

**Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> August 2022**  
**Matthew 7:13-23**  
**Mr.Brent Haywood**  
**Brightons Parish Church**

Sermon keypoints:

- 2 ways - narrow gate and that leads to 'life'; wide gate and a broad road and it leads to destruction
- What is this 'life' and what is this 'narrow' gate? - It is Jesus himself!
- Jesus warns us to watch on for false teachers and warns us not to deceive ourselves; but to do the will of Father God.
- Jesus is the truth
- This is a sober warning!

Father God, as we now come before Your Word, and as we look at Your words, Lord Jesus, the words from the Sermon on the Mount, we pray that You would open our minds, open our hearts and give us listening ears. If the words of the speaker are out of line, Lord, cast them aside. But those words of the speaker that come from You, may they go deep into our hearts I pray. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Liz Truss. Rishi Sunak. Two names that I suspect not many years ago none of us would have known. Both have been setting out their program for government, close to manifestos. Close to manifestos. I'll say nothing more about that.

Sometimes the Sermon on the Mount is described as the kingdom manifesto, as Jesus's manifesto. I'd like you today, if you can to have a Bible near you and open it up and just have those chapters five to seven in front of you.

I don't know about you but I've found the going through the Sermon on the Mount really enjoyable but at the same time really challenging. I hit on a marvelous thing. I started to listen to it on my audio Bible and what I would do is I would start in chapter five and I'd listen to the whole lot in a one because, if you look at it in your Bible, you'll see that it's broken up with little headings. Those headings are fine. They help us navigate our way around the Bible but those headings are not Holy Scripture and what they can tempt us to do is to break the Sermon on the Mount down into little, little chunks and, actually, the Sermon on the Mount was a sermon on the mount. It was Jesus' sermon. Well, today, we're getting to the point where Jesus is beginning to conclude what He's been saying in the in the Sermon on the Mount and frankly, He says some things in today's passage which are difficult to hear. Scott's smiling. Well, let me tell you a little secret. I must say that when Scott shared with me the program for the summer and he told me what my passage was, I was horrified. Of course, I didn't tell him that. 'Horrified' you say, 'about a passage in the Bible?' Well, I'll explain that in a minute.

But let me first recap a little bit on Jesus' manifesto. The Sermon on the Mount is challenging yet, at the same time, it's full of really uplifting passages and two weeks ago Scott said that there was a real danger that when we read through the Sermon on the Mount, we see it as a list of do's and don'ts and, if we do, that it leads to a lifeless religion that would deaden your soul. Those were his precise words. I wrote them down. A lifeless religion that would deafen your soul. You see, in Jesus' day, Judaism was plagued with legalism. A mistaken view that, if you obeyed all the rules all the time, you are living the right way and you are on the right path. Yet, consistently, Jesus calls that

out as hypocrisy and that's the running theme through the Sermon on the Mount. Instead, this amazing manifesto, flips everything. It flips it and it becomes something that's really quite radical. Now, you often hear me talking about Jesus being a radical and the message being radical. I say that deliberately because I think we have a problem in the Christian church today. I think the message is now seen to be so old, from 2000 years ago, that we're blunted it and we see it as an old message but, in fact, it's a radical, new message and we must believe, that we must stand up to that. It is hard to take an old message and see it as radical.

But, think about it for a moment. What if the Sermon on the Mount was truly implemented today? Everything on earth would change, if implemented. Everything would change. Modern slavery, immigration, war, famine, sex crimes, family tensions, fraud, exploitation, gone in a moment.

Now, I know some of you will be thinking 'Bent's exaggerating again!' Well, let's go back to our candidates for Prime Minister and imagine for the moment that one of them stands up, or both of them, and says 'I declare to you today that if I am your Prime Minister, the country will be governed by the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount.'

How's that going to work out? I'm serious. How's that going to work out? I can tell you, without a shadow of a doubt, that it would end in political failure. And the reasons for my confidence? Well, we're coming to it in today's passage.

You see, having set out His program for government, His manifesto, Jesus changes the mood music. Verse 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. But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life and only a few find it.' Whatever has gone on in the Sermon on the Mount to that point, these words shock you. See, throughout the manifesto, Jesus has, He's referred to the kingdom-way of living and He's nudged and He's cajoled us listeners into really thinking about an upside-down way of living on the whole, in the world, in an upside-down way, a heavenly focused way. We pray it 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth.' We pray it as Christians.

But now, where the rubber hits the road, Jesus says there's a choice and today people don't like choices. There's a choice. Two gates. One that is narrow and small, and one that is wide and broad. And I'll read that verse again because it's so, so important 'Enter through the narrow gate' says Jesus, 'for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it but small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life and only a few find it.' Now, I'll tell you, I don't like the word 'narrow'. People might call me narrow-minded. People might think I have a narrow perspective, but these are the words of Jesus so I need to take them seriously. You see, Jesus was no politician. He's not looking to get elected and He's certainly not out to win a popularity contest. He wouldn't try Strictly Come Dancing I don't think. This is Jesus Christ. His claim, His exclusive claim, whatever you make of it, is that He is God. God come to earth as a human being on a rescue mission. This is Jesus Christ telling the truth and I'm going to use these words, an absolute truth.

Now, to be honest, that might be hard to hear. Jesus, in very plain language is saying that, there are only two ways; one way that leads to life and one way that leads to destruction. Two ways. Not many ways. Not three ways. And that is offensive. It's offensive today because we live in a multicultural, multi-faith, secular, pluralistic world - all big words but it basically means anything, and I mean anything and everything, is okay. Where everyone has their own truth, that's your truth, that's my truth and you know, to all of that, not in a shouty way, not in an aggressive way, Jesus just says 'No, no. There are only two ways.' And, actually, when you really think about it, what He is saying is that there is only one way.

I know it's a bit dull but I'm going to read that verse again. 'Enter through the narrow gate for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it but small is the gate and a narrow is the road that leads to life and only a few find it.'

Notice the last six words 'only a few find it'?

Last week Donald took us on a car journey. Well, let me try and do the same. Come along with the Haywoods. Heather uses our car every day. She is a good driver. I am not as skilled as Heather. If Heather is driving and she comes across a signpost that's got two choices, I know Heather will pick the right choice. I know she will end up at the right destination. Now, I'm the son of a taxi driver- Alistair - if I'm behind the wheel of a car and I see the signpost to wherever we're meant to be going, but then I see a smooth road going in a slightly different way and it's a wider road and it might get the other, it might get to there, eventually well, I just might take it. We might get there sometime. But Jesus would say that my strategy for driving is not a sound strategy. It's certainly not a sound strategy for life and if I applied my navigation skills in the car to my life then I think I would be on the road to destruction.

So, there's two choices and frankly, people, this is now where it gets awkward because I'm compelled to say 'What gate are you passing through? What road are you on?' Now, maybe you can answer that and you're quite confident, or maybe you say 'Look, I don't buy into any of this Jesus-way stuff.' Well, that's okay, that's your choice. Jesus doesn't compel anyone. I said to the children this morning that Jesus is not a policeman. But all I can say is good luck to you. But maybe you're not sure and you don't know and well, gate and road and way stuff, what does that all mean? And like I said, why does it have to be narrow?

Well, the answer is maybe not quite what you would expect. You see let's take another passage. If your bible's open, you have a look in John 14.

And this is, this is, this is a really significant part. All parts of the Bible are significant but this is a discussion Jesus is having with His disciples on the night before He's killed. I don't know about you but when someone's close to death I tend to take notice of the

things that they might want to tell me. Let me take this slowly through the passages from John 14.

'Do not let your hearts be troubled.' This is Jesus speaking. 'You believe in God. Believe also. In my father's house has many rooms. If that were not so would I have told you that. I am going there to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come back and take you to be with me, that you may also be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.' Now, I've mentioned Thomas last time I was speaking or the time before. I think Thomas gets a bad rap in the Bible sometimes but Thomas was one of His disciples and he says 'Lord, we don't know where you're going so, how can we know the way.' Jesus answers 'I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.' I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the father except through me. Now, this is not the only time in the Gospel when Jesus explains Himself this way, but here we have it an exclusive claim, yes, a narrow claim, because the claim of Jesus is that He is the way, that He is the gate, He is the narrow path. Exclusive, because there is no other way to Father God. You see, the kingdom manifesto is about the king, and the kingdom-way is exclusive and it's narrow because it's a person, it's Jesus. There's no neutrality with Jesus. There's no middle road with Jesus. The claim of Jesus is that He is the truth. So, if your truth is different well, like I said to you, good luck. And it's hard to say it but you are on the road to destruction.

So, now do you see why I was horrified that this was the passage I was preaching on?

This is not a popular message and you may be sitting in your seat fuming or you may be watching this online and are about to give up, and I understand that. I did not pick this passage but though it makes me feel awkward to say it - you need to go through the narrow gate. Jesus says, if you don't, you're on the path to destruction. And again, it's actually easier for me to say this to a crowd of people but I know people here, personally, and I've never been able to go up to you and say, have you gone through the narrow gate, or are you on the road to destruction. I ask you that question today. I ask you that question today. You see, because in the language of the Bible, and this is not language that people like today, if you have not gone through the narrow gate, then you're going to hell.

ACDC, that wonderful prophetic, rock band - You're on the highway to hell.

To say that is difficult. It's been difficult for two thousand years. Particularly, interestingly, to middle class people, for some reason, through history and through the Bible we see that poor people are more likely to accept that message. But you know what, the man who first claimed it was not popular and they put him on a cross. The man who baptized Him, John the Baptist, got his head cut off. Jim, I think you're okay. Those first Christians were imprisoned and beaten and martyred. Even this very day in Asia and Africa people are dying because they've decided to follow the narrow way. We couldn't preach this openly in Afghanistan or North Korea or even China. And here I am,

telling you that I'm horrified or feeling awkward about telling you this. It's narrow and it's hard and only a few find it.

Think on that, think on that, for you. Now, usually a hard-hitting message like this you'd stop, but anybody who's awake has realized that there's two thirds of the passage that I haven't gone into. Don't worry Scott, I'm gonna finish soon.

But we've got a little bit more to do. You see, verses 15 to, 15 onwards, also reference back to that because they reference this business about false teachers. 'Watch out for false teachers, wolves in sheep's clothing.' I don't actually need to expand that. A wolf in sheep's clothing looks like a wolf, and a wolf eats sheep. You see, the problem has been throughout the history of the Christian church that there are have been false prophets and false teachers and Jesus in His very manifesto at the start, is telling us about what the kingdom-way is says, watch out, there are going to be false teachers. So, let's not get hung up on that and let's not get overcome with the fact that there are some bad apples. Jesus simply says, watch out and be and be aware. And, if we go back to the passage that Donald was teaching us about last Sunday, the word from that was 'discernment'. We need to discern, we need to know and see the bad, they see the false teachers and how well again, Jesus is just such a master at painting pictures, and He makes reference to the fact that, if the tree is unhealthy, the fruit will be unhealthy. So, the bad apple analogy is quite a good. One, you'll see you'll see the fruits of a false teacher and the reason there are false teachers goes back to what we've been talking about for most of this sermon is that it is a difficult message to say that there is only one way and that Jesus is the way. And people water it down. People try to have a little bit of both. A little bit of Jesus and a little bit of the wide road. And that's where the false teaching comes in. But it's Jesus Christ Himself at the foundation of bringing forward the message of salvation says that'll be there, you need to watch.

And even if we go a little bit further, it even gets tougher because we need to watch ourselves. Discernment. Verse 21 to 23 an important warning to take heart on it says 'Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven but only he who does the will of my father who is in heaven. 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 perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly' and again, these are Jesus words 'then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers.'

Wow! That's a warning. We can even fool ourselves. You see, we can fool ourselves into thinking we're on the right road. There's no magic formula into heaven and there's no amount of effort will get you there. Trying to live the kingdom manifesto under your own strength, as Scott said two weeks ago, won't work. Jesus is the narrow gate. He is the gate that we need to go through. watch out for false teachers, Do the will of God.

Amen.