

The Sermon on the Mount
Part 13: Secularism, Religion & the Gospel
May 10th & 11th

Introduction:

We've spent the majority of chapters 5, 6 & 7 considering what our lives will look like when Jesus Christ becomes our King...the King of our desires, affections, habits, and attitudes as well as our relationships, finances, and commitments.

And Jesus is very clear that without Him we'll never live this way, and I hope that at some point throughout this series you've felt the weight of that truth!

"Without Jesus Christ there is an unbridgeable gap between the ideal and the actual; the only way out is a personal relationship to Him. The salvation of God not only saves us from hell, but alters our actual lives." Oswald Chambers

Chambers is right on! If you read Jesus' sermon with an ounce of honesty, you'll never come away saying, 'I think I've got this.' No! Instead...we say, 'I could never possibly live this way unless Jesus gives me an unconditional grace to cover my failures, and uncontainable power to do what He says!

In chapter 7, Jesus shows us that it is possible for us to walk in His grace and power and to live the kind of life He has been describing for us! **Read with me starting in verse 13.**

"You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it." Matthew 7:13-14

First...Jesus says, 'You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate.' It's interesting that Jesus uses a word we despise to characterize what our lives will be like if we follow Him!

No one wants to be called narrow today, do they?

What does Jesus mean? If you look at the rest of Jesus' teachings, He's clearly not saying that we should be stuffy, legalistic, prudish, or exclusive toward others because this is the very thing He condemned in the Pharisees who reduced the gospel to a series of rules and regulations.

No...Christianity is narrow in that it demands authenticity and whole-life commitment and purposeful living!

Jesus says...this narrow road is the way to life (fullness)!

The Sermon on the Mount
Part 13: Secularism, Religion & the Gospel
May 10th & 11th

You might be saying... *"This sounds like a very confining and restrictive way to live."*
While that may be true, the narrow road is also liberating and life-giving...

In virtually every area of life, narrowness leads to fullness!

Marriage – When I stood in front of Beth fourteen years ago and committed my life to her for better or worse until death separates us, I willingly said to Beth, *"I'll be narrow for you."*

Meaning, today, there are 7.2 billion people in the world, and split that down the middle...3.6 billion other women, but I chose to commit my life to Beth and her alone...and she chose to commit her life to me and me alone! So...Beth and I don't have E-Harmony accounts...because that would be creepy!

Have you ever considered how narrow marriage is in that sense? Yet...it's the restrictive nature of marriage that leads to joy and delight and intimacy and security.

Parenting – Parenting is also incredibly narrow...especially on money and time!

CNN recently released data saying that it costs approximately \$241,000 to raise a child from birth to 18. Happy Mother's Day! Your children bought you flowers and a card today...and in the 18 years it takes to raise them, you could have purchased the flower store and owned part of Hallmark! Will parenting restrict you financially? Yes!

It also has a narrowing effect on your time. Do you know where I am every night in between 7:30-8:00 almost without exception? I'm at home in one of my kids' bedrooms reading, praying over them and giving goodnight hugs and kisses.

Why? Because we've chosen to walk the narrow road by saying, for this season we're going to make it a priority with our time and money to raise our children so that by the grace of God they will grow up into the young men and women God created them to be. **Is it exhausting?** Yes. **Is it chaos?** Not in our house because I'm a pastor, but I'm sure it is in yours. Just kidding. **Does raising five kids take a lot of work?** Yes! **Do people think we're crazy?** I don't know, do you? Of course you do...but will raising our five children fill us with life and joy and moments of unspeakable delight? **Absolutely it does!!**

Education – If you want to excel in your education, you must commit yourself to study, which means you'll have to say no to many other things. Your peers may consider you narrow...but the reward of a good education is worth it, right?

The Sermon on the Mount
Part 13: Secularism, Religion & the Gospel
May 10th & 11th

Physical health – If you want to be physically healthy...you will probably need to watch what you eat and you'll have to exercise. At times, that will feel incredibly narrow!

Yet, in virtually every area of life, narrowness leads to fullness.

Jesus says, *"The same is true if you want the life that I have come to give you. You must follow the narrow path."*

What does Jesus mean by following the narrow path?

In every area I've just described for you, if you want to experience the fullness of those things you must be committed to them, even exclusively at times!

The same is true when it comes to spiritual things! No one is on the fence, stagnant, or standing still. There are no fine lines when it comes to being apart of God's Kingdom! There are very clear lines. There are two roads...one is the way of Jesus and it leads to life and the other leads away from life. Jesus says that we're all moving toward God or away from Him!

This raises some problems, doesn't it? In today's culture, many people get upset about this part of Jesus' teaching, and they scoff at anyone who claims that there is one way to know God. Many believe that Christians are bigoted for claiming that Jesus Christ is the ONLY WAY to come to God.

Over 150 years ago, in Europe...universities began to teach that all religions were basically the same. And that if you looked at the essence of every major world-religion, you'd find the same god at work in all of them.

Mountain – The argument went like this. Envision a mountain. At the top of the mountain is god, and all around the mountain are multiple paths and each one is simply a different way to get to the top!

And this way of thinking has shaped our thinking, hasn't it? Many of us grew up believing this...or we took a class in college or read a book that convinced us that every religion is basically a different path to the same god...it's very popular today!

This view is called **religious relativism**. But religious relativism is internally flawed and contradictory. It says that no single religion should ever claim to be the only way to know God because no one can really know the way to God! Instead, you should believe that all religions lead to God. **THE QUESTION BECOMES, IF YOU REFUSE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THERE COULD BE ONE WAY TO KNOW GOD, HOW DO YOU KNOW FOR A FACT THAT ALL RELIGIONS LEAD TO GOD?** Don't you see...the very thing religious relativists try to do in keeping people from

The Sermon on the Mount
Part 13: Secularism, Religion & the Gospel
May 10th & 11th

promoting a belief in One True God is the very thing they do when they promote their belief that every path leads to God!

But Jesus won't let us go there...will he? Jesus says that there are two roads in life that lead to two destinations, not many roads that lead to one destination!

Later on in the gospel of John...Jesus had the audacity to say this!

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me." John 14:6

In the book of Acts...the Apostle Peter said about Jesus...

"There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved." Acts 4:12

Now...if Jesus is right, then only when you know Him personally by faith will you know God. But if Jesus is wrong, then He can't be one of many ways to find God. He is a lunatic...a crazy man! He is either THE way to God...or He's NOT THE WAY to God...but He can't be ONE of many ways!

Please hear me...it's not bigoted to claim that Jesus is the only way to know the One True God... Bigotry is arrogance. It's coldness and harshness, but it can't be conviction!

I'll be the first to admit that many people claiming to be Christians have said and done a lot of terrible and destructive things, **but that doesn't mean that Jesus is wrong! It simply means that they were terribly wrong.** Jesus always condemned pride, arrogance, and legalism and where we find Christians slipping into this way of living, we should call it out and get back to Jesus and His Word!

Jesus says...there are two roads, and everyone in this room is on one or the other! What are the two roads?

Broad Road – Jesus says that the broad or wide road is easily accessible, and this road leads to destruction! This is startling...and Jesus means for it to be startling!

The broad road is easy for a number of reasons, but I'll give you two...

First...it's easy because it's the road we were born on!

The Sermon on the Mount
Part 13: Secularism, Religion & the Gospel
May 10th & 11th

We're all born believing that we're competent to run our own lives! At some point, every child tells his or her parent that they don't need help...that they can do it alone!

Children simply say what we all believe...they just don't have filters...

The nature of sin in us is that we resist authority! We don't like anyone else telling us how we should live. As we get older, we learn to accept authority, but generally as a means to an end! We do what our boss says...because if we don't, things will go really bad. Or...we pay our taxes to the government, because if we don't, the IRS knocks on our door with a warrant!

And so there is authority we'll accept because it plays in our favor, but the majority of us won't willingly lay down our lives under the authority of someone else! You see...we believe that we are in control of our lives...

And the Bible calls this sin...you see, we were created for God! To know Him...and love Him... and honor Him by living in the way He designed us to live! This takes the willingness to surrender. To say, *"God...I trust that your way is the best way."* But sin is a spiritual cancer that leads us to take God off of the throne of our heart and to replace Him with SELF...

In Romans chapter three, the Apostle Paul wrote this...

"As the Scriptures say, 'No one is righteous – not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. All have turned away (to walk a different road)..."
Romans 3:10-12a

The broad road is easy...because it's the road we're born on. It's our default...and unless something causes us to face the fact that we're not as in control as we think we are, we'll stay on the broad road of SELF!

Second...the broad road is easy because it's where the majority travels!

There's no more popular road to walk today than the road of SELF! We even say things like, *Live and Let Live*. Don't tell me what to do and I won't tell you what to do! On the broad road, you can take God or leave him. Take truth or leave it. Take morality or leave it. Care about the world or toss it!

The broad road seems roomy and tolerant and nice...because let's be honest, *"Who doesn't like to be in charge!"*

The Sermon on the Mount
Part 13: Secularism, Religion & the Gospel
May 10th & 11th

But here's the deal! **The broad road will only work until life falls apart**, which is why many people finally start to wrestle with Jesus deeply when their life starts to crumble bringing them face to face with their mortality.

The broad road works until you get old. Solomon, the wisest king of Israel had wealth and power and romance and sex at his fingertips, and he came to the end of his life and wrote, *"All of this is meaningless."* Many people toward the end of life begin to realize that everything they've built their life on is going to go away.' In those moments, they begin to see that the broad road doesn't answer life's most important questions. **My life is going somewhere, but where?**

"This road isn't leading me where I want to go!"

Illustration: Early on, just after Beth and I moved to New England...we were on our way to York, Maine but I made a wrong turn and ended up in Rockport, Mass. By Gloucester, I realized that I had taken the wrong road and we were lost! Beth was frustrated at me. It was summer in Rockport, but it felt like winter! Very uncomfortable...and very hard to swallow my pride but eventually I did...I admitted that I was lost!

In the same way, though the broad road of self seems right at first, but it only leads us away from the purposes and plans of God and the further you walk from God, the more heartache and pain you'll experience! **And it's only by the mercy of God that we wake up one day and something inside us says, "The direction I'm traveling isn't where I am supposed to be...and unless I turn around it's going to destroy me."**

And Jesus says, *Will you stop walking the broad road and come to me and together we'll walk a different road?*

What is that road?

Narrow Road – The word narrow means 'pinched or confined.' Jesus says that this road is difficult to walk.

What is this road? As we've walked through Jesus' sermon, have you been listening to Him describe it? As Jesus' followers, we are to display a **flawless purity** in our thoughts, motives, and actions all of the time. We are to be people who **never break our word**, even if it hurts. We are to **reconcile** every relationship that is broken even if it means getting slapped. We are to **love and pray for those who hate us!** We are to live for Jesus so **purposefully** that when people cross our path

The Sermon on the Mount
Part 13: Secularism, Religion & the Gospel
May 10th & 11th

they see His greatness in the way we live. When He says go...we go; when He says give...we give; when He says love...we love...this is a life that flies in the face of the culture!

Don't for a moment believe that the Christian life is easy. Jesus said, *"If you want to follow me...you must carry your cross and die to yourself every day."* He says, *"You must love me so much that your love for others pales in comparison. I want your heart, soul, mind and your strength to be at my command!"*

Gospel – Jesus words are hard, aren't they? And unless you see them through the lens of the cross, you will never walk this narrow road!

You must first see the narrow road that Jesus walked for you!

Jesus was the rightful King. He was rich, yet He became poor to make you rich. He was innocent, yet He was pronounced guilty and convicted with criminals to set you free. He was the Author of Life, yet He was condemned to death and crucified on a cross to give you life!

He died for us because we haven't lived for Him!

Every other major world-religion says, 'if you want to get to God, this is how you must live.' Only Christianity says, 'God loved us so much that He gave His only Son for us when we were His enemies!'

You will never walk the narrow road that Jesus calls you to, unless you see the great love He has for you!

Close

How do you know what road you're on today? How do you know if you're walking the narrow road that leads to life...or the broad that leads to destruction?

Let me give you two ways to answer that question!

Prodigal Son – In Luke chapter 15, Jesus told a story of a young impetuous son who demanded his part of his father's inheritance (which in that culture was like telling your father to go die). He took the broad road of independence and rebellion and squandered everything on lavish parties and living! When all of his money ran out, he found himself sitting in a pigsty feeding pigs and desiring their food. It was in this moment that he realized a longing in his heart for home! To get home, he had to

The Sermon on the Mount
Part 13: Secularism, Religion & the Gospel
May 10th & 11th

drop his pride and control and make the long journey down the narrow path back into his father's arms. As the father saw him coming down the road, what did he do? Chastise him...you stupid son, why did you leave, you may not come near! NO!! He clothed him with a family robe and ring, killed the fattened calf, and threw a party!

Let me ask you...how did the young man come back into His Father's arms? He walked the one narrow path that led home. He looked his Father in the eyes and said... *"I'm sorry that I walked away! I need your mercy? I want to come home!"*

The Bible calls this faith! The way that we come into a relationship with our Heavenly Father is by looking him in the eyes by faith and saying, *"I'm sorry that I left home and ran away! I need your mercy to cover my sin! Please take me back on the basis of what Jesus Christ did for me! I want to come home!"*

The narrow road is not about trying really hard to be a good person or getting to God on your own goodness! The Apostle Paul says that when we call on Jesus and confess our need for Him, God saves us! Meaning...He forgives us...He places a new heart in us...awakens us to life...and sets us on a new path!

So...first, it takes an act of faith to walk home into the arms of your Heavenly Father! Have you done that? Have you confessed to God that you've spent much of your life walking the road of self and sin, but now you want to return home?

Let me give you a second way to know if you're walking the narrow or the broad road...and it's found in verse 17 when Jesus says...

"A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit...Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions."
Matthew 7:17-18, 20

Jesus says here and again in John chapter 15... If you want to know if you're walking Jesus' road, look at your life. Is there fruit? Anytime Scripture talks about fruit, it describes the life-transformation that God brings about in us as we live our lives in surrender and obedience to Jesus!

When you look at your life, are you growing in peace and confidence because of what Jesus has done? Is there a growing hunger to know and obey God with your whole life? Are you compassionate toward your neighbor than you were last year? Are things like generosity and kindness and patience beginning to take over your life? Are your relationships marked by wholeness? Husbands...are you loving and serving your wives?

Is there growth? Not...are you perfect is there recognizable change in your life? And when others are around you...is there a refreshing sweetness to your life?

Or is there anger, bitterness, jealousy, greed, lust, selfishness? These things aren't the work of the Spirit of God in you.

As you walk with Jesus and obey Him, he fashions his life in you.

"Fruit bearing is always mentioned as the manifestation of an intimate union with Jesus."

Close

Please hear my heart...and listen to Jesus' words. You can choose the broad path! You can choose to ignore God and live for something other than Jesus...career, success, money, romance, or family...all of which are wonderful things, but they make terrible gods. And when you turn them into gods, they will fail you and they will break your heart and cause disintegration and destruction in your life.

This is hell on earth...and it leads toward an eternal hell. What is hell but the complete absence of God and disintegration of everything that is good and right and lovely and beautiful?

Or...you can choose the narrow way, and the fullness of life that Jesus offers you! A life of joy, peace, love, hope, and purpose. Have you responded to Jesus Christ in faith? Have you surrendered complete control of your life to Him?

You can do that today...don't put it off! If God is pressing on your heart, please don't wait to press into Him! Mark your connection card, *"I'd like to have a conversation about Jesus and we will follow up with you."*

Pray