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Get off Broadway!
Matthew 7:13,14

John Calvin is well known in Christian circles as a theological all-star. As a young man he was very thoughtful, reverent and studious. By age 27 he had finished his multi-volume "Institutes of the Christian religion. And by the time he died in 1564 he had established the foundation for reformed theology. His influence greatly enriches our understanding of the Bible today. John also had a brother named Calvin. Everything that John was, Calvin was not. He lived a wasteful, lewd and wicked life and died a miserable wretch. So, what made the difference? It wasn't genetics because they came from the same two parents. It wasn't environment because they grew up in the same home. It wasn't education because they attended the same schools. In fact, in their early years they had very similar influences. But, one walked in life and the other ravaged in death. What made the difference?

Robert Plant of the legendary rock group Led Zeppelin wrote these words in one of the most popular rock ballads of all time "Stairway to heaven." *Yes there are two paths you can go by, but in the long run-there's still time to change the road your on.* Now Mr. Plant is right about part of this. There are two paths and as long as you are alive you can always make a change on the road you are traveling down. But here is the deception....Plant makes it sound like you can stay on any road you want for however long you want because there is plenty of time to make that choice. That's not reality. None of us here are guaranteed of tomorrow. You could die right now and if you are not saved, the stairway you will be taking will not be headed toward heaven. The drummer of the same band John Bonnam probably wishes he knew that before he drunk himself to death and died in his own vomit. If Satan can get you to think that you

have plenty of time...then you could well end up like Led Zeppelin's drummer. If you fail to choose well, even though you have the best family, best education, best influences...you could well end up like John Calvin's brother.

The differences between people depend on the choices we make. We make decisions and then those decisions turn around and make us. When Jesus preaches to the disciples up on the mountain side, he does not preach for applause or admiration. Jesus preaches for a decision. In His entire sermon on the mount, Jesus has carefully and forcefully explained what it takes for those who desire to pursue life in His kingdom. His golden rule in chapter 7 sums up the character qualities He wants to develop in us. He has explained the kind of life He wants to give us. So now he challenges us. What is your choice? For others who have weakly chosen, have prolonged the choice, for those who have poorly chosen, he stands asking, "Is that your final answer?" What's your choice? And what are you going to do about it? Jesus isn't looking for applause, He demands us to make a choice and live it out.

In this final section of his sermon in Matthew 7, Jesus challenges us for a decision then illustrates by way of some tests to determine how well we are following the choice we have made. It's not important what the tree looks like but what kind of fruit is produced. It's not how bad the storms are that hit, but does it stand up when the wind blows. Jesus challenges us to do far more than just listen and enjoy the truth. Listening is not enough, in fact it can be extremely dangerous, for in just hearing the truth, it lulls us into thinking we have actually done something about the truth. Coming to church, reading your Bible are dangerous things to do if you never do anything about what you learn there...because of the false sense of security. In Matthew 7:13 and 14 Jesus is challenging unbelievers to wake up and get off their highway to

hell. Jesus is challenging believers to wake up and totally commit to God by getting off the broad way. Read with me Matthew 7:13,14 (READ)

Jesus lays out the choices very clearly, simply for there are only two options. **He says "make your choice!"** there is the one option that looks very inviting, easy and comfortable. Most people are taking that option because it looks so well traveled and good from the start of the journey. The other option is not so attractive to the first look. The road is narrow. It is less traveled on, the signs are harder to find, but Jesus says that in fact is the road you want to take if you want to enjoy the kingdom blessings, the happiness and life satisfaction that you are searching for. The broad way or the narrow way. Two choices.

We want more than one option. We in the U.S. are addicted to choices. Just walk down the grocery isle and try to pick out a breakfast cereal. It's mind boggling the options we have. It adds quite a bit of stress to our lives with all the choices we have to make, but we wouldn't want to trade in our options now that we have them. So because of this we also tend to think there must be some more options then just two for our spiritual life. We want to believe that we are all just headed in the same direction. It doesn't matter how you get there as long as you really believe. Jesus cuts across our desire to fuse all religions together into one big happy family and says choose, you cannot be neutral. There are only two options. The broad way or the right way.

The broad way says assumes there are no restrictions. They may not even notice the gate they just walked through because it is so wide and easy. The broad road has plenty of room for all kinds of philosophies. Are you into eastern meditation and mantra chanting? No problem the road is wide. Are you into elevating nature to the same level as god. Not a problem. Have you decided all you need to do is be good enough, or at least better then most? Is it sensuality that you've decided will bring you whole life satisfaction? Is it all about the feel and

sentiment and emotional high you experience? Sure says the broad road come on down you will be welcome, there is plenty of room. Here there are no boundaries, no curbs, no fences. We are tolerant of all views except of course those who are intolerant of our views. Just follow your instinct, follow your desires. No self-denial or discipline are needed. If you need to designer create your own religion that's Ok with the broad way. You don't need to search real hard to find this road.

The problem is that just because it's the most crowded road. Just because everybody else is doing it, is no proof that makes it right. The broad road has plenty of room for whatever your opinion may be. Plenty of room for diversity of morals. It is the road of permissiveness, of tolerance, just follow your own inclination. No road map is needed because you make your own road and have plenty of folks to travel with. "For the gate is wide and the way is broad that lead to destruction, and many are those who enter by it."

Now the other option is the narrow gate. We don't like to be called narrow. "Call me vain, call me proud, call me mean, but don't call me narrow." We hear the accusation of begin narrow and associate it with a "dwarfed and stunted man, who has been cramped by defective education and squeezed out of shape by a narrowing environment." It is not uncommon for the world to accuse Christians of being narrow. Certainly I have known some who call themselves Christians who have a warped view of life and of God. Who treat their religion like the Pharisees of Jesus day. Those who are unwilling to discuss and debate and think and probe and challenge. But I don't think that's the narrowness that Jesus had in mind here. In one sense being called "narrow" could be a compliment if narrow means that I have a magnificent obsession and totally inflexible commitment to Jesus. If that is your definition of narrow then sure I'm narrow.

Being narrow can be quite a virtue. Those landing lights at the airport are quite unforgiving and narrow. You can approach the lights from the air at any angle 360 degrees. It's your choice, but if you desire a safe landing, there is only one angle you can choose. Its very narrow and unforgiving. Math tends to be very narrow. You may not care much what the answer to 8 times 7 is. You may even be convinced it is 54 or 55 or 57. But when your teacher says it is 56 and will always be 56 you may reply "oh whatever" but your teacher will mark you down wrong because math is very narrow. Narrowness is essential in marriage. When I perform a wedding I ask the man if he will "cling only to her forsaking all others and take her alone" When he replies, "I will" he is making a very limiting, narrowing commitment before God. Out of all the women on the earth he has vowed to cleave to her no matter how her health turns out, no matter how the finances turn out, no matter whether she meets all his needs or not, regardless of how she treats him or the amount of affection she shows him. He has vowed to be committed to her. Now that is very narrow and that very narrowness is essential if you hope to enjoy a lifelong marriage relationship.

God's truth revealed in the Bible is very limiting, it's narrow. It restricts followers of God to the confines of what God calls as good. The Bible puts fences around what we can and cannot believe and how we can and cannot approach God. Jesus makes the choice crystal clear. He wants to make sure there are no surprises to our choice. No cries of "I didn't know this was where my choice was going to end me up?" John 14:6 Jesus says, "I am the way the truth and the life. No man comes to the father except through me." Acts 4:12 "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved." If you want eternal salvation the Bible is very clear. You have one choice and it's very narrow. Who is the only one allowed to determine the basis on which a sinner can enter into

the presence of God? Its God himself. Anything other than accepting Jesus sacrifice for us is the wide road. Everything other than through Christ leads you on Broadway. In these verses Jesus says make your choice for there are only two options.

Secondly, Jesus warns us to choose well because the obvious answer may not be the right one. The wrong road is wide and broad and many people are heading down its path. It is the easiest most popular path. But Jesus says be careful because majority does not always rule. Bigger is not always better. Don't ever try judging the spiritual by statistics. The way to follow Jesus may be narrow and hard to find. It may not be near as appealing up front as the broad way. But Jesus says, don't make your choice by first appearance, but by where your choice will finally end you up.

Our society is ripping apart at the seams because we poll the majority to define our morality. We look around what most of our friends are doing and figure if most of them are doing it then it must be Ok for me. We fear choosing against the majority because its seems they often do rule, but that doesn't mean they are always right. But we wonder, Could that many people all be wrong? Could the way that I think seems better actually not be the best way for me to go? Could their really be only just one road that leads to life satisfaction?

In his book *Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis describes as a young man how he began to broaden his mind and soon was altering his words from "I believe" to "how do I feel". "And oh the relief of it! From the narrow tyrannical noon of (biblical) revelation I passed into the cool evening of Higher Thought where there was nothing to be obeyed, and nothing to be believed except what was either comforting or exciting." The broad way is not always the right way. Make your choice...there is only two options and choose well for the obvious answer may not be right.

The third point this morning that we can learn from these verses. Leave your baggage behind. Look at verse 14 "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life." The wide gate is so large we do not need to leave anything behind to get through. All of our baggage will easily fit through. There is no limit to the luggage we can take with us, whether that baggage be our pride, or our selfishness or prejudice or envy, or greed or laziness or sinful anger or impatience or critical cut-downs.

Jesus calls us to head down the narrow road and through the narrow gate. The narrow gate is as narrow as the eye of a needle and to get through we must leave everything behind. No one can get through on the way to following Christ unless he denies himself. Matthew chapter 16 Jesus says, "If anyone wishes to come after Me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Getting off Broadway demands that we leave our baggage behind. In fact we are to leave everything behind; sin, selfish ambition, pride and jealousy sinful anger and greed. Jesus wants to strain those things out of our life as we walk with him along the narrow way. That kind of luggage is way too cumbersome to carry with us on our journey with Jesus.

A couple of summers ago heading home from a mission trip to Ukraine, our group stopped to tour a beautiful walled city in the middle of Germany called Rothenburg. It's one of the few cities fully intact having been spared the bombing of World War II. The night watchman gave us an evening tour and stopped at one of the gates. He explained this large gate was kept open during the day crowded with merchants and travelers hustling easily through, conducting their business. But at sundown, the big gate was closed and locked shut. The only way to get through was a little man door. Maybe a 2' by 2' in size. I could barely get through it. The only time that door was open was if there was a citizen of the city who was caught outside the gate after hours called out and the

gatekeepers recognized their voice. The guards would open the man door and stand with a raised sword above the entrance. If it was not who they claimed to be he would give that intruder a severe headache. If the person had goods or belongings, they all had to be left outside until the gates opened in the morning. Only one at a time would fit through that gate and only those who were known by name and voice was recognized.

So too is the way toward God. He does not give group discounts. He does offer a family rate. He invites you to come as an individual. One at a time. He invites us to leave behind all that baggage that will slow us down on our journey. For that is what it is..a journey. It's a road. It doesn't take long to get married, but it takes many years to be married. It doesn't take long to sign a mortgage to buy a house, but it may take 30 years to pay it off, longer if you keep refinancing. So too it doesn't take long to make that initial commitment to Christ, to repent of our sin and decide to follow him. But that is just the beginning. Walking this road is a daily saying no to Satan and yes to Jesus. It's a continual denial of self and separation from sin and being set apart for God.

I see this illustration Jesus paints for us here as the narrow road that leads away from the crowd in search of true life satisfaction. That is the road leading up to salvation. Some of you are on that road right now. You haven't yet stepped through the gate but you are seeking God, maybe some are just outside the gate ready to step through. The gate I see is salvation. It is Jesus himself. John 10:7 "I am the door, if anyone enters by me he will be saved" Jesus is the one waiting for you to claim citizenship. He wants to recognize your voice. Just knock he is waiting to open it up for you. The narrow road after is living up to the commitment you have made in salvation.

Some of us need to quite fooling around and get off the Broadway. Some here have committed to Christ in salvation but once you got through the gate you are starting to live like the rest of the crowd on

broadway. Some of you got that way because you were attracted to Christianity thinking Jesus was a plumber who could fix your leaky faucet. Perhaps you came to Christ because you struggled with a destructive habit and wanted to tap into God's power to fix it. Maybe it was a broken relationship you wanted God to mend. But we've learned from Jesus Sermon on the Mount that God is not a plumber. Those leaky faucets of our is minor league soft balls for Jesus. He is one who wants to come and tear out our entire plumbing and deal with the well itself. He wants to change what is coming out of our faucet. We want to settle for a minor repair and He wants to come in and make a major renovation.

If you realize you are a believer that has stepped through the gate but has lived like he is still dancing on the broad road. Jesus has a few things to say to you in the next few verses. But know this that failure, giving into temptation, does not mean you are eternally lost and condemned. For those who are truly in Christ there is no condemnation. Immediately confess and ask God for forgiveness. If you are in the light you will walk in the light. Leave all that baggage behind and stop going back to pick it up. It's too heavy for you to carry on this journey God calls us to.

The main thing about a road is where it goes. Jesus is pretty clear there are two difference destination. Destruction and Life. This holds true for our eternal destiny, heaven and hell and our life right now. Hell on earth is living apart from the life that God wants to give filled with satisfaction and purpose. "Few are those who find it" We know from John's Revelation that the number in Christ will be like the sand on the shore, there will be many, many believers in heaven. But not all will accept Christ and the relative number who step through the narrow gate will be few. If you don't like crowds, the narrow road is for you. If you are in the majority, then chances are you are on the wrong road this morning, for the way of Jesus has never been popular. You will have

fewer traveling companions, but the trip will be far more rewarding along the way and definitely at the end destination.

So are you ready to get off of Broadway? What I'd like everyone to do is to take out your blue communication card. The ushers have extras. I want every person here to have one. If you can write. Write them. Put your name at the top. Then in the boxes below make your choice. Mark A if you have stepped through the gate in salvation and are pursuing a walk with God on the narrow road. Mark B if you have stepped through the gate, accepting God's salvation through Jesus Christ, but are having a hard time staying on the narrow road. You are often looking longingly over at the crowd on Broadway. Mark C if you are on the narrow road walking toward the gate, maybe you are very close and ready to open the gate and accept Christ as your personal savior. Mark D if you are trying to find the sign, you are still searching for the road to life's true satisfaction. And I would really appreciate your honesty on this one. Mark E if you know you are on the Broad way and see no reason to look for any other road to walk on. I want to pray for you folks as well.