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Matthew 7:13 - 7:14



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the concept of grace and its connection to faith in the Bible. He cites Matthew 7:13-14 and emphasizes the importance of striving to enter the narrow gate, which requires commitment and drive. While some may think they are following Jesus half-heartedly, Gregg suggests that they may actually be on the wrong road and encourages listeners to consistently act in accordance with their faith to enter the kingdom of God.

Transcript

Let's look at Matthew 7. I'd like to begin at verse 13. Perhaps we'll start with verses 13 and 14. Now, this is a very intriguing statement because Jesus indicated that it's not all that many people who are finding the way to the gate, which leads to eternal life.

Now, Jesus' disciples were among those who did want to find that gate. We know that they were eager to obtain eternal life. On one occasion, Jesus said to them, because a great crowd who had followed him had now deserted him, Jesus said to them, will you also go away? And Peter said, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life.

Obviously, Peter said, we want eternal life, and we find it through your words and through no other place, and therefore we will not leave you no matter how unpopular you become. And these were among those that were striving to enter in, in that gate that leads to eternal life. Over in Luke chapter 13, Jesus said something very similar.

In verse 24, he said, strive to enter through the narrow gate. For many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. Now, notice that.

Jesus said that his listeners should strive. That suggests some exertion, some effort, to strive to enter in at the narrow gate. And many are going to want to enter that gate, but will not be able.

Why? Because that is the gate that is so narrow, and you need to strive to get in. There are many who cannot get in. Jesus said it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a

needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

That would be an example of somebody who won't be able to get through that gate. Camels can't go through the eyes of needles, and therefore, without a miracle from God, I mean a very unusual miracle, a rich man can't enter the kingdom of God either, according to Jesus. Now, of course, that doesn't square very well with what we generally think here in America, because in America, being rich is a fairly common phenomenon.

Compared to most of the world, of course, we're all rich here in America, but even in America, there are some people who are filthy rich. I shouldn't really say filthy rich, as if there's something naughty about being rich. Some people have gotten their riches quite legitimately, through hard work, or through an inheritance, or through investments that were legitimate, or whatever.

I have no grudge against those people who are really rich, and honestly so. However, the Bible teaches that when people are rich, they have great responsibility, because to whom much has been given, of them much will be required. And I have a feeling that an awful lot of rich people who call themselves Christians, they don't take that into consideration.

Judging by the way that they hold on to their riches, or spend them in a wasteful manner, and give so little to the kingdom of God, I have a feeling that they may not be among those who are the exception to that rule, that camels do not go through the eyes of needles. If there is such an exception, it would not be such people as take such a light attitude, as that of some people in this country who call themselves Christians, and are rich. In fact, rich or not, there are many people in the United States who call themselves Christians, but who do not act as if they really care that much about entering into eternal life.

I mean, if you ask them, they'd say, of course, I'd rather go to heaven than to hell. Who wouldn't? Well, that doesn't take an awful lot of exceptional hunger and thirst after God, to have the desire to go to heaven rather than going to hell. But that is not the desire to go there, it is not the way you get there.

You have to have a desire, of course, but you then must strive to enter in. Now, sometimes people say, well, how does that square with the whole idea that we're saved by grace? Well, we are saved by grace, and grace comes through what means? Well, according to Scripture, grace comes through faith. According to Romans 5, 2, it is through Jesus that we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand.

So, we have access into grace through faith, Paul said. We have this also taught in Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9, where he says, for it is by grace you have been saved through faith. So, it is through faith that grace comes to us to save us.

So, in order to have grace and to be saved by grace, one must have faith. But faith in the Scripture is something more than just saying you believe a certain thing. Faith in the Scripture is a very life-obsessive kind of a thing.

It is something that dominates your whole outlook and pursuit of life. Let me give you an example from Paul himself in Romans chapter 4 of what faith must be like in order for it to be a saving faith. Paul in Romans 4 is talking about Abraham, how that Abraham, according to Scripture, believed in the Lord, and it, that is his believing, his faith, was accounted to him for righteousness.

That is, that God counted him righteous because of his faith. And this, of course, is an Old Testament verse, Genesis 15, 6, which Paul uses as a basis for defending the doctrine that we are saved not by works but by faith alone. This is a very good doctrine.

It is taught throughout Scripture. But let me read to you how Paul discusses this doctrine so that we don't misunderstand him. In Romans 4, beginning at verse 16, it says, Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only those who are of the law, but also to those who are of faith, of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

As it is written, I have made you, Abraham, a father of many nations. Now Paul gives this commentary. In the presence of God, whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did, who, meaning Abraham, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations according to what was spoken, so shall your descendants be.

And, not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body already dead, since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb, that was his wife, he did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what he had promised he was also able to perform. And therefore, Paul quotes Genesis, it was accounted to him for righteousness. Now notice, this is a long discussion here, but the closing words are, therefore it was accounted to him for righteousness.

Now what does that mean? Therefore means because of this. Because of what? Well, because of what he's just been describing. He's just been describing the nature of Abraham's faith.

What kind of faith is that? Well, it says he was not weak in faith. In fact, his faith in God was so great, that even though God had told him that he and his wife would have a child after they were much too old to have children, he did not waver in his faith. He was fully convinced that what God had said he was able to perform.

And it says he didn't waver in his faith. His faith actually dominated his whole

perspective of everything. His whole life was dominated by the fact that God had made a promise to him.

How do we know this? Well, he left his home in Ur of the Chaldees and went out and lived as a nomad for 100 years in Canaan. And this homeless wandering he did for one reason only, because God had made a promise to him and he believed it. Now he inconvenienced himself and his family.

He separated himself from the wealth of his youth and went out and lived as a nomad in a tent in a hostile territory and did that for a whole century. He entered Canaan when he was 75 and he died when he was 175. So for 100 years Abraham lived in this condition.

Why? Because of his faith. His faith in what God had promised was so compelling that it caused him to relocate, it caused him to give up all of his familiar comforts, it caused him to live in a nomadic lifestyle. Now I'm not saying every Christian has to do all those things, but notice that faith of Abraham wasn't just something that sat inside his head as he sat in Ur of the Chaldees and continued in the comforts of his original home.

It changed his whole life. And because it was that kind of a life-dominating faith that dictated a whole course of life to him that was different than he would have done had he had no faith, it says, therefore, this is Romans 4.22, because of that it was accounted to him for righteousness. In other words, because his faith had this characteristic that it dominated his whole life and thinking and course of life, because of that it was counted to him for righteousness.

Now that strongly suggests that had he not had that kind of faith, but some other kind of faith, it would not have been counted to him for righteousness. We're told in James 2 that the devils have a kind of faith, the devils believe and tremble. But they're not saved.

And we're told in James 2 that there are people who have a kind of faith that doesn't save them also. And what kind of faith is that? Well, James said it's a kind of faith that does not have works. He said faith without works is dead.

And all that really means is that if you claim to have a faith that does not dictate consistent actions that are consistent with that professed faith, then your faith is not a living faith. It won't save you. The Apostle Paul taught the same thing.

In Galatians 5 and verse 6 he said, it's not circumcision that saves us, it's not uncircumcision that saves us. But what does, he said, is a faith that works through love. What will save you, what will put you in the class of those who have the faith of Abraham, as opposed to those who do not, is if you have a faith that works through love, a faith that produces action.

There are many people who are calling themselves Christians today, and they say they have faith, but they don't have a faith that produces consistent action. Now what is

consistent action? Well, if you read what Jesus said, if you read that eternal life is a narrow gate to go through, and he said few are finding it, then would it not, if you really believe that, would it not be consistent for you to strive to enter into that narrow gate as Jesus said to do? In Luke 13, 24, if you believed what Jesus said, that there are few who find the road and the gate to eternal life, and that you need to strive to find it, if you really believe that, would you not do that? Wouldn't you strive to find it? If you knew there were things in your life that would prevent you from getting through that gate, would you not quickly cast them off? I mentioned earlier, a rich man having great difficulty entering the kingdom of God, I would imagine that if I were a rich man, that would strongly motivate me to make sure that if I were rich, that I was using my riches exactly the way God wanted, or else divest myself of them all. Because it is more important to enter into a life than not to.

Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said if your eye or your hand would cause you to sin, if it would keep you from entering the kingdom of God, then you should cut it off and cast it from you. And while we don't believe that Jesus meant literally that anyone should pluck out their eye or cast off their hand, what he was saying is this, your obsession with heaven, your obsession with entering into the kingdom, your obsession with having eternal life as opposed to missing out on it, should be so great that there is no price too great to pay to do it. If you have something in your life that would make it impossible for you to get through that gate with that thing, then get rid of it as vehemently, as quickly as you can.

For example, if there is some sinful relationship that you have, if there is some sinful habit that you have, if there is some possession that you have that you know is offensive to God, if there is some responsibility that you're ignoring, if there is some unfinished business that you know that you are neglecting, and you let this thing go, and you just let these things go, and you hang on to these things, it's foolishness. Because for all you know, this day your soul may be required of you. You may stand before God, and He'll say, Hey, you didn't try hard enough.

You were not really interested in entering the narrow gate. Now if you would say, But I was saved by grace. He would have to say, as the Bible does, No, only those are saved by grace who are saved through faith.

You are saved by grace through faith, if at all. And if you have no faith, you have not received grace. Faith is the means by which grace comes, according to Scripture.

And if you claim you're saved by grace, you better be able to show that you have faith. And if your works do not show that you have faith, then you do not have faith, according to Scripture, and you don't have grace either. Your preacher may convince you that you're saved.

Your mother may convince you that you're saved. Or you may convince yourself that

you're saved. Unfortunately, they may not be able to convince God that you're saved.

And that's what's going to matter. The main thing is you've got to be able to show, according to Scripture, that you are saved. And saved people are those who are striving to enter into the narrow gate.

When you consider the amount of thought and energy of your time, expenditure of your time and your energy and so forth, and your skills that you employ in pursuing the kingdom of God, and, let us say, the amount of the same that you spend pursuing other things not related to God at all, but just your own pleasure, let us say, or your own profits, would you be able to say of yourself that when Jesus sees you on the Day of Judgment, that He would say, Well done, you were striving to enter the kingdom of God. Doesn't the word strive convey some emotional exertion? Doesn't it suggest some commitment, some drive? It does. And therefore, we have reason to believe that no one will be in heaven except those who made a serious business of seeking to get there.

Now, this is not at all in conflict with the doctrine that we're saved by grace. We are saved by grace, if we are saved. And how do we know we're saved? By the fact that we have a heart that's after God, that we're trusting in Him.

We believe what He says when He says it's a narrow gate and few find it. And we determine to be among those who do so. And our lives show it.

If you want God, but you only want Him half-heartedly, if you want God and the world, then you will not have God. It says in 1 John 2, that he that loves the world does not have the love of the Father in him. You can't have both.

You can't love the world and God. Or in James, it tells us, that he that is a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Once again, you've got to make a choice.

Are you going to pursue the world and its pleasures and its things? Or are you going to seek the kingdom of God? You can't have both. Everything has its price tag. You can have the world, but it will cost you your soul and it will cost you Jesus.

Or you can have Jesus, but it will cost you the world, and your flesh, and your sinful pleasures. These are the things that Jesus clearly taught. These are things taught clearly through the Bible.

At this point, Jesus says, let me give you some good advice here. Strive to get into the narrow gate. He said, Enter by the narrow gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction.

A broad road is a much easier road to travel. You don't have to be so circumspect. When I'm driving on an interstate highway, I'm careful enough to be safe, but I'm not all that careful about every slight move of my steering wheel.

But if I'm on a very narrow little road with a cliff on one side, and there's just barely room for the tires on the road, I'm going to be very, very circumspect and very cautious the way I drive, because the narrower the road, the more difficult to stay on it. And Jesus is making that point. Most people, even those who would like to go to heaven, even those who would like to have eternal life, most people are on a much broader road that doesn't require so much care, and they're having an easier time of life.

But the problem is that road doesn't lead to the narrow gate. If you want to go in the narrow gate, you have to be on the road that goes through it, and that road is a narrow road. A lot of people think they're going to walk on the broad road and enter through the narrow gate.

That is not the way it is, Jesus said. The broad road leads to the broad gate, and that's the road to destruction, and there's many people going to be there. But, on the other hand, there is a narrow gate, and those who are on the narrow road will find themselves entering at the narrow gate.

Now what this tells us is that entering heaven, or entering eternal life, requires that you walk on a certain road. And we're not talking about natural roads here, we're talking about a way of life, we're talking about a way of living. The way you live is represented by walking on this path.

And the gate you enter has to do with your ultimate destiny. You cannot walk on the broad road and enter through the narrow gate. It won't happen.

You need to be committed to Jesus Christ, and to obedience to Him, and to total following Him, and committal and surrender to Him in all things, or else you will not enter that gate, because you will not be on that road. It is a very narrow road. And many times people try to ask, well, can I still be a Christian and do X? And X represents some selfish or sinful or gray area, a possibly sinful thing.

Can I still be a Christian and date a lot of women? Can I still be a Christian and have all my expensive little hobbies? Can I still be a Christian and watch R-rated movies? Well, listen, that's the wrong question. It's like the woman who was trying to hire a chauffeur, and she lived up on a mountain on a narrow road with a steep cliff on one side. And she put an ad in the paper that she wanted a chauffeur, and several applicants came.

And each time they took her for a test drive, for her to see how they did, they'd come to a very narrow and dangerous part of the road, and she'd say, how close can you get to the edge of this road without falling off? And each of the drivers tried to show that they could get very close to that edge and skillfully get by without going over the edge. Finally, one of the drivers who came to interview for the job, she asked him the same question. How close do you think you can get to the edge of that road without falling off? And he said, well, ma'am, this is a very dangerous spot in the road.

When I get to this part of the road, I'm going to stay as far from the edge as I can. And she hired him, because she was not interested in knowing how many risks her drivers could take. She was interested in knowing how smart they were and observant of danger.

It's a narrow road that leads to eternal life. And if people say, well, how far can I get to the edge of that road and still get through the narrow gate? Can I play with sin? Can I flirt with sin? Can I have a little bit of compromise in my life and still be saved? Well, if you want to take your chances and ask God about that on the day of judgment, you may find out an unpleasant answer on the day of judgment, and it'll be a little late to change it. If you are wise, you will stay as far from the edge as you can of that road.

If you know that the narrow road is a way of obedience to Jesus Christ, of total surrender to Him, of total trust in Him, of, you know, just doing what He said and avoiding anything else, then you take your chances. If you try to do other things that are not so clearly part of the will of God, and say, well, I wonder if I can still be saved under this. That's a broader road you're looking for.

You're looking for a broad road, and if you get on that road, it'll lead to death. If you had to walk on a tightrope across the Grand Canyon, you might be happy to do so without carrying a backpack full of gold, heavy as that would be. Although you would, of course, like to have your gold if you didn't have to walk such a tightrope, if your life depended on going across that tightrope, you might just leave all that luggage and baggage behind because you know of the great difficulty of walking that narrow path.

Well, you're going to have to consider those things about your life right now, because this life that leads to eternal life, this path is a narrow one, like a tightrope, and you can't carry all your emotional and sinful and material and selfish baggage with you. You've got to follow Jesus, and you've got to do it wholeheartedly. Anything less is an insult to God.

To follow Jesus halfheartedly isn't to follow Him at all. You may think you're following Jesus, and you're doing so halfheartedly, but you're on the wrong road. He's on the narrow one, and you're on the broad one.

Jesus said you must strive to enter in at the narrow gate. Let me urge you to do that today. If you've been a compromising Christian, you better change right now while you have a chance, because the time's running out for each of us.

I hope that you'll take this seriously. Well, it's time for us to close this session. We'll continue with our studies in the Sermon on the Mount next time.

I hope you'll consider prayerfully what we've been saying, and tune in again next time as we continue our discussions on this topic.