

**“Time to Choose”**

Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 13:22-30  
Sermon on the Mount Series

*“When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight”*  
Jeremiah 15:16

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## Meditation

Three weeks ago, I mentioned this analysis of Jesus' sermon:

Chapter 5 called us to the width of mercy (**Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy**); chapter 6 to the height of faith (**your Father who sees in secret will reward you – faith is - the conviction of things not seen**), and now chapter 7 calls us to the depth of justice. – see Matthew 23:23 – Jesus confronts the religious teachers with neglecting the weightiest themes of God's Word: justice, mercy, and faith.

This reflects Micah 6:8 . . . **and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness (mercy), and to walk humbly with your God (faith)?**

**“To do justice”** is the underlying theme throughout this final part of Jesus' sermon. “Doing justice” for the Christian is: one, living with a substantial understanding of God's justice and judgement at the end of days; two, living with a personal application of justice in light of God's justice; three, ‘judging’ others and life only from the humility of knowing one and two.

Jesus continues to warn his followers to live in a narrow way due to what is at the end of the way. **But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.**

Jesus tells us to form our lives not so much around our beginnings – for example, our family heritage; our natural gifts and abilities; our educational experiences and so on. Rather, form our lives around what we understand about our ending – in Jesus's words: **destruction or life.**

Jesus tells us we are faced with one basic choice in life. In and of itself this is judgment. We are only given two options – one or the other – we naturally react against that – is it not unfair? – do I not have more than one choice?

And then further, this same saying of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke is within a context of the judgement of God faced by everyone at the end of life and at the end of the age.

Jesus' sermon begins with blessings and ends with warnings all throughout chapter seven: the narrow or wide gate; the true or false prophet; the true or false disciple; the wise or foolish builder.

Jesus tells us to form our lives not so much around our beginnings, rather around our ending.

Last week I had a conversation with my eldest granddaughter about death. Her young friend from Haines Junction recently died when his vehicle struck a moose. We pondered the obvious tragedy of a young life ended, seemingly way before it ought to have; of the curious timing of the ‘chance’ meeting, had he left home a moment sooner or later would the accident have been avoided?; we talked about the many good things in the young man's life; and we ended our conversation with wonderings about a time to die, which comes to all of us, but as a rule, over which we do not spend a lot of time contemplating.

However, we agreed, in light of what happened to her friend, and in light of her current college studies, that it is a good thing, recognizing the surety and unpredictability of death, to also study and develop personal identity in view of our physical end: its meaning; the likelihood of existence beyond death; the relation between then and now and possible consequential responsibility and accountability

And I, of course, suggested in light of all of this that Jesus Christ actually presents a really solid example and teaching about understanding life in the face of death; continued existence; and responsibility and accountability for the gift of life we live.

**But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.**

Given the death of our Evangelical senior statesman, Billy Graham, last week I will close with his reflections on these words of Jesus:

*(Billy Graham "The Sin of Tolerance" February 2, 1959, issue of Christianity Today)*

One of the pet words of this age is "tolerance." It is a good word, but we have tried to stretch it over too great an area of life. We have applied it too often where it does not belong. The word "tolerant" means "liberal," "broad-minded," "willing to put up with beliefs opposed to one's convictions," and "the allowance of something not wholly approved."

Tolerance, in one sense, implies the compromise of one's convictions, a yielding of ground upon important issues. Hence, over-tolerance in moral issues has made us soft, flabby and devoid of conviction.

We have become tolerant about divorce; we have become tolerant about the use of alcohol; we have become tolerant about delinquency; we have become tolerant about wickedness in high places; we have become tolerant about immorality; we have become tolerant about crime and we have become tolerant about godlessness. We have become tolerant of unbelief.

In a book recently published on what prominent people believe, 60 out of 100 did not even mention God, and only 11 out of 100 mentioned Jesus. There was a manifest tolerance toward soft character and a broadmindedness about morals, characteristic of our day. We have been sapped of conviction, drained of our beliefs and bereft of our faith.

### **The Way Is Narrow**

The sciences, however, call for narrow-mindedness. There is no room for broad-mindedness in the laboratory. Water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit at sea level. It is never 100 degrees nor 189 degrees—but always 212. Water freezes at 32 degrees—not at 23 or 31.

Objects heavier than air are always attracted to the center of the earth. They always go down—never up. I know this is very narrow, but the law of gravity decrees it so, and science is narrow.

Take mathematics. The sum of two plus two is four—not three-and-a-half. That seems very narrow, but arithmetic is not broad. Neither is geometry. It says that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. That seems very dogmatic and narrow, but geometry is intolerant.

A compass will always point to the magnetic north. It seems that is a very narrow view, but a compass is not very "broad-minded." If it were, all the ships at sea, and all the planes in the air would be in danger.

If you should ask a man the direction to New York City and he said, "Oh, just take any road you wish, they all lead there," you would question either his sanity or his truthfulness. Somehow, we have gotten it into our minds that "all roads lead to heaven." You hear people say, "Do your best," "Be honest," and "Be sincere—and you will make it to heaven all right."

But Jesus Christ, who journeyed from heaven to earth and back to heaven again—who knew the way better than any man who ever lived—said, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:13,14).

*Jesus was narrow about the way of salvation.*

He plainly pointed out that there are two roads in life. One is broad—lacking in faith, convictions, and morals. It is the easy, popular, careless way. It is the way of the crowd, the way of the majority, the way of the world. He said, "Many there be that go in thereat." But he pointed out that this road, easy though it is, popular though it may be, heavily traveled though it is, leads to destruction. And in loving, compassionate intolerance he says, "Enter ye in at the strait gate ... because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life."

In Baptism we enter through the narrow gate and at the Lord's Table we recommit to walk the narrow road. May we think on these things as we share the Bread and the Cup. Amen.