

Sermon for February 2, 2025 – The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Matthew 7:13-14 EHV

Theme: Don't Envy Worldly Success and Popularity

- 1) It only leads to destruction.
- 2) Only Jesus brings us to life.

*<sup>13</sup> “Enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter through it. <sup>14</sup> How narrow is the gate, and how difficult is the way that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

“If it’s popular, then it must be good!” How often has this way of thinking influenced your decisions? For example, if you’re considering dining at a new restaurant in town that’s become popular, you might reason, “With so many people wanting to go there, the food must be excellent!” But is that always the case? In my experience, no!

Many companies understand that financial success does not always correlate with their product’s quality; often, it’s about popularity. This is why they invest heavily in “influencers” to promote their products.

The notion that “if it’s popular, then it must be good” extends beyond our physical choices; it also affects our spiritual decisions. We see a world filled with smiling, spiritual influencers urging us to do what they do and believe what they believe if we want to be happy. They appear successful and seem to live carefree lives, doing whatever they want. Don’t you want what they have? Most people do, which is why many encourage you to live for yourself, follow your own path, and do what feels right. They promise happiness if you join them in this lifestyle.

But is this popular approach to life truly the best path to take? No, it certainly is not. Therefore, with Jesus as our guide, let us **learn not to envy worldly success and popularity because** 1) it only leads to destruction. 2) Only Jesus brings us to life.

Part One: Worldly Success and Popularity only leads to destruction.

Our sermon text comes from Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Mount—a discourse directed at believers about the realities of following Him. Our text summarizes those realities, with the encouragement:

*<sup>13</sup> “Enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter through it.*

While there seem to be countless religions in the world, there are ultimately only two choices, or paths, for a person to follow. The first path is through the narrow gate, which is none other than

Jesus Himself. As He said on another occasion, *“I am the door. Whoever enters through me will be saved.”*<sup>i</sup>

Why does Jesus describe faith in Him as a narrow gate? Because, even though He invites everyone to be saved through faith in Him, the Bible also says: *“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.”*<sup>ii</sup> You can’t believe whatever you want and still be saved; salvation comes only through faith in Jesus.

Jesus encourages us to enter onto the path of everlasting life through the narrow gate of Himself. How do we do this? By repenting of our sins and trusting in Him alone for salvation. We cannot bring our pride, self-righteousness, or personal “truths” with us; these things must be left behind. He wants us to trust Him alone for salvation and to let go of all else.

This brings us to the second gate Christ mentions, which encompasses every religion or philosophy in the world that doesn’t centre on faith in Jesus alone for salvation. Because this second gate is so wide, people do not need to abandon their pride or selfishness to enter it. You are welcome to believe whatever you wish. For example, are you a strict Buddhist monk striving for nirvana through self-discipline? The broad gate welcomes you! Are you a hedonist seeking carnal pleasure? Come on in! Do you identify as a Christian but struggle with the notion of Christ being the sole pathway to the Father? The wide gate is open to you, too.

The path beyond the wide gate is also broad, allowing individuals to do whatever they please as they navigate life together. It is populated by a multitude of seemingly content and happy people from all around the world. This can tempt us to ask: am I on the right path? Can so many joyful individuals be wrong?

However, Jesus—who is the only person to have come from heaven—issues a warning that the broad path of worldly philosophies and religions does not lead to God. It leads only to destruction. Therefore, unless those people on that broad path repent and turn to Christ Jesus alone for salvation, they will ultimately end up in the same place as the devil and all his angels: hell.

King Solomon once wrote: *There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it is the road to death.*<sup>iii</sup> What King Solomon describes is the wide gate and broad road to destruction. May the LORD mercifully keep us off that path.

Part Two: Only Jesus brings us to life.

Therefore, Jesus adds: <sup>14</sup> *How narrow is the gate, and how difficult is the way that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

Indeed, the way to heaven is narrow; accessible only through Jesus. Only a few find it. Why is that? Because our sinful pride blinds us. By nature, people want to believe they are good and that they don’t deserve God’s threat of everlasting punishment. Many think they can earn His forgiveness on their own. As a result, people often view the pure Gospel as foolish.<sup>iv</sup> While many

may praise Christ and claim to follow Him, they ultimately do not know Him because they have distorted His Gospel into something other than what He intended.<sup>v</sup>

That is why, when Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, <sup>17</sup> *Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”*<sup>vi</sup> We Christians are just as blessed as Peter. How so? Because the Holy Spirit has broken through our sinful pride with His law so that we might understand our need for Jesus. Having accomplished that, He pointed us to God’s promise that He *so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*<sup>vii</sup> This promise moved us to repent – to shed all thoughts of self-righteousness, and to trust in Christ alone for salvation. Through faith in His Son, God the Father clothed us in Jesus’ righteousness, forgave our sins, and adopted us to be His children through Holy Baptism. Our path in life is now the path Jesus paved by dying for our sins on the cross. It is the path of Jesus that leads directly to everlasting life with God in glory.

If that is the case, why does Jesus describe it as difficult? Because the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh constantly try to lead us away from Christ and onto the broader path the world follows. The world makes us feel foolish, claiming that our journey on the narrow path reveals our ignorance, intolerance, and lack of love. Our sinful flesh desires the worldly things that Jesus commands us to leave behind. And the devil? He seems always present, tempting and accusing us. Yes, the Christian life is hard because we are continually battling these powerful enemies who try their best to separate us from Christ.

Despite the challenges on our path to life with God in glory, two truths sustain us: first, we are on the right path! No matter what happens in the world or how much the devil rages against us, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.<sup>viii</sup> Second, the Lord Himself travels with us on our journey through life. Through the prophet Isaiah, He promises: <sup>10</sup> *Do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be overwhelmed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*<sup>ix</sup>

These truths encourage us to persevere joyfully through life’s difficulties, taking comfort in Jesus’ words: <sup>33</sup> *I have told you these things, so that you may have peace in me. In this world you are going to have trouble. But be courageous! I have overcome the world.*<sup>x</sup>

Yes, the devil, world, and our sinful flesh will do their worst in trying to make our earthly lives miserable, but what they cannot do is take away God’s love for us in Christ. They cannot take away the heaven that is awaiting us at the end of life as we cling to Jesus in faith. And that life that awaits at the end of our path will make every suffering we endured during our earthly lives worth it, as the apostle Paul states: <sup>18</sup> *For I conclude that our sufferings at the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.*<sup>xi</sup>

Therefore, dear Christian, don’t envy worldly success and popularity as people preach a different Gospel than the one you received from the Holy Spirit working through His Word. The world’s broad road, as popular as it is, leads only to destruction. It is only through Christ Jesus alone that we receive everlasting life, as He promised on the eve of His Crucifixion: *“I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through me.”*<sup>xii</sup>

Therefore,

May Jesus be your staff and stay,  
As he leads you on life's way,  
You to comfort and to hold,  
As a member of his fold,  
And in his arms may you find rest,  
And through his love for e'er be blessed.  
Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> John 10:9 EHV

<sup>ii</sup> Acts 4:12 EHV

<sup>iii</sup> Proverbs 14:12 EHV

<sup>iv</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 1:18, 22-25

<sup>v</sup> Cf. Matthew 7:15-23

<sup>vi</sup> Matthew 16:17 EHV

<sup>vii</sup> John 3:16 EHV

<sup>viii</sup> Cf. Romans 8:35-39

<sup>ix</sup> Isaiah 41:10 EHV (also cf. Matthew 28:20)

<sup>x</sup> John 16:33 EHV

<sup>xi</sup> Romans. 8:18 EHV

<sup>xii</sup> John. 14:6 EHV