Up till now you’ve been a wide-road thinker,” Jesus says. “You’ve been trying to be your own savior. You’ve been trying to keep control of your own life. Will you get your clammy hands off of your life? See the wide-road thinking in your heart and turn to me.”

That’s what He’s saying. That’s wide-road thinking. It’s the easy path, the one that takes no effort to get on, and if you’ve never made any kind of major effort to break the grip of your hands on your own life, **you’re there**. And most people are there. That’s not what **I** say; that’s what **Jesus** says.

In Dante’s *Inferno* there’s one road that goes to life and it says, “Abandon all **pride**, all ye who enter here.” And there’s a road that leads to destruction and over it the sign says, “Abandon all **hope**, all ye who enter here.” There it is. You abandon your pride if you want to have hope, and you abandon your hope if you want to have pride, but you can’t keep them both. Jesus is saying that the way of obedience always starts off **narrow and hard** and leads to life, and the way of disobedience always starts off **wide and easy** and leads to destruction.

Now Jesus says in the simplest terms there are two roads and only two roads and there are two different destinations. That’s diametrically opposed to the modern model, which says there are many roads and one destination. Many and one; Jesus says there are two roads and two destinations. Jesus is as blunt as He can be. **John 14:6**, “Jesus said to him, “I am **the way, and the truth, and the life**. No one comes to the Father **except through Me**.” And then in **Acts 4:12** we read, “And there is salvation in no one else, for **there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved**.” It couldn’t be clearer ... wide and easy or narrow and hard. And you can’t fake it.

#### **CONCLUSION: We Pretend We Are Christians!** <sup>4</sup>

There is a series of great books called *Freakonomics* that my son David pointed out to me; and they try to get you to look at common problems and issues from the standpoint of economics and they try to demonstrate that economics has way more influence over everyday decisions than most of us realize. Well, the authors have a blog where they continue to deal with various issues and they get some amazing responses to their posts. Recently they wrote about “**Faking It**.” One of the examples they mentioned was about a Jewish lady who claimed to keep a kosher home but had secret love for **bacon**. In response to that article, they said that the *Freakonomics* inbox constantly produces interesting material, and so they had a follow-up article, based on an email they received from a reader we’ll call **G.D.** The email reads as follows

...

“I loved your books! I have found my thoughts drifting to some of the subjects over the past few days, especially altruism [which is an unselfish concern for the welfare of others] ... I was curious if any of the experiments took into account the subjects’ religious beliefs. I don’t know how one would logistically test that but it would be interesting to see how those claiming to follow a religious doctrine teaching altruism would do in the tests.

This thought led to another about myself. How would I do in the tests? We are **agnostics** living deep in the heart of Texas and our family **fakes Christianity** ... for social

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<sup>4</sup> The Conclusion is taken from the article “*We Pretend We Are Christians*” by Stephen Dubner, 2/23/10, [www.freakonomics.com](http://www.freakonomics.com). The C.S. Lewis quote is taken from *Mere Christianity*, page 65.

reasons. It's not so much for the sake of my husband or myself but for our young children. We found by experience that if we were truthful about not being regular church attenders, the play dates suddenly ended. Thus started the faking of the religious funk.

It seemed silly but it's all very serious business down here. We don't go to church or teach our children one belief is "right" over another. We expose them to every kind of belief and trust that they will one day settle in to their very own spirituality. However, for the sake of friends and neighbors, **We Pretend We Are Christians**. We try not to lie but rather not to disclose unnecessary information. As the children are getting older, this isn't so easy for them and an outing is probably eminent. We're not the only ones. We have found **a few other fakers** out there. I would love it if you ever explored this subject in a future book. I should mention that the friend who recommended *Freakonomics* to me is the head of the Bible Study at her church. Interesting."

These people are intentionally pretending. They're telling people they're on the narrow way but they're really on the wide, easy way. And they know it. Which raises a big question? **Are you pretending?** There are a lot of people who claim to be on the narrow road but who are living as if they're on the wide road. Their Christian life is easy because **it's not very Christian**. And they risk facing Jesus someday and hearing Him say, *"I never knew you; depart from Me."*

If you find this difficult just think of Jesus. In the end, the **narrowness** of the gospel is the **narrowness** of Jesus. Look at what He did. When He's in heaven, He looks down and sees that if He comes to earth He's going to have to give up all of His glory and come and be born into poverty, be born into a dirty manger, become a little baby. He knew when He was in the garden of Gethsemane that the soldiers were on the way, and there was going to be torture, and there were going to be nails splintering His bones, and there were going to be thorns in His scalp, and there was going to be a spear in His side, and there was going to be the slow death of suffocation, and He knew that was a mosquito bite compared to the pain and torment of the rejection of the Father.

Which way did He choose? The self-indulgent way? ***"For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life."*** Look into Jesus' tomb. When you look into that tomb it looks awfully small and cramped. It looks pretty narrow, doesn't it? Some of you right now, especially those of you who have chosen the narrow way and are feeling stifled, look into that tomb. I get cosmic claustrophobia when I look in there. "Don't go in there, Jesus. It's a dead end for sure. The way of obedience, the narrow way, is a dead end."

**He went in there**, because at the back of the tomb was **the narrow gate** into the life of God. There was no other way for Jesus into that life than through the tomb, and there's no other way for you and for me unless you take the narrow way, the focused way, the authentic way, the committed way. Please don't wait too long. If right now what you're listening to moves you, please listen to it. Don't say, "Maybe tomorrow, maybe next week, maybe next month, maybe next year." Don't do that, because you might be **hard** next year.

C.S. Lewis puts it like this, "When the author walks on the stage the play is over. God is going to invade, all right: but what is the good of saying you are on His side then, when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream and something else — something it never entered your head to conceive — comes crashing in; something so beautiful to some of us and so terrible to others that ... it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature."

It will be too late then to choose your side. That will not be the time for choosing; it will

be the time when we discover which side we really have chosen, whether we realized it before or not. **Now, today, this moment** ... is our chance to choose the right side. It's a narrow gate. God is holding back to give us that chance. But it won't last forever. And you can't **pretend**.

Think about that ... You need to pray.  
Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

*Our Lord and our God, thank You that You have given us a King. In this passage, we see Your Son. Open our eyes that we might see our sin and then see our Savior. Father, thank You for this wonderful and tremendously practical truth, that obedience begins as straight and narrow and opens into life, and disobedience begins as wide and easy and empties into destruction. We pray that everybody here, if they have already entered that narrow gate and are now on that hard path, might be given the incentive and the strength and the courage they need this morning to continue on that path as they set their eyes on Your kingdom.*

*Father, if there's anybody here at all, who is in a position where they begin to now realize they're on the wide path, enable them to move over. Enable them to realize today is the day to choose. Help them to see that though it may look narrow, it's the way to life. And so, O Lord, if there is anyone among us this day, who comes here not trusting in Christ, we would ask that by Your Spirit that You would draw that person to Yourself. Help us to know and believe that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever. Amen.*

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### **Philippians 1:27-28**

*“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.”*