



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH
SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS



Stairway to Heaven or Highway to Hell?

Tim Badal | April 27, 2014 | Matthew 7:12-14

The Upside-down Kingdom Series, Lessons Learned from the Sermon on the Mount, Part 27

Let us read God's Word. Buckle up your seatbelts because it's going to be a rough ride. I ask your blessing and your prayers as I preach this. Matthew 7:12-14 says:

¹²"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. 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. ¹⁴For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

Oh Lord, I pray that these words would resonate in our hearts and we would understand the implications of what You have just shared in these three verses. You've challenged my heart this week. You have brought grief into my heart as I think about those who are on the road leading to destruction. You've reminded me of the grace You have shown me, that I—a sinner—might find the narrow gate and the way that leads to life. I pray that You would allow me now to take what You've taught me and share it with these wonderful people whom I love and that I would do so with the authority You've given Your Word and with clarity. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

I've taken my sermon title from two very famous secular rock songs from about 30 years ago. I've not done this to be cute but to address that there is some truth in those two phrases "stairway to heaven" and "highway to hell." While we may not agree fully with the lives of those who sang the songs, what they articulated in those words are true realizations of what unbelievers think regarding the afterlife and what happens when we take our last breath.

Inherent within human existence is a profound realization that something comes after this life. We're not the only ones who understand this as Christians. Robert Plant wrote the song "Stairway to Heaven" and said:

Yes, there are two paths you can go by, but in the long run
There's still time to change the road you're on.
And it makes me wonder.

("Stairway to Heaven" by Led Zeppelin)

At the end of His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus wants to take away all wonder, questions and foggiess of mind as to what happens in the afterlife.

All major religions believe in some version of the afterlife. In the Far East reincarnation is the name of the game for both Buddhism and Hinduism. It's defined differently within those two religions, but with both it is an endless cycle of existences. Your next reincarnation and cycle of life will be dependent on what your previous cycle of life was. So the Far East religions believe in the afterlife.

Moving to the Middle Eastern religions, we see that while they are incredibly different Judaism and Islam both believe in two parts of the afterlife. They both believe in paradise—the abode of God—and hell. While they may get to those places in different ways, both of these major religions believe that there is an afterlife with places for those who do well and those who don't do so well.

But within Christianity—especially conservative Christianity of which Village Bible Church is a part—we hold not only to an afterlife but to a conscious and active afterlife. In some ways we will begin to live life in greater and better ways in the days to come than we're living it right now.

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that there are two paths—as Robert Plant said—that we can choose. One path will lead us to God and a place called Heaven. It is a place full of bliss, total peace and joy. Jesus said in [John 14:2-4](#) that He was going to prepare this place for His followers. Jesus also makes it clear in His sermon—and the Bible is clear on this in other places as well—that there is another place called hell. It's a place that is apart from God where people reside there in total agony, pain and sorrow.

Jesus says that this afterlife will not be for a short season but it will be for all of eternity. So the question before us today is, "What destiny do you find yourself traveling towards?" Do you find yourself traveling the stairway leading to heaven or are you running down the highway leading to hell?

1. Pathway that Leads to Destruction

In order to understand this Jesus' words have to bear direction in our lives. Our first point to understand is the pathway that leads to destruction. I'll deal with [verse 12](#) in a little bit, but let's look at [verse 13](#) again. [Verse 13](#) says, *"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."*

Let's stop for a moment. We need to understand that Jesus has been redefined in our world today. He has been redefined as a loving and only-nice-word-saying Teacher Who said, "If we can all just get along then everything will be fine." People extrapolate their version of Jesus based only on the nice sayings of Jesus. In liberal Christianity, the agnostic world and the atheistic world they forget that Jesus isn't just some pleasant Teacher. He's the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords and He speaks like that.

Notice what Jesus says here. This is the same sermon in which Jesus spoke about the wonderful Beatitudes. He taught us how we are to treat others. Now with the Golden Rule just one verse before, Jesus says, "I want to make this abundantly clear. There are two roads: one that leads to Me in glory and one that leads to the devil and hell that is destruction."

Many people will say, "But God wouldn't do that." Jesus makes it abundantly clear that there is a place called hell. He speaks about it in the Scriptures more than He does Heaven. He says if you're not careful and don't follow His way, you will spend eternity in hell.

This Way Is Entered by Many

Notice what Jesus says about this path that leads to destruction. He says it's entered by many. *"For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many."* If that doesn't grieve your heart then something is wrong. Jesus is saying there are people in our world today who are breathing some of their last breaths in total agony and the only thing they are looking forward to is a reprieve from the pain, agony, sorrow and difficulty of their last days. But because they're apart from God those people who are dying in agony at this very moment will close their eyes, their hearts will stop beating, their brains will stop functioning and they will go from a place of temporal agony to one of eternal, insurmountable agony. Jesus says there are many like that.

It doesn't take a Greek scholar to understand that the word "many" (*polys*) means a lot. The people are heading there not one at a time but in large quantities. That means people of all backgrounds, all faiths and all places are heading to hell. Do you realize that you have family, friends, co-workers and loved ones who are on this highway to hell? Some of you have children or spouses on this path. Some of you here are on that road today.

I want you to notice something else about this word "many" (*polys*). Jesus says the broad way is filled with many but the narrow way that leads to life with God is for the few. Based on this verse, it seems that Jesus is saying—and we have to take Him at His word—that the realm of hell will be more populated than the realm of God in glory. This is a problem. It should grieve our hearts because we have family and friends who are on this road and Scripture says they've entered into it.

Right away, we will look at this and say, "This is a tragedy," and it is. It's a tragedy of epic proportion. So we might be tempted to say, "That doesn't seem like a very nice God. How could a loving and kind God allow many to embrace this kind of life and head to hell? Why doesn't God do something?" God did. He declared Himself in that.

I want you to notice something: as you look at that word "enter" (*eiserchomai*) in the original Greek language, it speaks of a responsible decision of the one who is on that path. So don't think that people are lost without knowing they're on the wrong path. The Bible makes it clear that every person who is in sin has chosen that path. Paul says in Romans 1:21, *"For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened."*

So what happened? God revealed Himself as Creator and loving God and sinful humanity said, "Thanks but no thanks, God. I'll do it my own way. Instead of pursuing You, I'm going to pursue self. Instead of following and submitting myself to the lordship of Christ, I'm going to submit myself to my lifestyles and desires." We need to understand that the many who are on this road have made a conscious decision to be on this road. They've entered into it as the text says.

This Way Is Effortless in Nature

This broad way that leads to destruction is effortless in nature. When Jesus speaks of the narrow way in verse 14 He says, *"For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life."* There's a contrast; one way is hard and the other one is easy. When Jesus talks about the wide gate He says, "The wide gate isn't going to cost you. It allows you to bring all of your desires, pursuits, wants and all the things that go with living life on this earth. You can have them all. You don't have to bow the knee to anybody. You're king. You're the one in charge. Do whatever you want." You don't have to submit yourself to anybody—not even God.

The broad way is an easy way. It requires nothing. There are no restrictions. In the song "Highway to Hell" AC/DC puts it this way:

Livin' easy
Lovin' free
Season ticket on a one way ride
Askin' nothin'
Leave me be
Takin' everythin' in my stride
Don't need reason
Don't need rhyme
Ain't nothin' that I'd rather do
Goin' down
Party time
My friends are gonna be there too
I'm on the highway to hell
On the highway to hell
Highway to hell
I'm on the highway to hell
No stop signs
Speed limit
Nobody's gonna slow me down...
I'm on the highway to hell

That's true. He's preaching the road that leads to destruction and he has done so quite aptly.

Notice our text goes on to say, "There are many on this road and the road is easy. They don't have to do anything or change who they are. Just be who you are. You can be left alone; you're fine."

Jesus says that those who enter it are many. The term "enter it" (*eiserchomai*) is in the present tense. This paints a picture of an endless line of men and women plodding along the road to destruction. Jesus is sounding the alarm for His listeners. He's saying, "Listen up! Many of you find yourself living this life and not wanting to follow the ways I've commanded. You don't want to find life in Me; you don't want to seek first My kingdom. You want to worry about yourself and your own desires." Jesus says to those people, "You are on a road that leads to destruction."

This Way Is Filled with All Kinds of Evil

Why wouldn't people stop then? You would think that having someone yell, "Hey, the bridge is out! Stop going in that direction!" would make people stop right in their tracks.

But notice what we see next: it's filled with all kinds of evil. Why in the world do sinners find themselves continuing down this road? Because the broad way is easy, attractive, inclusive, indulgent, permissive and self-oriented in every way because it is the way of the world. There are no rules, no restrictions and no requirements. It is so tolerant that you can even say you profess Jesus—or are at least a little bit religious—and you will still be accepted by this group.

The only thing that changes is when you say, "But Jesus says we can no longer live this way." Then you are no longer tolerated. Truth is moderated. Sin is tolerated and humility is ignored. God's Word is viewed as a wonderful book but it's not studied as the standard. It's not admired or followed as the book God gives so that people may have life.

This way down to hell is an easy way of floating downstream. As Paul says in [Ephesians 2:2](#), *"Following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience."* That is what the writer of Proverbs meant when he said, *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death"* ([Proverbs 14:12](#)).

So why don't people see this pathway to destruction? What keeps them from seeing it? They're enjoying the ride. The ride is fun. What makes it so fun? Turn in your Bibles to the [Book of Romans](#).

Romans is Paul's magnum opus. In it he addresses the questions, "Why in the world do sinners act the way that they do? Why did we act that way before we were embraced by the grace of God?" Because all of sinful humanity has made a decision, "We will live life without God and pursue our own ways."

So with what do we fill our lives? If it's not with the good things of God and submission to His Word, it is what we see in [Romans 1:24-25](#), *"Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen."*

So sinful humanity has chosen this path. They saw the way to life everlasting and said, "No thanks." We did as well because Paul says [we were like them at one time—disobedient](#). We saw what God had to offer and said, "Thanks but no thanks. We're going to go our own way." When we make that choice we serve ourselves who are created beings instead of serving the Creator God Who is forever blessed. We serve one another and we serve the appetites and passions of the flesh.

When you exchange God for a life that's dedicated to yourself, look at what God says is going to happen. It begins with immorality: women exchange natural relations with men for women. Men likewise exchange natural relations with women. They are consumed with passion for one another and commit shameful acts.

Look at what [Romans 1:28-32](#) says:

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

When we say, "God we don't need you. We're going to do it our own way," He gives us up to the direction we want to go.

So God tells us the reason why people are having such a good time even though they know destruction is coming their way is because they busy themselves with a lifestyle of feasting on the good things of the flesh. Why would they do that? You would think that at some point they would decide, "Okay, enough is enough. I should stop doing that."

Let's take a look at some history. In the tragedy of the Titanic historians tell us many people did not get into lifeboats because they had a flawed understanding that trumped all human reasoning. The flawed understanding was, "The Titanic will never sink. It's a boat that not even God Himself can sink." That idea had been tossed around over and over again. People talked about this amazing work of human ingenuity, this boat that was unsinkable.

When the Titanic hit the iceberg you would think the light would have dawned on them and they would have realized, "Hey, it's time to get in the lifeboats." But their flawed understanding moved them to an unreasonable action. Most eyewitness accounts from people who were in the lifeboats said that the party continued aboard the ship. Even as the boat began to rise up into the air people still assumed they were okay. The book *The Band that Played On* was written about how the Titanic's musicians kept playing aboard the ship the whole time it was sinking.

So here's the picture Jesus is painting: many are heading down this road and they have a flawed understanding that this way is the way to real happiness. They think this way is the way to fulfill their lives and dreams. Meanwhile there are all these signs saying, "Don't do this!" but they're too busy dancing, eating and enjoying the good life. They are running through warning sign after warning sign that destruction is on top of them.

This Way Is Enticing to Christians and Non-Christians

I know some of you are thinking, "How foolish! How stupid can people be? How can they miss it?" Let me remind you of something: this broad way that leads to destruction is filled with things that are enticing to Christians and non-Christians alike. You need to recognize that before you start saying, "How pathetic! Don't you see that your way is foolish and futile? What's your problem? Where's your brain, people? You're going down a bad road. I mean, don't you get it?"

You might not want to admit this so I'll do it for all of us. Even as one who teaches God's Word on a weekly basis and has been a follower of Jesus Christ for a long time, I am saddened to say that the way that leads

to destruction is still incredibly enticing to me. There are times in my life when I'm walking the grace-filled life and I look at friends, family and co-workers and am jealous. I see them living with reckless abandonment, enjoying the frivolity of their ways. Instead of saying, "How stupid! How arrogant! How wrong they are!" I say, "What can I do to be a part of it? It sure looks like fun."

There are times when I look at the Christian life and say, "I'm not having that kind of fun. I'm not enjoying myself. Over there, there are no cares or concerns. You can just do what you want. How great is that? What a wonderful life!" If you look at it from a temporal standpoint, it is all fun.

Maybe some of you are thinking, "Man, I am really disappointed in my pastor. Sit down and stop talking until you've got this thing figured out!" If so, then let me tell you something: my view on the ways of this world seem to be more biblically based than your view because the Bible says repeatedly, "Hey Christian, be careful because that way is enticing."

In one of Paul's letters to his young disciple Timothy he spoke of a man named Demas. Demas was a man who had done fruitful ministry and work with the gospel of Jesus Christ as a man who stood by Paul. In 2 Timothy 4:10, Paul says this about Demas, "*For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me.*" This is true for many of us as well.

Why would Demas leave Christ? Because the present world looks glorious to the human being. Demas started looking around and saying, "What's this business of getting put in prison? What's this business of always being under attack and always having to watch ourselves? Why can't I just go hang out with my friends? Why can't I just live life like everybody else does? Let's pay homage to Caesar, tell him he's god and just enjoy the pleasures of life." Why would Paul mention Demas to Timothy? He is saying, "Timothy, be careful that you don't start loving this present world."

The Book of 1 John was written to believers. Let me read 1 John 2:15-17 for us. If we don't have this issue of loving the world then why does John say what he does in this passage? He says:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

If there wasn't a care or concern that believers would be enticed by these things then John never would have had to write about it. He's not saying, "Hey, I'm going to tell you about this stuff because you don't have these issues and struggles." Well of course they had those issues. They were concerns for the believers. Think of all the prohibitions in Scripture to flee sexual immorality and all kinds of sin. Why would John have to tell us not to love the world if we didn't have a problem with it?

So before we look down our noses at unbelievers and say, "How pathetic, dumb and stupid the sinner is." remember that a part of us is still waging war with the new man and new woman. A part of us yearns for that kind of lifestyle and yearns for the ability to do whatever you want and whatever feels right with no concern for what will come.

This Way Ends in Doom

Here's the problem: Jesus makes it abundantly clear—without mincing any words—that this way ends in doom. The text says it leads to destruction. The word “leads” there is the Greek word *apagō* and it's used in secular writings in the first century to describe prisoners being taken under armed guard to their execution. In our text *apagō* is found in the present tense, which indicates that this leading of people is continuously happening in one direction. In essence, the devil is leading people on this broad way to destruction.

What does “to destruction” mean? Where are they going? When Jesus uses the word “destruction” (*apōleia*) He uses a word that speaks of utter ruin or complete loss which is epitomized by eternal punishment. You could say doom, destruction or total despair. However, it does not speak of annihilation. Some people think, “Well, I just have to endure it for a nanosecond and then it's all done.” That's not what it means. It speaks of a ruin that makes something no longer useable for its intended purposes.

Jesus is helping us understand what hell is. Hell is a constant reminder of what you could have been and what you will never be. Hell is a reminder of your potential in relationship with God and that you will never live up to that potential at all. You will spend eternity yearning for something you will never have. It is a reminder that while you were made for relationship with God and that your whole existence is based on and needs that relationship with God, you will never have it because the presence of God has been taken away from you. This is the epitome of what hell is all about.

Maybe our friends and our family say, “I don't like that kind of Jesus. My Jesus doesn't talk about hell.” That's not true! He's spoken about hell three times in the Sermon on the Mount: [Matthew 5:22](#), [29](#) and [30](#). Jesus talks about hell in other parts of Scripture in terms of a place called Gehenna (*geenna*). Hell is a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, where a worm will not die. It is a place of utter despair. It was illustrated by this literal place called Gehenna outside the city of Jerusalem where they burned their garbage, feces and corpses. The place absolutely reeked. It was a garbage dump perpetually on fire. The fires of Gehenna never stopped burning. Jesus says, “That is where sinners are heading unless they turn, repent and follow Me.”

It is easy for us to think of others who may be on this road, but as your pastor and one who loves you I need to say that some of you here are walking that road right now. You have deceived yourself into thinking, “I go to church enough,” or, “I've done enough nice things,” or maybe, “I've professed some things and prayed some prayers.” Let me tell you something: it is about our obedience. The question is, “Are you obeying self on the highway to hell or are you obeying God through the gate that gives life?”

2. Passage that Leads to Deliverance

Jesus has just hammered us but He doesn't stop there. In our text He also shows the passage that leads to deliverance. After receiving a sobering view of what awaits those on the broad road that leads to destruction Jesus gives us some good news.

Here's the good news of Jesus Christ: we are all sinners. *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way"* (Isaiah 53:6). We've all gone that way. The gospel is that God—in His sovereign goodness, love and mercy—said, "I'm not going to leave them all on the road to destruction. Out of my grace and mercy, I am going to call upon those and bring them back to Ourselves. I'm going to open their eyes to see that their way leads to destruction. I'm going to do so through the gospel of Jesus Christ that those who respond by faith and repentance will then turn from their ways of evil and wickedness on their way to destruction and they will find a way to life."

How do you get that life? It's through Jesus Christ. He came to be the Bread of Life. Jesus Christ came to be the Light of the World. He also came to be the Way, the Truth and the Life. He called Himself the Door or the Gate. In our text Jesus tells people to stop running down the road that leads to destruction and calls them to repent. He says, "There's another way. Stop going the way that is for many and turn." He's offering the exit ramp from the highway to hell.

This Passage Is Diminutive in Comparison

Why don't most take it? Notice what Scripture says. It says many are on the road that leads to destruction because it's fun, the crowd is there and it's the party area. But another reason people don't find the gate that leads to deliverance is because it's diminutive in comparison. One gate and is wide and the way is easy. But Jesus says, "The way to life is narrow and hard." The broad way is easy and full of traffic. It's crowded and is a well-worn pathway. In comparison to that, the gate leading to Jesus is small and narrow. The word narrow has become a curse word in our society. We say, "We don't like narrow people." The narrowest of all people was Jesus.

The word "narrow" is the Greek word *thlibō*. It means a very small and constricting walkway. To get through this walkway, you will have to strain to get through it. You have to press into it and be squashed. It is something that's going to bring you great difficulty. It hems you in and constrains you. It doesn't allow for a crowd of people because it is so small and so narrow that you must go one person at a time.

The narrow gate doesn't allow us to have shirttail faiths. You can't be hooked to your mom, dad, spouse, pastor or church and get through the narrow gate. We all have to go through it one at a time.

This Passage Demands Our Total Allegiance

This gate's narrowness forces us to deal with some things in order to go through it.

The best way to illustrate this is to picture ourselves at O'Hare Airport. Imagine that we're in the concourse where thousands of people are coming and going with no thought of each other. Nobody's really talking to one another. There are wide hallways filled with people who are busy doing their own thing.

Amidst those thousands of people, at some point you have to make a decision to get off the concourse. If you want to get on a plane and fly somewhere, you can't stay on the concourse. You have to act as an individual, line up and walk through the security checkpoint.

To do that demands some things. We can't just walk on a plane and say, "Well, I'm ready to go. I've got my bags packed and I'm ready to go to my destination." Just as in the airport concourse you have to step aside to go through the security checkpoint, Jesus is saying we have to go through His security checkpoint in life—Him.

If you've gone to the airport and flown in a plane then you know that the TSA agents don't just let you saunter through the security checkpoint. They say, "Take off your shoes. Get rid of the belts. Is there anything in your pockets? Hey, you can't take your suitcase through there; put it on the conveyor belt. It has to be searched as well."

When we enter the narrow gate there are things that have to leave our lives. There are habits we will have to stop doing. There are things that won't make it through Jesus' x-ray machine of justification. Jesus is saying, "If you're going to follow Me then you have to rid yourself of some things."

Have you ever seen someone who doesn't want to give up that one thing in the security checkpoint? They cry, moan and say, "If I have to get rid of that then I'm not getting on the plane." A year ago, I took a flight to San Diego and saw that happen. A person at the security checkpoint said, "No, I'm not getting rid of that."

The TSA agent said, "Then you're not going to get on the plane."

The person said, "Well then, if that means I can't get on the plane then I won't."

The reason unbelievers see the narrow gate of Jesus and don't choose it is that they look and say, "It will cost me too much. I'm unwilling to give up what is important to me to follow Jesus."

Some of us right now are thinking, "We're at church. We're doing fine." You're walking the concourse but at some point you have to go through the door. Jesus is going to say, "One at a time."

The last time we went to San Antonio Luke went with me through security. I don't know what I was thinking. I didn't want Luke to get away from me or go by himself. So I pushed him through in front of me and we went through the metal detector together. The TSA man stopped me and said, "Not two at a time; one at a time. I don't care how cute he is."

We can't just walk through the narrow gate attached to someone else. We have to go through it one person at a time and be examined. The TSA says, "These are the things that can go and these are the things that can't," and that's what Jesus does at the narrow gate. Jesus says, "You can't come to Me and think you're going to hold onto stuff. The things that I say can't come through have to go; you have to let go of them. You can't have both."

Why would anybody do that? Because the grace of God that appeared to man in the Person and work of Jesus says, "When you give up those things, you'll find joy and contentment." As lovely as those things are

in your human mind, when you give them up and agree with Jesus that you can't have both Him and these things then Jesus says, "That's where you'll find the life."

So many people—and I think they do it with good intentions—say, "Oh, just come to Jesus. Don't worry about who you are or anything else. Nothing has to change. Just believe in Jesus, follow Him and everything's fine. That's the good news: it's easy." But it's *not* easy! It's difficult! Yes, you do have to change! Jesus isn't changing so the only one who's going to change is you. The gospel changes everything and we have to be in agreement with that. If we're not in agreement the Bible says, "Get back on that road that leads to destruction because you're not going through here." So we have to be willing to give those things up. We have to throw off everything that doesn't meet Jesus' approval. That's the only way we'll get through the narrow gate.

The narrow gate is not just narrow for a short time. Some of you might think, "I'm willing to go through the TSA process because it's only a short time and then I can get to Disney World. It's just a minor inconvenience. Once I get through it's Disney World for me and my family." The Bible says that the narrow gate leads to the narrow way. Does that make sense? It doesn't get any easier. It isn't as if we go through the narrow gate—work our way through—and then can relax. "Phew! Get out the La-Z-Boy. Look at the acreage I have now." No, the Bible says the gate is narrow, the way is narrow and the way is hard.

What makes it hard? Isn't being saved glorious? Yes, it is. But here's the hard thing: we are saved, our position has changed and we've been empowered by the Holy Spirit but our same flesh that was on the highway to hell is still with us as we walk through this difficult path. So Jesus is ridding us of all the garbage that we've brought along—and it hurts. We think, "But Jesus, You're pushing me in, hemming me in and constraining me. I don't like that." Jesus says, "This is what it means to be Christ-like. This is what it means to live a life like I did."

Some of you are struggling with sin right now. You're wondering, "Why am I battling with this sin?" It is because your body still says you're on the highway to hell but your heart has been changed. Jesus says, "Now you are being delivered." Each day we're being delivered more and more. That's why Paul said, "I just want to go home. I'm tired of this. Let me be with Christ."

This Passage Directs Us to Life with God

It's tough because it directs us to a life with God. The word "life" in verse 14 is an important word. "*For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*" This word gives us reason to endure. It is the Greek word zōē and it speaks of an absolute fullness of life.

Jesus used the same word when He said, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life*" (John 14:6). This is what Jesus meant when He said, "*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly*" (John 10:10). Jesus says that the abundant life is the constrained life. We think, "That doesn't make any sense." It doesn't make any sense to human beings like you and me but it makes total sense to Creator God. When I constrain myself for the sake of holiness God says, "In it you will find life."

When we look at Hollywood we see that those who have reckless abandonment pursuing the things of this world are absolutely, positively unhappy. It is because they haven't found life in Christ. This life is in the here and now. It's for the life to come where we will be forever free from sin, sickness, sorrow, suffering and death once and for all.

3. Predicament that Demands a Decision

This brings us to a predicament: there are two roads and you can't be on both. Some of you think you can be on both roads. On Sunday you're on the narrow road saying, "Amen, Tim!" and "This is good!" But then for the rest of the week you're saying, "Hey guys, over here! I'm back. Don't worry about me; I just took a little rest stop but I'm back on the highway now. Let's go do our thing and enjoy our stuff." Maybe you're doing that by yourself and saying, "Hey, it's a hard road. It sure is nice that I can do whatever my body says is good for me to do over there."

So it demands a decision: will you like a sheep go astray, each of us to our own way? Or will you go the way of Christ no matter the cost?

This great theme is the crux of Scripture: God has placed life before us; we have pursued death, but God—in His faithfulness—continues to call us back to Himself. Look at these passages:

- Deuteronomy 30:19 says, *"I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live."*
- Joshua 24:15 says, *"And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve."*
- In John 14:6, Jesus says, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* You can't go down the road that leads to hell and still follow Jesus.
- Acts 2:38 says, *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."* The apostles said this repeatedly.

Let me stop and ask you, "What road are you on today?" The question is not, "Where do you go to church?" or "What prayer have you said?" What road are you on? Are you on the easy road or the hard road? Have you entered in the narrow gate that is Jesus? Have you made a decision at some point in your life to follow Jesus instead of yourself?

If you haven't then the question is, "Will you?" Will you embrace Jesus? Will you bow the knee to Jesus and know that what you are asking for is the hard way of living, not the easy one? In the end it leads to life—both in this life and in the life to come. Have you bowed the knee?

What does that involve? What does it mean? Jesus says in Luke 9:23, *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."* If you're not sure what that looks like then I beg you to take time later to talk with me or someone else who will share with you what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Don't wait to redirect the road you're on so that you can find Jesus and live and walk with Him for the rest of your life.

4. Principle that Determines our Demeanor

Now what in the world do we do with verse 12—the Golden Rule? It says, *“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”* Before this incredibly difficult passage, Jesus gives us a principle to determine our demeanor. What do I mean by that? Jesus tells us, *“Do unto others what you would want done unto yourself.”* He is saying that the way to live as a Christian is to put yourself in other people’s shoes.

Then Jesus gives us an example of people who are on their way to destruction. He is saying, *“What would they want from you? What would you want if you were in that situation?”*

If we knew we were on the way to destruction and were too blind to see our way out, here are three things I think we would want others to do for us.

Pray for the Spirit’s Leading of Unbelievers

If we are to do unto others as we would have them do to us, then we need to pray for the Spirit’s leading in the lives of unbelievers. If your friends, family, coworkers, neighbors and classmates who are on the road to hell knew the whole picture, they would be pleading with you right now, *“Tell me about Jesus.”* They would be saying, *“Pray for me! Pray that my eyes would be opened.”*

We need to remember that we didn’t come to faith on our own. It’s not as if something dawned in your life and you just put the pieces together enough to say, *“Alright, I’m on the wrong road. I have to get on the right road to follow Jesus.”* I want you to understand something: you were blind, dead and held captive by the evil one. It was only by God’s sovereign goodness that He saved you. He pulled you out of that sin, gave you eyes, gave you a new heart and said, *“Now you can worship Me.”*

So we need to pray for God to do that in the lives of unbelievers. That’s the only way blind and dead people will be freed to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to be on our knees praying for unbelievers by name.

Point Them to the Open Door

We need to be praying for an open door to which we can point them. When God gives us opportunities we need to share the good news of Jesus Christ with those who haven’t heard it. We need to clearly articulate to them that the only way to eternal life is Christ. He’s the only way, the only truth and the only life. We need to point the unbeliever to Christ in our actions, our attitudes, our affections and our aspirations. All of my life should be pointing people to Jesus and proclaiming that Jesus is all that He says He is.

Present Them with the Cost

When believers ask you about this life present them with the costs. Don’t tell people that the gospel is easy. Stop doing that! The gospel is very hard. It will cost us all that we have but in it we will gain all that we’ve never had through the treasures and riches of Jesus Christ our Lord. Tell them that! Maybe you’re worried that they won’t believe us. Leave that to God. He’s the One Who can change lives. I know people in this church who were living lives of their own. But the gospel was proclaimed to them, the Spirit of God

moved in their lives and we told them, “This is not an easy way; it’s a hard way.” By the grace of God they said, “I don’t know any other way but to follow Jesus.”

At one point in Jesus’ ministry things weren’t easy anymore. After he fed the 5,000 and began telling people they had to eat His flesh and drink His blood, the crowds left. Many of his disciples said, *“This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?”* (John 6:60). At that time Jesus turned to the 12—not the 20,000—and said, *“Do you want to go away as well?”* Peter says for the disciples, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”* (John 6:68). Jesus is telling us, “You better buckle your seat belt because the life of the Christian is hard.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.” That’s the gospel. We need to recognize it, proclaim it and tell people that when they accept Jesus they don’t just accept Him in His resurrection but also in His suffering on the cross. Jesus says we are to take up our cross and follow Him. These are hard words, not fun words. But Jesus says these words bring life. I pray that they’ve brought you life today.

Let’s pray.

Father God, we come before You and I pray that my words have rung true. If I’m wrong in any way I pray that You would bring clarity. I pray that we would search out the Scriptures and recognize what Your Word says, not just assume that it’s true because the preacher said it. I pray that we would wrestle with these things and work through them. I pray that we would stop in the midst of our day filled with joy, contentment and peace in order to recognize that there are many on the road leading to destruction and few on the road leading to life.

Lord, You have enabled us as treasure in jars made of clay to declare the goodness of what You have done in pulling people from that highway so they might enter the narrow gate that through Jesus. Thank You for opening our eyes through the Spirit and the miracle of regeneration that we might see You and glory in You. You are the only way, truth and life that we have. Thank You for making us Your child. For the ones who have never done that, seize them where they are right now and have them seek You while You can still be found and before it’s too late. We pray for Your blessing on our time as we fellowship with one another and speak about such things with those around us. Give us empowerment by Your Spirit to proclaim these truths to a lost world that needs to hear. We love You, thank You and it’s in Your name we pray. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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