**Week 36**

**The Narrow Gate**

**RECAP**Over the last two weeks, Jesus has shown us how to judge rightly with humility, not hypocrisy. He reminded us that we’re all sinners, each with our blind spots. Yet, we’re still called to stand for truth, even when it costs us. In our weakness, we are invited to ask, seek, and knock to cry out for wisdom, discernment, and the Spirit’s strength to walk in love and truth with others. Jesus is about to bring it all to a final point. After revealing what kind of heart the people will have in His kingdom, He now calls us to examine the road we’re all on. Few will choose the narrow path, but it’s the only one that leads to life.

**The Narrow Gate**

**READ:** Matthew 7:13-14 **“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. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."**

Our lives are full of decisions. What to eat, where to work, who to marry, what to say or do in any given situation; the list of decisions goes on and on. Some decisions, like “what do I wear today,” are trivial in the scope of life. However, other choices are life-altering, such as who I should marry or what career I should pursue. The most crucial decision a human can make is about who Jesus Christ is and whether to enter His Kingdom. This is the decision Jesus is asking the crowd, and us, to make today.

We see that God has always given man a choice to follow Him and His commands.

**READ: Deuteronomy 30:19-20 “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, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”**

**READ: Joshua 24:13-15 ‘I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant.’“Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”**

**READ: 1 Kings 18:21 And Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” And the people did not answer him a word.**

**Just a few weeks ago, Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters.” We must choose one or the other.**

**“Enter”** is a direct action of choosing. We can’t sit by the gate and admire it; we can’t sit at the gate and rest. We can’t sit on the gate wavering between two paths. **We must enter the gate deliberately.** We cannot simply enter any gate; God has given us one narrow gate to enter. There is only one gate that leads to life. There is only one way to enter. Our blind eyes must be opened to find the gate, and then we must have faith in entering such a narrow, hard path, and often a lonely path, as not many others are on it.

Jesus says that we must **“strive”** to enter the narrow door!

**READ: Luke 13:24 “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”**

What does it mean to “strive”? The Greek word is *agōnizomai,* which means: To struggle, to fight, to contend, labor fervently, exert oneself with intense effort. Rooted in the word **"agōn"**, from which we get the word **"agony",** when used in other passages, we see this is not passive wording; it is “war-like” behaviors. **Salvation is free, but it is not cheap.**

The narrow gate is to repent, lay down every selfish desire, and everything we cling to in this world. It is total surrender and self-denial. It is declaring war on the flesh, denying its sensuous appetite, and declaring war on sin.

**READ: Matthew 10:38-39 “And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”**

**READ: Matthew 16:24-25 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his lifewill lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”**

Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell all he had, give it to the poor, and follow Him. Jesus said the most excellent command is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. This means everything you are and with everything you have is now submitted to Him.

**Everyone Turn To**

**READ:** Luke 14:26-33 **(Count the cost of following Jesus)**

Salvation is not something we add to our great life. Salvation is the exchange of all that we are for all that He is.

**READ: Matthew 13:44-46 The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then, in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.**

The narrow gate requires true repentance. Jesus is speaking to a Jewish audience, many of whom assumed they were secure because of their ethnic lineage, their connection to Abraham, their strict observance of traditions, or their attempts to keep the Law. But entrance into God’s Kingdom is not granted by heritage, religion, or outward conformity. Jesus shifts the focus to the individual, calling each person to make a personal decision. The narrow gate is entered one at a time, not with our status, works, or possessions, but with empty hands and a surrendered heart. We come humbled, stripped of self-righteousness, laying everything down at the cross. Only when we come to the end of ourselves, repent, and place our faith entirely in the finished work of Christ, do we find the gate that leads to life. And as Jesus warned, few will find it.

**Why Did Jesus Make the Narrow Path Hard**

1. **It strips away the self**

The narrow path isn’t hard because God is playing some sick game; it’s hard because dying to self is hard, and we make it hard because we love the world, ourselves, and self-pleasure.

**READ: Luke 9:23 “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily.”**

We are born with a nature that wants independence, comfort, control, and approval, but the narrow path requires:

1. Repentance (turning from sin)
2. Submission (yielding to Christ’s Lordship)
3. Endurance (staying faithful even when it costs us everything)

That will always feel “undesirable” to the flesh. Very few are willing to give up their lives for someone else's will. However, it is the very process that frees us and makes us more like Jesus. It’s the same thing Jesus did for us.

1. **It divides the tares from the wheat**

The narrow path reveals who truly loves Jesus and who are false pretenders. It’s a refining process. The narrow path separates those who love the idea of Jesus but have no desire to obey Him from the born-again believers who are giving up everything to serve their Master.

1. **The reward is eternal life**

The narrow path leads to the greatest treasure imaginable, eternal life with God.

**“For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life” Matthew 7:14**

If salvation came through ease and pleasure, it would be no different than the world’s ways. But Jesus offers something far better: life, peace, holiness, and fellowship with the living God. That road must be different from the wide one, because it leads to a different destination.

1. **We are to follow Christ’s example**

Jesus didn’t call us to a path He avoided; He calls us to a path He too followed.

**READ: Isaiah 53:3 “He was despised and rejectedby men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”**

**READ: Philippians 2:4-8 “Let each of you look not only to his interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”**

**The narrow path is hard because it’s the road of the cross. It leads us to crucify the flesh, but it also leads us to resurrection life. It is not a path of comfort, but of transformation.**

**OPEN DISCUSSION**

**The Wide Gate**

There are only two ways a man can choose to go: the broad way or the narrow way. The wide road is very accommodating; it’s broad and can fit many people. It implies an easier path to follow, smoother roads, and more enjoyable travel, unlike the narrow path that is difficult to find, hard to walk on, and not accommodating to the masses. The wide way is easy, attractive, inclusive, indulgent, permissive, and self-oriented. There are a few rules: we do it our way, we live our way, and the god we made up on that path is ok with it. Many on this road, as we will study in a few weeks, are religious enough to profess Jesus on this wide path, but rebellious enough to end up in eternal damnation.

On the broad road, people's sins are tolerated and justified; truth is relative; humility and submission are ignored. God’s word is repeated but not studied. There is no spiritual maturity, no commitment, no sacrifice. It is an easy way of life; one they have chosen. Many believe they are following Jesus, but they are following another spirit altogether.

**READ: Ephesians 2:2-4 “in which you once walked, 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 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the bodyand the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”**

**READ: Proverbs 14:12 “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death”**

**Open Your Bibles**

**READ:** Luke 13:23-30 **(Many will try to enter in the narrow door but will be turned away)**

Both paths have a sign that reads, “Heaven Leads Here.” However, only one path leads there. The broad road has deceived many into thinking they are on the right path leading to life, when in fact their end will be destruction. The wide gate encompasses every imaginable religion, philosophy, and ideology, including those who think they are following Jesus. It is the blind leading the blind. This is the road the Pharisees had the people on. **(We will talk about False Prophets at the next gathering)**

The word **"destruction"** in Greek is ***apōleia***, meaning: to destroy, utter destruction of vessels, perishing, ruin, a destruction that consists of utter misery in eternal hell.

Jesus leaves no room for neutrality in this matter. There are only two gates, two paths, two destinations, and two groups of people: the **many** and the **few**.

Let that sink in; Many will walk the easy road to destruction, and few will find the narrow path to life. Not because God has hidden it, but because **so few are willing to surrender what must be left behind to enter it.**

The broad road feels right to the flesh; it’s appealing, and it offers a sense of freedom, but it's a false freedom. Freedom that leads to spiritual bondage and ultimately to ruin. The narrow way, by contrast, requires death to self and obedience to Christ. It's not popular. It's not applauded. But it’s the only way that leads to eternal life.

**Which Road Are You On?**

**1. What is your relationship to Jesus?**

**a. Broad Road:** You know *about* Jesus, quote Him, sing about Him, but He doesn’t rule your heart or shape your daily life. He is an accessory you wear around your neck, but He is not a Master you follow.

**b. Narrow Path:** You’ve repented, trusted in Jesus alone for salvation, and submitted to Him as Lord and Master, not just Savior. You obey His commands, willing to lose it all to follow Him.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter… but the one who does the will of my Father” **Matthew 7:21**

**2. Is the Bible your final authority?**

**a. Broad Road:** You pick and choose verses. You follow what feels good. You twist Scripture to fit your lifestyle, or you do not give the Bible much priority in your life.

**b. Narrow Path:** You submit to God’s Word, even when it's hard. You let Scripture correct you. You obey what it says even when we want to do it our way. You have a biblical worldview, not one corrupted by modern culture and trends.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet” **Psalm 119:105**  
“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word” **Matthew 4:4**

**3. How do you respond to sin?**

**a. Broad Road:** Sin is tolerated, excused, or hidden. Repentance is rare. There is no conviction, only justification. You get angry when others try to correct you.

**b. Narrow Path:** Sin grieves you; you repent when convicted. There’s a growing desire for holiness. It is not just good moral behavior but a radical transformation.

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh” **Galatians 5:24**“Blessed are those who mourn” **Matthew 5:4**

**4. Are you carrying a cross or chasing comfort?**

**a. Broad Road:** Life is all about ease, pleasure, and self. Christianity is a label, not a lifestyle. Your life doesn’t look that much different from before; perhaps some moral maturity, but following Jesus hasn't cost you anything.

**b. Narrow Path:** You deny yourself, embrace suffering for Christ. You value obedience more than approval. Following Him has cost you friends, family, lifestyle, jobs, etc.

“Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” **Matthew 10:38**

**5. Is your faith producing fruit?**

**a. Broad Road:** No real growth, or hunger for God or the things that God loves. Gathering with the saints is more about entertainment than a body knit together for His purposes. It’s a religion, not a radical love relationship with God and His people.

**b. Narrow Path:** You’re becoming more like Christ over time, more loving, humble, obedient, prayerful. You desire to fulfill a calling bigger than you, and you want to do it with the bride of Christ.

“You will recognize them by their fruits.” **Matthew 7:16**“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” **2 Corinthians 5:17**

“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.” **2 Corinthians 13:5**

**Summary**

Jesus begins His Sermon on the Mount by describing the kind of people who belong to His Kingdom. And from the very start, we can see that this isn’t a message for those looking for comfort or convenience. It's a wake-up call. In Matthew 5, Jesus gives us the Beatitudes, not a list of rules, but a portrait of the heart posture of His faithful followers. He says it’s not the powerful or popular who are blessed, but **the poor in spirit, the meek, the mourners, the merciful, and the persecuted.** These aren’t the qualities our culture praises, but they are the qualities of those who walk the narrow path.

He calls us to **be salt and light** in a world that’s dark and decaying to stand out, not blend in. He makes it clear, He didn’t come to do away with the Law, but to fulfill it. Then He raises the standard beyond outward behavior and presses into the condition of our hearts. He says that **anger is the root of murder, and lust is the root of adultery.** Jesus is after our hearts, not just our actions. He’s calling His people to a righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees, not because we try harder, but because we surrender deeper.

In chapter 6, Jesus shifts to what true devotion looks like. He warns against performative religion, where praying, giving, and fasting are done just to be seen by others. Instead, He invites us into **secret, sincere, intimate fellowship** with the Father. He teaches us how to pray with kingdom priorities, how to fast in humility, and how to give without needing applause. Then He calls us to examine our treasure. Are we storing it on Earth, where it fades? Or in Heaven, where it lasts? He reminds us that **we cannot serve both God and money**. And when it comes to the worries of life, what we’ll eat, wear, or face tomorrow, He calls us to trust the Father who already knows what we need. **“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,”** Jesus says, “and all these things will be added to you.”

As we move into chapter 7, Jesus warns against hypocritical judgment. He doesn't tell us never to judge but to judge rightly. Before we confront others, we need to examine our hearts and repent of our sins. Only then can we help others see clearly. He invites us to keep **asking, seeking, and knocking** because our Father is generous to those who come to Him in faith. But then He brings it all to a critical crossroads. He says there are two gates: one wide and easy, leading to destruction, and another narrow and hard, but leading to life.

**Here's the sobering truth:** many will choose the wide road. Many will like the idea of Jesus, but not the cost of following Him. Many will admire Him, but few will obey Him. The way Jesus has described His kingdom so far is that it’s not popular, it’s not comfortable, and it’s not convenient. **It will cost you everything.** But it’s the only road that leads to life.

Now we stand at a moment of decision, a moment of self-examination. Jesus isn’t just giving us nice ideas for moral living; He’s calling us to repentance. To surrender. To examine ourselves and ask: Am I truly walking the narrow path, or has the comfort of the wide road deceived me?

The narrow gate requires humility. It requires repentance. It demands that we let go of self-rule and come under the Lordship of Christ. We don’t get to bring our pride, our pet sins, or our self-righteousness with us. It’s a tight squeeze, and only those willing to die to themselves can pass through.

Please don’t just stand near the narrow gate. Don’t just hear the words of Jesus and nod in agreement. **Strive to enter!** Lay down your life, your will, your way, and take up His. Today is the day to make sure you’re not just following the crowd, but following the King. Jesus didn’t preach this sermon to entertain. He preached it to expose the heart and invite you into the only way that leads to eternal life.

**Homework**

Go back through and re-read all the scriptures, and conduct a self-examination guided by the Holy Spirit. Go deeper than Stephen did tonight. What are some broad road behaviors that need to be crucified in your life?

**Outreaches**

**First Friday:** August 1st come pass out tracks Hall of Fame weekend 6 pm-8:30 pm

**Akron Pickle Fest:** August 10th 10 am – 5 pm, we will have a booth set up

**August 13th – 16th** Lions Festival Sign up at the church to help out

August 16th Pagan Pride Festival (Cleveland team has plenty of people)

**August 25th**, Stephen starts back up at Akron University in the mornings (see him if you want to come, pass out tracks, and talk to students)

**September 6th:** Community Harvest Festival and Pig Roast

Let us know if you'd like to lead some outreach efforts; we need people to help spearhead them. We can walk the streets, festivals, parks, set up booths, feed the homeless etc. We need some people to plan, organize etc.