

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *Wide & Narrow*
SERIES: *Whoever Hears These Words*
SCRIPTURES: *Matthew 7:13-23*
SPEAKER: *Shaun Kipe*
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**Credit to Scot McKnight, John Ortberg for valuable insights regarding this message!*

BABY DEDICATION 3RD SERVICE FOR VIOLET GRACE YODER (CORBIN AND KRISTEN)

Well good morning, it is so great to worship with you. We only have two weeks left in our Sermon on the Mount series. This morning and next Sunday. Before we get into our passage for this morning, I want to share a riddle with you. So put you're thinking caps on...muster up all of your brain power.

There's this riddle I remember from when I was younger. And if you heard this before don't spoil the ending.

Suppose you are trapped in a room. And there are only two doors out of the room (**PIC OF ROOM TWO DOORS**). One door leads to life and freedom. The other door leads to instant and immediate death. It's just you don't know which door is which.

There is also one guard standing at each of the doors (**GUARDS APPEAR AT DOORS**). One of the guards always lies. The other always tells the truth. But, you don't know, which is which. You are allowed to ask one and only one question, to one of the guards.

What question can you ask that will help you to determine, which door is the door to life and freedom?

The question you ask is:

“Which door would your friend (the other guard) tell me to go out?”

If you’re speaking to the liar-guard, he will lie and he will tell you that his friend, would point to the door that leads to death.

If you’re speaking to the truth-guard, he will tell you the truth, that the liar-guard would point you to go out the door that leads to death.

So, no matter which guard you are speaking, both will point to the door that leads to death, and therefore you go out the other door.

I told you it’s a brain-buster, it takes some work, thought, effort to think through all of that. But the truth is that’s a silly riddle. It doesn’t really matter whether you can figure that out or not. You’ll likely never put in a situation where you are forced to choose between life and death...on the other hand, maybe that’s exactly what Jesus offers us in our passage this morning.

If you’re following along in your Bible, please turn to Matthew 7:13...here’s what Jesus says...

¹³ “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Jesus says, there are two gates one leads to life and the other death. Make sure you go through the narrow gate. And the question is...

How do you know if you're walking through the right gate? How do you know if you're on the road to life? Is it a riddle that you have to figure out?

I. What is the narrow gate?

Now in some ways it's kind of riddle. Because there is a lot of misunderstanding surrounding this passage and what Jesus really means.

Often when we read this passage, we assume that the narrow gate means, **right belief**. The narrow gate means believing the right things. This often referred to as orthodoxy.

Entering the narrow gate has become synonymous with...giving mental ascent to a certain set of correct doctrines or truths or principles or ideas.

But that's not exactly what Jesus is referring to in this passage. And if we miss what Jesus is saying here, we must just end up walking through the wrong door.

In this passage **the narrow gate is obedience to Jesus**. Right behavior not right belief. Orthopraxy.

And I just want to say this, because sometimes in our emphasis people misunderstand. I am NOT saying that right belief or correct doctrine do not matter.

We need to have important conversations with fellow believers about theology (study of God), the nature of Scripture, about the incarnation, about soteriology and eschatology and epistemology. We have to be thoughtful, intelligent.

Our beliefs matter. In fact if you're really into it. You can go on-line you can find the BIC manual of doctrine and government. What we believe matters.

And when you really get down to it, it's hard to separate right belief from right behavior. Usually you act on what you believe.

But the emphasis of Jesus passage, here is not right belief, it's right behavior. The narrow gate is not, doctrinal correctness (orthodoxy), it's obedience to Jesus.

We started our sermon series off, way back in February and we said, Jesus isn't just interested in what we believe but how we live. Remember "whoever hears these words of mine and puts them into practice..."

Now some of our confusion comes in because right after talking about the narrow and wide gates Jesus says... ¹⁵ **“Watch out for false prophets...”**

And we assume false prophets are people who are teaching incorrect doctrine. But notice in this passage false prophets are not those teaching incorrect doctrine...they are teachers, who may be teaching correct doctrines, but they are false, because they do not practice what they preach.

¹⁵ **“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.**

“every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.”

The Greek word in this passage that is translated as “bears fruit” is the Greek word POIEW and it literally means “to do or make or practice or act on”.

Good fruit means doing the will of God, bad fruit means not doing the will of God!
(MckNight)

Jesus said this about the religious leaders. **Do everything they tell you to do. But do not do what they do. For they do not practice what they preach.**

Jesus emphasis in this passage is right living, not right belief.

The narrow gate is not understanding a set of beliefs or book, it’s entering into relationship with the Messiah, a person. The narrow gate means putting into practice the life and teachings of Jesus and by addition...all of Scripture

Entering the narrow gate means becoming a Kingdom of heaven person. Entering the narrow gate means...knowing, loving and following Jesus.

Here’s how Dallas Willard says it...

The narrow gate is not, as so often assumed, doctrinal correctness. The narrow gate is obedience- and the confidence in Jesus necessary to it. We can see that it is not doctrinal correctness because many people who cannot even understand the correct doctrines nevertheless place their full faith in him. Moreover, we find many people who seem to be very correct doctrinally but have hearts full of hatred and unforgiveness. The broad gate, by contrast, is simply doing whatever I want to do. (Willard)

This is why Jesus says...

21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ 23 Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

If the narrow gate means, that obedience to Jesus and the Kingdom of heaven life are the right way to live or the only way to life and freedom then...

II. Isn't the narrow gate exclusive?

So let's just talk about that word for a minute. In fact this is one of the most common critiques of the Christian faith in our world today. Talking about a narrow gate kind of sounds exclusive, narrow-minded, intolerant, and arrogant.

Exclusive is kind of a bad word in world; it kind of carries the connotation of “I'm right. You're wrong. I'm in, you're out.”

And its important for us, as church people to own our failures. The Church, has often been narrow-minded, intolerant and arrogant. We use our claims of absolute truth and concepts like the narrow gate to abuse, condemn, shame, fight...and when we do it is wrong.

This is why, in our world, you often hear people saying: What we need is **tolerance** not exclusivity?

Now here's the problem...tolerance is a pretty low standard as a general guideline for doing life. Tolerance kind of means, “to put up with.” It kind carries the idea of doing just enough to get by, doing only what is necessary. John Ortberg says it this way...

“When you got married and said your wedding vows you didn’t say ‘For better, for worse, in sickness and health, I put up with and endure you until death brings relief.’ You don’t send your kids off to school and say, ‘Hope you have a good day kids, I’ll be here to tolerate you when you get home.’ You don’t go to birthday parties and sing ‘we tolerate you, we tolerate you’.”

Do you know why? Because you weren’t created for tolerance.

Jesus never encourages people to live a life of tolerance. Jesus does not say, you can tolerate some anger and physical abuse in your relationships. Jesus does not say if you have a co-worker that you don’t like and you don’t get along with and you don’t like what they believe or how they act, just tolerate them. Jesus does not say, tolerate a little bit of lust in your life. He doesn’t say, if people are from a different country or speak a different language or have a different cultural background, just tolerate them. He doesn’t say tolerate your enemies. And if someone forces you to go one mile, tolerate it.”

(Ortberg)

That’s not good enough. We were not created to be a people who just tolerate life. Instead, all throughout your Bible, Jesus teaches time and time again that we were created for a life of abundance, love, forgiveness, grace, joy...

In fact, think about it this way, even the idea that we should tolerate others, starts with a really important foundational truth. It kind of starts with the premise that all people are valuable enough and deserving of being tolerated.

Even tolerance begins with the claim that other people have some kind of intrinsic value and worth. And the idea that all people have intrinsic value and worth is an exclusive claim. God does not give us other options. You don’t get to choose if other people have value and worth. In the kingdom of Heaven life, the King in your

Kingdom tells you that every person is worthy of being celebrated, loved, cherished!
And you don't get a say.

You were made not to tolerate life, but live and thrive. And Jesus gets very clear, that the only way to experience that life is the Kingdom of heaven life. And Jesus is the gate into that Kingdom.

Jesus says, when it comes to life there is a narrow way. There is a narrow gate. It's Jesus. Jesus teachings about the right way to live, are not optional suggestions, good advice from your crazy uncle. **I am the way, the truth and the life.**

And so in that sense what Jesus says is exclusive.

Think about it this way. We all make exclusive claims every day about all kinds of stuff.

If you want to learn to play the piano and you want to experience the glory and freedom of piano music. Every piano teacher will tell you that there is a right way to thrive. There is a right posture and finger/hand position. There are right notes. That's how we distinguish between beautiful music that is pleasant and someone just randomly smashing the piano keys. And some people may say, "Well that's being exclusive to say there is a right way to position your hands, I should be able to do it any way I want."

Some of you know I help to coach youth soccer. I'll just tell when it comes to soccer there is proper way to kick a soccer ball.

Use your laces.

Toe pointed down.

Ankle locked.

Support foot beside the ball.

Land on your kicking foot.

That's the way. It's kind of like the narrow gate way to kick a soccer ball. If you want to experience the glory and freedom of soccer, then you have to learn to kick the ball the right way. And so we practice, over and over and over. And did you know, in all seriousness, I've never had a parent come up to me after practice and say, "We noticed you were teaching our kids that there was a right way to kick the ball. That rather exclusive. We'd rather teach our kids to kick the ball any way they want, that seems a little more fair."

I could just keep giving you examples. Most us in here are pretty exclusive about what we put in the gas tank of our car.

So, when it comes to life (here and now and into eternity), if your goal, desire is abundant life...Jesus is the master teacher and he's pretty exclusive about what that life needs to look like.

The problem is not that Jesus claim is exclusive. The problem is that sadly, all too often, in churches we have become exclusive about all of the wrong things.

And so it turns out, what we need in our world is not "tolerance for everything".

We need to be able to say to racism it is wrong and will not tolerate it. We are exclusive about that. We need to be able to say to the abusive spouse or parent. That is wrong.

The cure for arrogance, intolerance, narrow-mindedness... is not "tolerance toward everything", rather the cure is finding the right kind of exclusiveness. It's learning to be exclusive about the right things.

Now where are we gonna find that right kind of exclusiveness? The kind that is not arrogant, intolerant, narrow-minded. Where will find an exclusiveness that will help us change what's wrong with our lives but won't condemn us for our wrongs.

But the kind that is also exclusive enough to say that injustices...this is not ok.

Well, Jesus says, you've come to the right place because I'm the master of that kind of living. Jesus says, what you're really after is me, my life, my teachings! What you're really after is the Kingdom of heaven life.

The exclusive life that Jesus taught was the golden rule community, "do to others what you would have them do to you." And he was exclusive about it. It's the narrow gate.

What Jesus believed and lived exclusively is that every person, created in his image, is worthy of God's incredible, grace-filled love.

What Jesus believed and lived exclusively was a life of humility that has no place for arrogance or "I'm better than you mentality"...no matter what the person looks like, speaks like. No matter what their beliefs are or their life's failures. No matter what country they come from or what language they speak. Jesus is exclusive about his incredible grace-filled love.

If your enemies are hungry, feed them. It's exclusive in the life of Jesus. In fact he died on a cross because of this. If a Roman soldier forces you to go one mile, go two...because that's the narrow gate. It's exclusive.

We are exclusive about not judging. We are exclusive about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for widows and children, strangers and refugees. There's no other way. We are exclusive about caring for our world and storing treasure in heaven, not treasure on earth.

The Kingdom of Heaven life that Jesus taught and lived reached out and touched lepers. Held conversations with Samaritan women outcasts, turned religious Pharisees from stoning a prostitute, shared meals with tax collectors.

Jesus was pretty exclusive about the need to eat with tax collectors and sinners. This is the way of Jesus. This is the narrow gate.

And it kind of leads us to the last thing you need to know about the narrow gate.

Sometimes people think the narrow gate seems to suggest “God enjoys keeping people out of heaven.”

It almost appears that God seems to enjoy that only a few people make it and everyone else gets left out.

There is one reason the gate is narrow and only a few find it. And it's not because God is hoping to keep people out.

III. It's a narrow gate because it's hard.

The gate is narrow, because it's gonna cost you your life. It's narrow and only a few will find it, not because Jesus is trying to keep people out or someone didn't fill out the doctrinal questionnaire exactly right. It's narrow because it's hard and demanding discipleship.

See when we turn the narrow gate into simply believing the right things it's because deep down we want a short cut to the life and freedom. It's because we don't want it to be too hard.

One of my favorite authors is a gentleman named Dallas Willard, he has this really great line that I kind of remind myself almost each day he says, **“Grace is opposed to earning, not effort.”**

You can't earn God's grace. But if you want to experience God's grace-filled abundant life...it will take effort. And sometimes people don't like that.

See everyone likes the idea of being a great piano player, but all great piano players know that it's gonna cost them significant sacrifices to achieve their goal.

Sometimes Keagan and I will go out in the backyard and we will ball juggle. And I can juggle forever without letting the ball hit the ground. I can do all kinds of tricks. And he'll say, “Man dad, how can you do that?” But I know, the hours, and hours of juggling it took get there.

It requires a person to turn from sin and follow Jesus. And creating habits that turn you from sin, may be really hard.

It might mean confessing to a close friend and finding accountability.

It's a narrow gate because “now you can't just tolerate any kind of language or attitude.” You have to give up your harsh words, you have to give your greed, you have to give up lust. (I hear people say to me all the time, look just don't touch. But Jesus followers of Jesus are called to a higher standard, a narrower gate....the one that leads to life.)

He's asking for you. He's asking for your motivations, your intentions, your thought life. He's asking for every decision, relationship, and conversation.

And I'll just tell you that's why you need Jesus. That's why your journey to becoming a Kingdom of heaven person is a relationship with him. It's hard and you

will fail. And you will need Him by your side. To pick you up, to encourage you, to forgive you, to lay down his life for you.

You'll need to keep his example and his words and his Holy spirit in front of you...each and every day. Jesus is also exclusive about this...it's why he was called Emmanuel. He will be with you.