

Enter by the narrow gate

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[0 : 00] That's mighty I. Let us join in prayer. O Lord, remind us of our indebtedness to the grace of God that has enabled us to gather together like this on the evening of another Lord's Day, a privilege that has been extended to us, and very often we take it for granted as being our right.

And yet we know that it wasn't always so, in our own land even. There were these times, the covenanting times, when your dear people were hounded and hunted, and met in caves and in woods and in the dens of the earth, been pursued by their enemies.

And it is still the same today, not so much in our land but in other places, where this very day itself your people have been hounded by the enemies of Christ because of the bitter enmity and hatred that is in the heart of man.

And we cannot but remember them and think of them, especially in the Middle East and in Afghanistan and in other Muslim lands, where to name the name of Christ is to have not only a threat leveled against you, but to have your very life taken away.

And so we remember them and pray that you would bless them with a real sense of your own presence and the peace of God that passes understanding.

[1 : 49] Although their outward circumstances may be so different, yet no man can take away from them the blessing that you confer. And we give thanks, O Lord, that though there is terrible unrest and bloodshed and war throughout the world tonight, and the ravages of sin seen in so many different ways, that there will come a time, according to the Scriptures, when the lion shall lie down with the lamb, when men will beat their weapons of war into plowshares and instruments of peace, when Christ himself shall reign, and all his enemies shall be made his footstool, when he shall establish peace on the earth, and those who are separated now will be together.

And so for ourselves we do give thanks that we can meet like this so freely, without fear of threat of any kind, and are afraid that the door will open and enemies will burst in, or a doorbell will ring, or some way or other be reminded that it is not legitimate for us to meet.

And sometimes, O Lord, we fear that yet ahead in our own land that that day might return when the Church of Christ will meet in very small groups and will be persecuted in a way that has been unknown for generations.

But for us, in our day of privilege and opportunity, help us to make full use of it. And while we gather together like this once again around the word of life, having sought, like the psalmist, to open our mouth and to sing the praises of our covenant God, what a privilege you have given to us, that we can sing your name, the praises of your name, and be reminded again of your faithfulness, new every morning at your mercies, day after day and night after night.

And for some of us, many years of enjoying the privileges of the Gospel and the outward blessings in your providence of health and strength, of freedom of worship, of having shelter and security and every provision.

[4 : 24] Oh, forgive us for just assuming that these are our rights. when so many of our fellows in the world are denied even to have bread on the table, and we have plenty, more than sufficient.

And so as we lift up our hearts in adoration and in praise for your great faithfulness to us and your long suffering, we will remember most of all that the greatest of your blessings has come our way, that we have heard that Jesus Christ of the seed of David has become one of us and taken our place, that God so loved the world that you gave your only begotten Son so that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Forgive us, O Lord, for our familiarity with the truth and how little impact it seems to make upon our lives, how we ought to be full of joy, how our hearts ought to overflow with praise and adoration to the God who loved us and gave his Son for us, delivered him over to the wrath not only of his

enemies but to the wrath of God against sin.

He being given us our justification, raised again with power on the third day, it is in his name that we meet and looking for his blessing by his Spirit that we have that confidence that we meet not just as a group in our own name or under the name or banner of a church but under the banner of the Lord's Gospel and in his name.

For you have promised that where two, even two or three, are met together in your name that you are there to presence yourself among us and to bless us.

[6 : 33] And so it is with an eye towards that blessing that we lift up our hearts tonight again in worship and in praise and in petition.

For we ask that you would come under our roof in such a way that it would be unmistakably known to each one of us that the Lord is present by his Spirit and that our dealings are with thee, our maker, our sustainer, and our judge.

And may we meet with thee as our Savior. We pray your blessing over us. We have come along different paths on the journey of life. Our experiences are not the same and you know all that is within the cup of that experience.

For some of us tonight, it may be a great sorrow and anxiety and foreboding with a fear that will not go away, whether that is with regard to our health or to our destiny or to both.

We ask, O Lord, that you would meet with us in mercy and tonight. The living word of the living God would speak powerfully to us. For we know that our confidence is not in ourselves or in our fellows, but in the one who has given the promise.

[8 : 01] Speak the word and your servant shall be made whole. We ask, O Lord, for whole families. We rejoice in the families that do come out faithfully in your name, where the torch of truth is lit in the home and where your name is honoured and your day is observed and witness is born to the grace of God.

Pray your blessing upon parents and their children. We ask for those homes where there is darkness, spiritual darkness, and we pray that you would come in a day of mercy and grace and conviction and bring them to a realisation that one day, perhaps sooner than they or any one of us thinks, there will be that great meeting with sinners before their judge and the verdict shall be pronounced that will be irreversible.

We pray, O Lord, for this congregation. We do give thanks for them. We ask your blessing upon your servant, their minister, asking especially that where he is tonight and as he labours in your name and as the good news of the gospel is preached, so there might be the newness of life imparted and that it might be recorded in the annals of heaven, this one and that one there was born.

We pray that you would bless all who uphold him here in prayer. We do give thanks for praying men and women and perhaps those who feel that their work, at least in a large part now is over, their physical strength ebbing with the years, remind them that those, and remind each one of us, that those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.

It is they who shall mount up with wings like eagles, run and not be weary, walk and not faint. We bless you, O Lord, that ultimately your work is a hidden work and it is in the closet behind the closed doors where our Father who sees in secret will reward openly.

[10 : 22] Make your thanks, O Lord, for the assurance that no matter what may take place in the experience of your church, your kingdom hath no end at all. It shall throughout ages all remain.

That earthly kingdoms rise only to fall again, but the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ is guaranteed to succeed. That very first promise that was given, at least in the hearing of our first parents, that there would be one who would crush the serpent's head and in the process his own heel would be bruised, that he must triumph until all his enemies have made his food store.

And so it is with that great encouragement that we draw near tonight as part of the body of Christ, that vast company of people even here on earth who this day already have gathered to worship his name.

And that praise shall be sung until the sun sets in the far west. We bless you, O Lord, that he, as the servant of the Father, in obedience to your own will, came into this world as the Savior of sinners.

Lord, remember us then and all who have gathered and all who belong to us and who are yet a burden to us because they are on the outside. They haven't yet bowed the knee and sought your face in prayer.

[11 : 55] We pray that you would remember them in mercy and visit them with your salvation. We pray for an outpouring of your spirit. We do give thanks for every token of your favor, for all who are coming to know you and to profess you.

We thank you too for your work amongst the young in our own day and for the witness that is born to the grace of God in their homes and in their schools. And we give thanks for all of that. Pray for those of them who have had to leave home in search of employment and further education. We pray that you would bless them and protect them and keep them in the evil day. And for others who find themselves tonight at the far ends of the earth, removed from their home by ocean and by continent, and we ask, O Lord, that you would remind them of what they were taught and those who as yet have not bowed a knee in repentance would be convicted and reminded of their early upbringing and so that good news would come to us from far countries. And now, as we continue in our worship and in our praise, grant us hearts overflowing with thanksgiving and as we shortly turn to the word to read it and to reflect upon it, we pray that the Holy Spirit, its author, would take that living word and make it a powerful instrument in his own hand for the upbuilding of your people and the gathering in of the lost and take away all our sins.

[13 : 46] Amen. Amen. We'll see, in the Lord's help, we'll turn again to the chapter that we read together, Matthew 7, and to the words of the 13th and 14th verses, Matthew 7, 13.

Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few. There have been many dark days in the history of the human race, right up to the present. and no doubt until the end of time. But surely the darkest day, the most tragic day in the history of humanity, was the day when our first parents fell.

There they were in a perfect environment, having come off God's assembly line, so to speak, in accordance with his own specification, perfect, unflawed, lacking nothing, and yet they fell.

[15 : 32] the day that sin entered into the experience of the human race, left it and every succeeding generation to our own, left us having forfeited the blessing of the Lord and having lost everything.

that was the outcome of the revolt of Adam and his wife Eve. It wasn't a simple fall, an accidental slip.

It was defiance of the first order. it was made perfectly plain and clear to them that everything in the garden was theirs to enjoy.

They had fellowship with their maker, unbroken fellowship, and yet they chose to listen to the third party.

And that third party entering as the tempter caused our first parents to listen to him. And by an act of choice, by an act of their will, they rebelled against their maker.

[16 : 52] They were made not as the brute beasts of the field were made, not as any other living species was made.

Each of these came into being according to the template that was ordered for them. Let the water spring forth and the oceans teemed with life.

Let the earth bring forth and every fruit-bearing tree and all the great cultivars, all the land-born based animals came into being.

creation. But when it came to the creation of man, the template was God himself. Let us make man in our own image.

There was a divine, deliberate consultation and man came forth from the hand of God bearing his own image. But of course there are differences.

[17 : 58] in certain important respects. So we're made as the apex of God's creative activity.

There are some who think that the angels are higher than men. But nowhere is it said that the angels were made after the image of God.

God. They were created individually with the human race as a species. And so life was conferred upon our first parents.

Physical life and spiritual life. And at the end of the day that's what life really is. Spiritual life.

Fellowship with God enjoying his favour coming under his blessing. And they forfeited that. And the day that they sinned they lost their life.

[19 : 05] And they lost it irretrievably. There was no possibility that it could be recovered. Not at the human level. And the sad picture that we have as Milton closes his great paradise lost.

The closing lines depicts Adam and Eve hand in hand going out of Eden. Wistfully looking back but the entrance was debarred.

The cherubim were there with a flaming sword. There was no possibility that her first parents could return to partake of the tree of life and live forever.

And there was ahead of them an unknown future. And no matter how much they wanted to return they couldn't.

There was only one way and that was forward. And it's like that still. no matter how we try to create our own utopias and our own earthly paradises there are those who think that by escaping from the rush and hustle and bustle of city life and coming up to remote islands that they will regain paradise.

[20 : 41] But whether the island is in the Atlantic or in the Pacific, the Hebrides or Hawaii, there is no paradise, no earthly paradise.

And no matter how we would wish to go back to the security of childhood where others made decisions for us or even to the security of the womb, it's simply not possible.

the one way is forward. And that was the way that they took. It was a dark day, as I said. It was bleak in the extreme, but there was one glimmer, one glimmer of hope.

And the words that the Lord God spoke to the serpent was in the hearing of our first parents. and I believe that from that they took courage and hope.

There would come a day when one, a descendant of the woman, the seed, interestingly, not the seed of the man, but the seed of the woman would come and do battle with the serpent and with the seed of the serpent and overcome and crush the serpent, but in the process his own heel would be bruised as human nature.

[22 : 11] And that's the way it is. There is a divine ordained enmity between the seed, between the serpent and the woman, between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, divinely ordained until the end of time.

And so they make their way out of the garden and forwards and they embarked on a journey, for them a journey of no return.

We too are on a journey and every journey presupposes a starting point and a finishing point, a beginning and an ending.

And the Lord Jesus Christ picks up on that and in the words that are before us tonight, he depicts the journey of life as being along one of two roads, either the broad road or the narrow road.

So there are two roads and there are two destinies. things. Now I said that Adam and his wife Eve had hope.

[23 : 37] And hope is unwishful thinking. Hope and wishful thinking couldn't be further apart.

There's a diameter of difference between hope and wishful thinking. Hope has a foundation.

And hope looks forward. It never looks back. And it looks forward to good things to come. That's true of hope.

Wishful thinking is just hit and miss. No basis. what is your hope tonight with regard to the future?

We're on this journey.

There's no way back. We must go forward. Does it ever cross your mind what is going to happen to you when you die?

[24 : 38] For die you must. It is appointed to men to men once to die and after that a judgment.

What is going to happen after death? Will I still be able to think? Will my memory follow me?

Will I be myself? Now surely every thinking person sometime sooner or later must reflect upon these great and weighty issues.

What is going to happen to me when I die? Well Jesus Christ confronts us once again in the gospel of his grace with these two issues concerning our destiny.

First of all he speaks about the broad road road. And the broad road is an easy road. It's a wide gate.

[25 : 47] Many go through it. Indeed the vast majority of adults will go through the broad road.

Through the broad gate, the wide gate and onto the broad road.

It's easy. It's popular. It's not rigorous. No demands are made upon us. The ethic is easy.

The broad road. But there's another one and that's the narrow road. And the entrance to that road is through the narrow gate.

Through the turnstile. Where we go in one at a time in single file. And it's that narrow that we cannot take any baggage with us.

No room for baggage. We must leave behind us all our prejudices, all our preconceived ideas.

Whatever merit we may think we have will have to be left on the outside.

[26 : 58] The narrow road, said Jesus, is difficult. It's a rigorous road. And there are few on it. What a contrast between the many going along this broad road where they pat each other on the back and they say let's eat and drink and be merry.

No cloud on their horizon. No fear of the future. Everything is going well. Hail fellow well met. But those on the narrow road, not easy.

It never was easy to be a Christian. Never is and never will be. Now there are several elements in connection with the narrow road.

And these are highlighted for us in the Sermon on the Mount. The character of those who are on the narrow road that leads to life.

Their character is depicted for us in the Beatitudes. Blessed are those, and there's a list of them.

Blessed are those who are poor in spirit, for there is just the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God.

[28 : 16] Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Blessed are the meek, weak, and there's a wide difference between meekness and weakness.

Those on the narrow road, says Jesus, when they're reviled, are not to revile again. They are to turn the other cheek. They are to go the second mile.

And in so doing, they are but copying and following their master, who when he was reviled, reviled not again. When he suffered, he did not threaten.

He submitted himself to his father's will. So those who are on the narrow road, they have to live the life and walk the road.

And that life is spelt out in its principles in this great sermon. is very challenging. But then there's another element in connection with the narrow road.

[29 : 30] And we're to ask ourselves right now, on which road am I traveling? Am I still on the broad road that leads to destruction? Or am I walking the narrow road that leads to life, eternal life?

life. And Jesus says that there were those who made certain claims. They claimed to be prophets and miracle workers and so on.

And he will say to them, and he points us forward to the day that's ahead of each one of us. He points us forward to the judgment day. And they will say to him, Lord, Lord, we did this in your name, and that in your name.

We cast out demons. We were great preachers of the gospel. We were theological students. We followed John Calvin.

We read our Westminster confession from end to end. And he will say to them, but I never knew you. It's a matter of whether he knows us, and whether we know him.

[30 : 48] That's what it's about. And then, finally, he brings us and confronts us with the two builders. We read about it.

The man who built his house upon the rock, and it stood the test, and the man who built his house upon the sand. And there were many in his own day, and still, who followed him, who enjoyed his teaching, who loved listening to the word opened.

But it never went further than that. They never built upon the truth. And the rock, the rock that Jesus refers to, is not his teaching.

the rock is our attitude to that teaching. What is our attitude to the truth? It is one thing to be a hearer of the word.

It's quite another to be a doer, and to build upon it. Tonight, what is our attitude to the teaching of Jesus? Is it the rock upon which we build?

[32 : 07] The narrow way. And the end of that narrow way is life, everlasting life. What is the end of those on the broad road?

there are three possibilities. There are those who claim that at the last, all will be saved.

No one will be lost. Before the end comes, they claim the love of God is such that it will overcome the resistance of those who have said no all along.

And that doctrine is called universalism. All will be saved without exception. That's a very comforting thought.

If only it were true. But nowhere in the scripture, in the teaching of Jesus, in fact, the very opposite is the case. The end of the broad road is destruction.

[33 : 20] salvation, not salvation. And then there is the possibility of us ending our existence, or of our existence being ended, of a time coming in the future when the impenitent, those who have refused to believe, will go out of existence.

They will be annihilated. It's as if you press the delete button, and the screen is blank. End of it all. Now, that's not, that is not an ancient teaching. It's quite modern, within the last 150 years or so. people. And what has given rise to this teaching, and if we haven't met it, we will, sooner or later, and it's a teaching that's embraced by many in the evangelical world.

it's a comforting thought, that there will be no everlasting punishment. And what has given rise to this teaching is simply this, an aversion, a hatred, of the doctrine of hell.

They say, how is it possible for a loving God to send anyone, to a lost eternity, to suffer everlastingly.

[34 : 59] Surely that is not possible. And so they've come up with this idea or this doctrine, that those who are unregenerate and who refuse to bow the knee to Christ will be annihilated.

And the thought that lies behind it is this, that we are mortal, both body and soul. And that immortality is conferred only upon those who believe in Jesus.

And that when God by his spirit works in them and they become new people in Christ, at that moment immortality is conferred upon them.

so that those who are not born again and who defiantly refuse to bow the knee to the Savior are mortal and will go out of existence.

But that is not a truth according to the scriptures. That too is untenable scripturally.

[36 : 16] but it is a doctrine that is embraced by many as I said in the evangelical world. And the third possibility is hell.

And this is the most solemn subject that we can read of and particularly difficult to speak of. Hell is at the end of a Christ defined life.

And it is pictured for us graphically by none other than the Lord Jesus Christ himself who spoke in the most graphic language and used unforgettable metaphors in describing that place and that condition.

He likened it to Gehenna. And the Jews who were in his hearing knew full well what he meant. The rubbish dump that burned day and night outside Jerusalem or outside the city walls.

The smoke rose up incessantly. The flames were always to be seen. It wasn't a one-off Guy Fawkes night experience.

[37 : 47] The bonfires have gone out. This fire goes on and on and for the Jews it was synonymous with the end of a Christ defined life.

And then he spoke of the lake of fire that burns forever and ever. The anguish that is experienced there. And he spoke of the darkness that is on the outside.

The outer darkness. And it's outside of the cosmos. Within God's creative work there is order and there is beauty and there is artistry.

There is no confusion or disorder in any work of God. but this darkness is outside the cosmos.

It's a place where there is no order and where the light is as darkness. It's a black hole where not a glimmer of light will enter and there will be no light emanating from it either.

[39 : 05] And it's important to defend the doctrine of hell. Because our Lord's reputation is at stake.

No one more than he spoke about hell. And if hell is not a reality then he was mistaken and that has grave consequences.

Now the language is metaphorical and literal but who is to say that the reality is less than the simile or the metaphor the broad road that leads to destruction and endless destruction.

But what about the end of the narrow road and how much easier it is to speak of the end of this road.

This journey's end is absolutely wonderful. Jesus says that at the end they are to enter into his father's house.

[40 : 28] The house of many mansions. And it is part of his great prayer the night in which he was betrayed when he prayed for them.

He prayed for them as an entity. He prayed for those whom the father had given to him. In other words he prayed for the church and he prayed that they would be with me where I am that they

might see my glory.

and that's what awaits the ransom of the Lord when they return to the heavenly Zion. They shall see how much the father loves the son.

The father loved the son from all eternity. Loved him with an everlasting love, an unending love. Loved him while he sent him into this world.

Loved him at his lowest point. And he was never more lovely as one theologian has said. He was never more lovely in the father's eyes than when he was suspended on the cross.

[41 : 45] Father, I want you to show them how much you love me. But there's even more. father, I want them to share in the glory that you have given me.

Let that glory be given to them. And John Calvin's comment on this verse is unforgettable as he reflects upon the great truth that is there revealed.

And he says why it's almost a kind of deification. It's almost as if we become God that we share in the divine nature.

Now there are always and must always be discontinuities between the creator and the creature. Always. He is eternal.

We are not yet created in his image with a capacity to know him and to love him and to have fellowship with him.

[43 : 01] and there are several passages that we could connect with the end of the narrow road. There is this one.

One of the great passages in the New Testament where the apostle John on Patmos Island a prisoner of conscience and for the testimony of Jesus Christ Christ.

And the Lord meets with him on that memorable morning and pulls aside the curtain and John gets a glimpse into glory. And he sees a vast company, an innumerable number, gathered around the throne of God and of the Lamb.

And he asks the question, who are these? and where have they come from? And the angel answers John's question, these are they who have come through great tribulation, the great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

And there is not one blood bought saint who is unacquainted with tribulation, some more than others, but all have come through the great tribulation.

[44 : 29] And John goes on to describe for us the sight that he has shown in connection with those. They have come through the great tribulation and God the Father as it were bends down and wipes away the tears, tear by tear, individually.

And many are the tears that are shed by the Lord's people, tears over what they find within their own hearts, even the renewed heart, tear over sin, over their non-repentance, tears over what sin has done to their Saviour, tears over those who as yet are on the broad road.

Many are the silent tears that are shed. David said, into your bottle put my tears. Are they not in your book? book. And then John sees this.

He sees the Lamb leading his flock, the Lamb acting as shepherd, and he leads them to new pastures, and besides still waters, and he leads them to the very swoosh of the river.

Here they drink, here they drink, from the river of his grace. there is a river whose streams do glide the city of our God, but there they are taken to the very source, to the fountain head itself, and there they drink, and they shall feed.

[46 : 18] Adam and Eve ate in the earthly paradise. They lacked nothing, but they had to feed, and the Lamb will feed his flock.

throughout everlasting ages. And then John has shown this, there will be no more sun, nor any heat.

And how precious this must have been for the apostle John, now an old man, with the sun beating down cruelly on his head. No shelter, unremitting heat, and there shall be no more heat.

and they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their forehead, and they shall worship him as never before. That's just a little of what awaits those who are on the narrow road, the end of which is life everlasting.

thing. The life that begins here, and that will go on unendingly, there is much, much more. There will be a renewal, and a reinstatement, and the work of salvation is not just confined to sinners of mankind.

[47 : 42] this poor world, the poor ground that has come under the curse due to man's sin, even the ground will be renewed, and remade.

And the mandates that were given at the beginning to the first Adam will be renewed, and given to the second Adam, who will lead his people on a journey of exploration that will never end.

What blessedness, and what bliss. On which road are we traveling? It's one or the other.

The possibilities that I outlined in connection with the end of the broad road are reduced to one. And no one, no one, need go to hell.

And if you do, you'll go to hell trampling on the blood of Jesus Christ. It is those who trample on that precious blood who will go to hell.

[49 : 01] No one need go to hell. And on the day of judgment, when an account must be given of every word that has been said and maybe not said, and every word that has been heard, the question will be asked of those who are still on the broad road.

Did no one tell you that I sent my son into this world? Did no one tell you that the spirit of God is a spirit of love?

were you not told? And that's part of the great commission. We are not to be silent in our witness.

We are to proclaim the good news. It would be wrong to end on that solemn note of hell.

Jesus Christ came into this world to proclaim the good news. Liberty for the captives, sight for the blind, hearing for the deaf, salvation for sinners.

[50 : 17] And that salvation is available here and now. You need not let one other moment go by in your experience. why not along with Jacob when he was confronted by the angel of the covenant and that unforgettable wrestling match that night on the desert sand, I will not let you go until you bless me.

You should argue along these lines in prayer and put him to the test. Those who come to him, he will in no wise cast out.

It comes down to choice. Our personal destiny depends on the choice that we make here and now.

Moses said in his day, I have set before you life and death, good and evil.

But he didn't leave it there. He said, choose life. May you choose it too. Let us pray. Oh Lord, we give thanks in as much as we are able to reflect upon your great goodness to us.

Before we came here tonight, we prayed. We prayed for your help. we sought your blessing. We asked for the guidance of your spirit. We prayed for hearing ears and hearts that would be opened.

[52 : 02] And we ask that you would do that. For it is not by might, not by power, but by your spirit. And that it might be recorded in the annals of heaven, once again, that one here and another there was born again into your kingdom.

And taken from the broad road that leads to destruction to the narrow road that ends in life, everlasting life. This is your great gift, able to pardon sinners and able to receive them and able to give them new hope.

We give thanks that that is why Jesus came, to rescue the perishing and to give hope to the hopeless. Bless us now in our short meeting and in our parting.

Watch over us and keep us. Do us good. For Jesus' sake. Amen.