

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount Sermon Series

Sermon 29

The Narrow Gate

Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. ¹⁴ "Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

In Jesus' time, many of the cities of Palestine were walled cities set on a hill. At nightfall the gates of the city would be shut and no one would be permitted to enter. So just before sunset the people working the fields during the day would make the long climb up a steep, narrow road to the city. The people would not linger or delay for fear that they would be locked out of the city for the night.

Jesus compared entering the kingdom of heaven to the climb up the narrow path to the city. Nothing should distract our attention from our goal lest we be unprepared and left out of the eternal home. Even though the way is upward and difficult we should not give up or turn back. It is easier to go downhill but that doesn't give you a safe place to stay the night.

When I think of a narrow way I think of the Gıda Çarşısı in Izmir. The Gıda Çarşısı is a market area that has shops selling everything from garbanzo beans to light bulbs from plumbing pipes to fountain pens. The distance from the front of one shop to the shop across the street is about three car widths. The shopowners put their goods on the street to display their wares and everyone parks their car or truck in front of a shop. If you are lucky you can pass one car between them to traverse the market. If you are unlucky enough to be in one of these tight streets when a truck and two cars following it are coming the other way then you have to back up to get out. It takes a lot of time to pass those streets and we have suffered our car being scraped by a passing truck. You certainly don't want to go through there with a wide vehicle loaded with goods.

When I think of a narrow place I think of getting on city bus. At rush hour the bus is packed with people standing in the aisle from the back all the way to the front. It is difficult to even to find a place to hold on. I almost always have my laptop bag with me and it is so hard to hold on to it and hold on while the bus goes around a curve. The computer bag does have a shoulder strap but the bag is always disturbing the person next to me. Sometimes we have had to return from the airport on a bus or metro with our luggage. Izmir's train isn't so full most of the time but if you have tried to take a luggage on Istanbul's metro then you know what difficulty is. In Istanbul if you board the metro at the airport then the train is empty. But then the train fills and you have to try to get off. It is nearly impossible.

In Izmir there is a pazar on Wednesday's in Bostanlı. Many people try to get on the bus with their shopping bags and carts. The bus drivers will turn people away. The drivers will not permit someone with a large bag or cart to board the bus. The bus is just too narrow for baggage.

I have here my shopping bag and I am trying to get on the bus to heaven with it. But the bus driver is Jesus and He won't let me get on the crowded narrow bus with my large bag. In the sermon on the mount Jesus had just said the golden rule:

Matthew 7:12 Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

The golden rule forbids many things. What do I have in my bag that is keeping me from getting on the bus? What do I have here that is forbidden in heaven so that I can't get on the bus?

Oh!, here is the biggest item in my bag. It is my pride. But how can I live without my pride? It is my favorite item in the bag. I defend myself against anyone who challenges me and I even resist authorities. Who can tell me what to do? No one! I am the king! Me, Me Me! My opinion is superior and must be defended at all cost. But Jesus says I cannot get on the bus to heaven with this in my bag. The way is too narrow.

What else is in my bag? Self seeking! Oh no! I can't give this up! I always have to be the winner. I must always get my way. Me Me Me! I am not sure I can live without having my way all the time.

I still have many other things here in my bag. What else must I get rid of before I can get on this bus?

Doctrines! There are many things that I want to believe but aren't true. Why is that so bad? Is truth really that important? Can't I believe what I want to believe? What difference does it make?

What else is in my bag here?

No! This is worldliness! I have to have this! I must be fashionable. I must go shopping to fill my closet with clothes and shoes. I must spend my time with music and television and games that entertain me. I must have fun! I don't care that people all around me are suffering and in need of the gospel. I don't have time for doing good deeds. I must have fun! What is wrong with having fun? I am not harming anyone with my movies and games!

What else is in my bag? Dishonesty. This package of mine isn't so big really. If I tell a little lie here and there at work to make my job easier, is that really so bad? Would God really keep me from heaven for that? After all the bureaucracy is so heavy here in Turkey, everyone has to tell a little lie every now and then don't they?

What else is in my bag here? Uh Oh! Moral debasement. This is my secret possession. I don't want anyone to know of my secret sinful thoughts and desires. No one else seems to see this one but it is filling my bag up a little bit and the bus driver won't let me on the bus with it.

What else is in my bag? Evil habits. Smoking and alcohol don't harm anyone else, they only affect me. So why should I have to give these things up? Why won't the bus driver let me get on board with these? Is heaven really that pure?

If I can't have my pride and my way, if I can't believe what I want to, if I can't keep my worldliness, if I can't tell lies, if I have to be pure in thought, if I can't keep my cigarettes then I won't get on this bus, I will wait for another bus. Look! Another bus is coming. There is plenty of place on that bus. Surely I can get on that bus with my bag.

"Bus driver, can I get on this bus with my bag?"

"Certainly, there is plenty of room for these things!"

"Where are you going?"

"I am going to the graveyard. There is no resurrection from this graveyard. You will stay there dead for eternity."

"Aren't you going anywhere else?"

"Yes, I will drop by hell for a brief stay. Come on board! There is plenty of room because my bus is much bigger than that other one."

"Let me talk to some others on the bus and see how the ride is going."

"Hey how do you like this bus?"

"Well the road is bumpy. Jesus has put many obstacles on the road so that we will get on the other bus but we like this bus. Here we can do what we want when we want to. And we can take our shopping bags with all of our favorite things on this bus."

"Aren't you concerned about where you are going?"

"We don't think about it much. We just want to have fun right now. That is the most important thing."

Listener, which bus are you on?

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