

## WIDE OR NARROW

Willy Nelson sings a song called “On the Road Again” and as I was thinking about the roads we travel that line from his song came to me and I couldn’t get it out of my head. “On the road again. Can’t wait to get on the road again” are all the words I could remember from that song. Thinking of roads I began to think of the Bob Hope and Bing Crosby movies about roads with Dorothy Lamour. I looked them up on the internet and found movies like ‘Road to Bali,’ “Road to Rio,” “Road to Morocco,” ‘Road to Utopia’ and others. In those days we never got tired of watching those movies listening to them sing and dance and solve whatever mystery was before them with less violence, laughter and a happy ending.

Roads! That’s how we travel. Whether dry, icy, snowy that’s how we get to our destinations. Our son Jim made a 10 hour trip from Oklahoma City to be with us this weekend since he didn’t make it for Thanksgiving. Those roads were clear and the weather sunny getting here and should be great for his trip home.

In early years settlers moving west made the roads, others refined them so that many could travel to new places. Obstacles were dealt with. Those not able to be moved were left and a route around or over them forged. It took planning, determination, willingness, hard aches, headaches, backaches, and a whole lot more to develop those roads. They were dirty, muddy when rains came, full of rocks, ruts and other stuff until we modernized them. No need for gas stations or such, just a place to change horses and get a quick bite to eat, if you were lucky. Today our roads are much better to travel, unless there is snow or ice or ruts because of decaying roads. Then they become hazards. But how else do we travel to get to our final destination? So roads are important.

In Scripture there are many roads as well where things happened as they traveled along. So for a few weeks we will look at some of them.

This morning we begin with a familiar passage found almost at the end of Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount given by Jesus. Throughout chapters 5, 6 and 7 Jesus lays out the road map of life. Read those chapters and you will find great advice that covers many subjects.

This morning let's 'get on the road again' by traveling the two roads Jesus mentions in chapter 7, verses 13,14. "*Enter through the narrow gate*" Jesus says, "*For wide is the gate and broad 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.*" Here is that same verse with a little more "Zip" from another translation:

*"Don't look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don't fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires total attention."*

*"Don't look for shortcuts to God....the way to life-to God...is vigorous and requires total attention."* Lots of people look for shortcuts lose their focus in life. We want the quick and easy. Fast for. Fast cars. Short lines. We want the shortcuts by ignoring the difficult decisions we sometimes are called on to make. But when it comes to our relationship with God and our future there is no shortcut. Jesus couldn't take a shortcut to the cross. There was no by passing the rejections, the pain of the whip, the nails in his hands, the spear in his side, the crown of thorns on his head, the 6 hours of suffering on a Friday listening to people yell for him to come down and they would believe or give them a miracle and they would believe. There was no by pass for him in order for him to get to the place he was going to blaze for us, no short cut.

**There are two gates that lead to two roads, the wide or narrow.....two groups of people, the many and the few.....two destinations, either destruction or life.** Seems pretty simple to me. How about you?

If we God's word we realize there are really only two paths to travel. We either travel the worldly path or the path of faith. We either travel the path that was forged by Satan or the one laid out by God. Even from the time in the garden there were two paths. Think of it. One path led Adam and Eve right to the tree of forbidden fruit and they just took the path around it every day not even thinking about those special trees. One day on that path Eve met someone who distracted her, stopped her right by the tree she had seen many times. This was her first encounter with someone on this road who called to her attention not only how great the fruit of the forbidden tree looked, but that God didn't mean it when he said if they ate the fruit they would die. He, that is Satan, kind of twisted God's word and made that fruit so enticing that Eve could not resist and neither could Adam. We know what happened and a new road was formed. A road to death and destruction. A road they were about to embark on. They were about to take the trip through the wide gate into the world outside the promised land that would bring misery, destruction, hatred, anger, murder, sinfulness of all kinds as well as spiritual death and physical death. Where they were was paradise. No problems at all. They didn't have to work hard to get the fruit to survive. God supplied all their needs. They were naked and not ashamed. They didn't fear God. But that all changed when Eve took a bite and gave to Adam to enjoy. With that their peaceful road ended and the road of turmoil awaited them on the outside of the narrow gate of heaven.

“Blessed” or “Happy” Jesus says, ‘who do all these things.’ He then lays out how to treat each other, and what God requires. When we come to our passage today he says there really are only two roads in life that one can chose to follow. You either take the one well traveled that leads to destruction, the one many of the ancestors had traveled, or you can decide to take the narrow road, the one God's

word spoke about, the one that would lead to a peaceful and joy filled life on this earth and a greater reward in heaven. One was easy to follow. The other the most difficulty. It's not the road that we should look at, but where it leads.

We don't often think about those roads do we. There are some who say there are many paths to God. But in this passage especially, we don't see them being mentioned. Jesus says pretty clearly, there is only one that leads to life. I don't see any other paths, do you?

Which would you chose to travel? The answer seems simple. Choose the one that leads to life. Why do so many chose the other path? Or why do we look for those shortcuts? Is it because it is easier? That one seems to be filled with no restrictions. You can do what you want to do...believe what you want to believe....you don't have to pay any price. Funny thing with that is this. I think Jesus didn't want any to think about taking that road. Throughout the ages God has said if you are going to be his people and he our God there are guidelines, restrictions, rules.

The gate was the beginning part of their journey. I think of a skier standing on the top of a hill at the starting gate waiting for the horn to sound to start his rush down the slopes through all those wide and narrow gates, or flags along the route. He or she has to enter those gates precisely without thinking about it or else time will be lost. They have done this over and over again, practiced it, failed, got up and did it again and again until they and the mountain became one. Many have floundered on those runs. Some have been tripped up by the narrow gates and have fallen out of the race. But then they get up and try again and will keep on that narrow path until they finally reach their goal and cross the winners line even if it isn't in first place. Isn't that kind of the picture of a Christian's walk with God? You know, you have your beginning, then you walk daily with him, sometimes stumbling, sometimes you take your eyes of him and fall flat on your face. Then you get back up seeking forgiveness, getting back on the right track and proceeding

on the path to your eternal reward. Paul reminds us that those who remain on the right road will be the winners, not whiners.

You know in our lives today some people look for the easiest road to travel. Don't think so? If I asked some of you what routes you take to certain places you would tell me the shortcuts through the country. When we first came to Buffalo and Dawson we were told how to get places by going east or west north or south until you see the pink house which isn't pink anymore, take a right go till you see the old chicken coup which has been torn down take a right and go to Mr. Cravens house who doesn't live their anymore and...you get the idea. I know I like shortcuts but Carole thinks my shortcuts are often the long way.

We always have the choice, don't we. The wide road leads to destruction. It's the road of least resistance, the shortcut to nowhere. Just like the bridge to nowhere we've heard about that our tax money built. There is little of no sacrifice required. One is allowed to bring whatever baggage they desire...you know, materialism, prejudices, hatred, unforgiving spirit, and believe whatever you want. Here is my favorite...God is so loving that he will let everyone into heaven. That's the kind of world Jesus came to save. Didn't he pay the price? Didn't he sacrifice his life? His road was narrow full of rejection from others. He took the journey on the narrow road to lead the world to his Father so that we could leave the wide road of destruction and join him on the narrow road to life. He says take the next exit and follow the signs to the less traveled road leading to a better place. I'll lead your home.

We look at the world around us and think we can believe whatever we want, do whatever we want to do, grab the brass ring and who cares whose toes you step on to get what you want. The goal of such a thought is a self goal. Thieves do that. Murders do that. Followers of Jesus Christ do not!

Jesus says that wide gate that many travel leads to troubles in life. How many people use Google maps or MapQuest prior to a journey or use a GPS? Why? Because you want the best roads to travel. You want to make sure there are no detours you have to take. You want a smooth trip. But as you have found out the unexpected can pop up. Just because it is the road most traveled doesn't mean it is the correct road to take. In his illustration this road that is wide is the one that many take but it doesn't lead to the best destination. In fact Jesus says just the opposite. This gate and this road leads to destruction.

Now the other gate and other road was different. It was the narrow gate that was a little more difficult and you had to take your time and not many took that road. Those on the wide road wanted to get their as quick and as easy as they could. They would bypass all kinds of safety and not think it out. However those on the narrow road took it one day at a time, counting the cost, trusting in the one who was leading the way. Jesus says those who take this road are going to find something much better. They are going to find life.....real life.

What kind of a road is this narrow road? It's the road where we follow the path Jesus laid out. It is one dedicated to truth, perseverance and trust. I think Jesus concludes his sermon with this illustration because when the people got up to leave they had a choice to make. Either accept and follow his words that lead to life. Or go back on the road they had been walking and find that their lives will never change. The truth is, you can always follow the crowd and do what they do or you can look for the truth and decide it might be more difficult but the end results are a whole lot better.

Keeping on the straight path is the better way. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life and the only way to the Father is through me." I would add... there are no shortcuts.

You see, the narrow road that leads to life means you follow God's ways. It means you sow seeds of love and hope, not hatred and unrest. It means you don't put yourself first, but put God first in your life. You really do ask the question "What would Jesus do?" when you try and figure something out. Your faith would mean something.

Yup! There are two roads .....the wide road of destruction or the narrow way to life. There are two groups that travel those roads.... There are the many, or should I say 'worldly' or 'unbelievers?' Or the few, the followers of God through Jesus Christ. Then there are two destinations....destruction or life.

Now the point is this.... which gate and road are you going to travel? Be smart. Make the right choice. Your eternal destination depends on it.