

## Finding the Way

### *Eureka: On Finding, Pt. 1*

One of the side benefits of attending church and listening to sermons – well at least some sermons – is you come away a little more literate than you were before. Especially in terms of *biblical* literacy – which is important, because so many of our cultural signposts are marked with biblical allusions and references. Very often I'll have someone say to me after a sermon, "Oh, *that's* where that saying comes from!" "An eye for an eye", "turn the other cheek", "Good Samaritan" there's thousands of them.

You even learn some Greek. Last week we talked about two different Greek words for "patience" that James used to two different ends. But the truth is, you know more Greek than you realize. And the name of this series proves it, *eureka!* Do you think of an old prospector who suddenly strikes gold? Or maybe a scientist who makes a great discovery? And that's because the Greek word *eureka* means, "I have found it!"

And we're beginning today a brief series – we will wrap it up on Easter - of sayings by Jesus on the nature of finding. And that's important, because there is something I have noticed over the 20 years of leading a "seeker sensitive" church in a religiously

skeptical place like Austin. You see, though it's perfectly acceptable nowadays to say, "I'm spiritually *searching*," it's *not* acceptable to say, "I've *found* God." It's okay to say, "I'm searching for God," but to say, "I've found God," is not. Why not? Probably a number of reasons. But I think a big one is because it seems *narrow*. Seems limited, restricting. We like to keep our options open. So, we want to search...but we're afraid to say we *found* it because it's narrow.

And in the text we have this morning, Jesus tackles just that issue. Let's take a look at it and keep an eye out for "finding" language. **Matthew 7:7–14:** "*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. 9 Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?"*

*"11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! 12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. 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. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."*

Now in this text, Jesus confronts head-on the issue of spiritual finding and the implication of narrowness. And what he does is he says all spiritual approaches basically break into two categories - two ways, two paths, two roads, it can be translated any one of those ways. So two ways or paths or roads.

And what we're going to do is very briefly look at *where* he says those two paths lead. Secondly, *what* they are. Then thirdly, *why* they lead there. And lastly, *how* you can be on the true way, how you can find the true path. Okay? Where they lead, what they are, why they lead where they do, and how to be on the true path.

**First, Where do they lead?** Now Jesus intentionally uses the most shocking language. First of all, the word “narrow”, not just today but even in the Bible, has very negative associations and references. And the word broad has very, very *positive* associations and references. The word “narrow” literally means “to be squashed or crushed.” If I step on a bug, what does it die of? Narrowness. Because your physical being needs a certain amount of spaciousness or you can't breathe. You can't work. You can't live.

How many of you remember, Baby Jessica, who fell down a well in her Aunt's backyard in Midland? Her ordeal – and eventual rescue, thank God – captured

the whole nation. By the way, Jessica McClure is 34 years old this year – how old do *you* feel? But for 56 hours, rescuers struggled to free the 18-month-old from an 8-inch pipe, 22-feet below ground. Some of you will not be able to sleep tonight just thinking about that! And they did manage to rescue her, but if they hadn't, she would have died...of narrowness.

Whereas the word “broad” means spaciousness. And in the Bible, it has the ramifications of freedom. The Psalms are always saying, “You have led me into a broad place.” Or the psalmist says, “I walk at large” and so forth. So it's shocking Jesus would use such a negative word for the right way and such a positive word for the wrong way, but beyond that, he goes even further. Jesus doesn't only say that, but he says the broad way leads to what? Destruction. The narrow way leads to what? Life.

And that means Jesus is saying the broad way is the way to narrowness, and the narrow way is the way to spaciousness. What he is actually saying is the thing that looks *superficially* very spacious leads into suffocating deadly narrowness. And the thing that *superficially* looks incredibly narrow is the thing that leads to eventually incredible vastness and breadth and freedom.

There is one of *The Chronicles of Narnia* tales, which is C.S. Lewis' series for children. At one point, a man goes into a stable. It's a little stable. He goes inside, looks up, and he sees this incredible high blue sky. He sees forest and lakes and everything. And in the text he has a conversation with the man standing next to him, "It seems, then," said Tirian, smiling himself, "that the stable seen from within and the stable seen from without are two different places." "Yes," said the Lord Digory. "Its inside is bigger than its outside." (C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*)

And that's what Jesus is saying here. Jesus is saying the gospel, on the outside, looks incredibly small and cramped. But when you get inside, it's unbelievably spacious. And the alternatives to the gospel look incredibly broad and spacious and free and tolerant, but on the inside, they're incredibly cramped and narrow. In fact, they lead into a hole. They lead to suffocation. They lead to death through narrowness. Now that's where they lead.

**But secondly, What are they?** Now when you read about the broad way and the narrow way, you say, "Well, what are those two ways? That's where they lead, but what are they? What does it *mean* to be on the broad way? What does it mean to be on the narrow way?" And it's normal for people to say because it is possible...and sometimes the translations

talk about the broad and "easy" way and the narrow and "hard" way. Sometimes translations choose those terms.

The English Standard Version says, (**Matthew 7:13**) "*Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and **the way is easy** that leads to destruction...*" And so people say, "Oh, I know what that means. The narrow way is the way of the people who take the hard disciplined approach to spirituality. You see? Self-denial. They are the good people. They're the people who care for the poor. They're the people who *obey* the Ten Commandments. They're the people who *pray* all the time and go to church. They're the people who *follow* the Golden Rule.

Oh, but the broad way is for people who want the easy life. They don't want to do that. They don't want to care for the poor. They don't want to pray and go to worship. They don't want to live by the Ten Commandments. They don't want to live by the Golden Rule. That's the easy way." But is that what's going on here? Not a bit. Now, I'll excuse you if you think that because preachers that want to control you preach it just that way. If my goal was just fillings seats, maybe *I'd* preach it that way. But that's not Jesus' goal. And I kind of want to be like Jesus.

So look at this. By the way, the reading this morning is all in the context of the the Sermon on the Mount - right before the end of it actually. And so v. 12 acts a come thing of a summary of everything Jesus has been saying. It's what we've come to call the Golden Rule. Do you know it? "*So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*" In other words, Love as you want to be loved.

Well is it really fair to say that the broad way is made up of people who *don't* go by the Golden Rule? Let me tell you, *everybody* thinks they're going by the Golden Rule, and *most* people are trying. And there are some bad people. There are narcissists and sociopaths who get up in the morning and say, "I want to trample on somebody. I want to break the Golden Rule everywhere I can," but there aren't many of them. You could certainly never fill up a broad way with them.

And if you want to understand what the broad and narrow ways are, you need to do some interpretation and you have to understand the context. This comes at the *end* of the Sermon on the Mount. And at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, verse 13 to the end, suddenly Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount by saying there are two ways: one narrow, one broad. Then he expands the theme. He says there are two

*trees*: one rotten and one good. Then he says there are two *houses*: one built on the rock, one built on the sand.

Now if Jesus Christ is summarizing and *concluding* his great sermon by saying there are two ways, that can't mean he was just introducing the idea. It means those two ways must have been contrasted throughout the sermon. In other words, I don't preach a sermon that say, "Fathers, love your children." I don't preach a whole sermon on, "Fathers, love your children," and then in the end I say, "In conclusion, you'd better keep your car fixed because it could break down when you're out in the middle of nowhere."

I wouldn't do that because in a conclusion, you don't start a new subject...unless you're an idiot. And therefore, assuming Jesus is *not* an idiot - or Matthew, his editor, is not an idiot - then we have to say if Jesus at the very end says, "Now in conclusion there are two ways," that must mean all through the sermon there are two ways. And if you go back and study it - we did a whole series on this a few years ago called *Blessed are the Cheesemakers* - you'll suddenly realize something. The sermon does contrast two ways *all the way through* when you start to understand it like that.

When you go back and look, it's there. It's very clear, but it is *not* bad people versus good people. If you go through, you'll see it. Right in the beginning in chapter 5 it says, "I want to show you a different kind of righteousness than that of the scribes and the teachers of the law." And then he goes on, and he says, "You've heard it said, 'Don't murder,' but I say don't even have hatred in your heart."

So all the way through he is saying, "I want to show you *two kinds* of ways." Then he gets to chapter 6, and he says, "Some people care for the poor, and they pray all the time, but they do it so people will honor them and so they will be heard for their many words." And then at the very end of chapter 7, he begins to say, "One group of people is judgmental, but I don't want you to be. You're not. This group of people tries to take a speck out of other people's eyes, but they don't see the plank in their own eyes." And this is what Jesus is saying.

Jesus is *not* contrasting bad people with good people. *Both* of these groups take care of the poor. *Both* of these groups pray all the time. *Both* of these groups obey the Ten Commandments, and both of these groups seek to obey the Golden Rule, but they do it for utterly *different* reasons. Completely different motivations. Now this is frightening, isn't it? The people on the broad way are doing all the same things but for a completely different reason. What are they doing?

They are doing it to get leverage over other people so they feel superior, and to get leverage over God so that He owes them, so they will be heard for their many words. In other words, there are two ways. One way you're using God to get things, and the other way you're using things to love God. In the one way, you're trying to save yourself. Everything you're doing you're doing in order to say, "See, now God will *have* to hear me. Now God will *have* to bless me."

But in the other way, what do you have? Well, if you look at verse 14, you'll see it's very interesting. Jesus does *not* say, "Hard is the way, and narrow is the *gate* into life." Oh no! He says narrow is the gate and *then* comes the way. No this is a pattern that Paul emphasizes in so many of his letters. No place more clearly than his letter to the Galatians.

In **Galatians 3:2** he asks – rhetorically - "*Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?*" You see, Paul says other religions say, "Try hard, do the good works, and you'll be saved," but Christianity says, "Be saved, and then out of that, live a good life." In other words, other religions say, "First the road; then the gate." Other religions say, "The way is hard, but if you can take the gate, you can get into salvation. You have to be diligent. You have to be disciplined. You have to fight your way in."

But Christianity says, “No. You enter the gate *now*. By believing what you heard.” Why? Because what you hear is there was One who fought our fight. There is One who won the gate. There is One who died outside the gate so we could come in. There’s One who has done all the fighting for us. And you see, the broad way and the narrow way are two *very* different kinds of people.

One is very judgmental. The broad way is the judgmental people! The broad way is the people who always think their sins are not as bad as the other person’s sin. The broad way is the people who feel *superior* to the people who oppose them. That’s the reason why liberals *and* conservatives are on the broad way, because the liberals say, “The real problem is the conservatives.” And the conservatives say, “The real problem is the liberals.”

That’s the broad way. But the people on the narrow way say, “The real problem is *me*. I’m a sinner.” Broad and narrow is not the “good people” vs. the “bad people”. It’s the humble people vs. the proud people.

So first of all we’ve seen where the two ways lead. Secondly, we’ve seen what the two ways are. There are two kinds of “good” people. On the surface, they look completely the same. Well, not completely,

because there’s a pride. There’s an anger. There’s a grumpiness. There’s a superiority. There’s a feeling like, “People owe me. God owes me.”

But on the surface, they seem to have the same behavior, but underneath, the goodness is for two different reasons. Now can I show you *why* this narrowness, this gospel narrowness, actually leads to spaciousness and why this spaciousness seems to lead to narrowness?

**That’s our 3<sup>rd</sup> point: Why do they lead there?** First of all, here’s how the narrowness leads to spaciousness. If you believe that, “The only way I can be saved is through Jesus,” that’s narrow, right? Right, but it’s the only way to believe in *grace*. If you believe you’re saved by grace, you have to believe, “Somebody else fought and won the gate for me. That’s why I can just enter.” Jesus doesn’t say, “Hard is the way, but then you can enter the gate.”

He says, “You enter the gate first, and then you live your life,” whereas broad-minded people say, “Oh. I’m broad-minded. I would never believe you have to believe in Jesus. *All* good people can go. All good people can find God.” And that is very broad *sounding*, but what it means is you’re saved by your works.

Here's a pet peeve of mine. Whenever I hear people say, "Doctrine doesn't matter. I don't believe in doctrine. I believe all that matters is good people can find God. It doesn't matter what you believe. What matters is that you live a good life," but that's the doctrine of justification by works! When you say "doctrine doesn't matter"...*that's* a doctrine. When you say, "I'm broad-minded," that's actually a certain kind of narrowness. But it's a different kind of narrowness.

Christians *know* there's a narrowness about the gospel. We know it. We struggle with it. We wrestle it. We get upset about it. But you see, the opposite side is also narrow, but they don't know they're narrow. Listen, a proud person who knows he or she is proud is not all that proud, but a proud person who doesn't know he or she is proud is *incredibly* proud.

A narrow person who struggles with narrowness can't be *that* narrow, but a person who says, "*I'm* very open-minded. I would *never* believe in doctrine," - which *is* a doctrine - that's a narrowness in denial. In other words, it doesn't know it's narrow. Let me go a little further.

You know, here's two people: a person on the narrow way and a person on the broad way. And they're *both* out there, and they're *both* trying to be good.

They're trying to live their life, and they're trying to do the right thing. But if you're on the broad way, every event, every incident in your life, every incident in your day, is fighting for your very life.

If somebody robs you of your reputation, that's the only reputation you have. You're not sure that God loves you. You're not sure that God is your Father. You're not *sure* God loves and accepts you. You *can't* if you believe you're winning the gate with your good deeds. And here's what that means. You know, Jesus continually *inside* the sermon when he is contrasting the two ways and he talks about the people who are winning the gate by their good deeds, he says, "They *already* have their reward." Over and over he says, "They have their reward."

Do you know what that means? Your spaciousness, your broadness, that says, "I don't believe you have to believe just in Jesus. I don't know that I believe in all that. I just believe you try to live the best you can." If somebody comes along and takes away your reputation, or if somebody who says they're going to marry you jilts you, or if somebody hurts your career, that is the only worth you have. That is the only *honor* you have. That is the only *love* you have. God is remote. You don't have anything else.

And the person who slighted you? You're going to hate that person. You *have* to hate that person. And you're going to hate yourself, and you *have* to hate yourself. Why? It's narrowness! The broadness has led to narrowness. See? You're chained. You can't stop it. But when a Christian who has been willing to be narrow enough to say, "I'm saved by grace. Someone else has won the gate for me..." It's a completely different reaction.

When someone comes along and takes something from you but you know God loves you, you know what you mean to Him, you know what He has done for you, you know what you look like to Him, you know what's in store for you...then it's like somebody can only sort of pick your pocket of ten dollars when all of your wealth - a billion dollars - is in a trust fund somewhere. I mean, it might be annoying - maybe you were going to buy lunch with that \$10 - but you're not going to lose any sleep over it. You have a broader perspective. You see, the narrowness leads to spaciousness, and the spaciousness leads to narrowness.

**Now lastly: How can you make sure you're on the right way?** Well, I have something to say to both non-Christians and Christians here. All right? If you say, "I'm not a Christian ..." Okay? First of all, welcome. We built this church with you in mind - to be a safe place for people to ask legitimate questions about Christian faith.

But here's what I would say to you. What Jesus is trying to say here is you need to make a decision. *If* salvation was by works, it would be absolutely wrong to make a cutoff.

I want to show you a picture. This is my son Ari and me on the field at the Bands of America super regional competition in the San Antonio Alamodome last November, moments before he would perform in the marching band for the last time. He's a senior and Deanna and I were very active in the pit crew as band parents. I am grieving the closing of that chapter of our lives - it was very special to me.

Now, at the time of this photo, neither of us knew that this was to be his last time to perform. In fact we very much *hoped* it would not be. Because out of the 80 teams in competition, the next afternoon they would announce which schools had made the top 14 and those bands would get to perform in the final round of competition on Saturday night.

So on Saturday we made the drive back to San Antonio. The band loaded all the equipment and instruments and props in anticipation, in utter hope. We sat up in the stands and waited as they announced the names of the top 14 schools. They did not announce James Bowie High School of Austin, Texas. It was all over.



But a little later we learned what our ranking *had* been. The Bowie Bulldogs finished...15<sup>th</sup>! I would have rather been 25<sup>th</sup>. To come that close was a devastating punch in the gut. I still get emotional about it. So close! And yet our season – and Ari’s career – was as over as the band that placed 80<sup>th</sup>. Seems unfair. But you know, you have to have a cutoff somewhere.

But when it comes to hell and heaven and stuff like that, judgment day is *impossible*. The whole idea of judgment day is horrible if it’s really true that we’re saved by our works and God has put a cutoff some place. Where would it be? If the cutoff is 3.0 and the poor slob gets a 2.9998, he goes to hell?

*But* if salvation is a matter of relationship, if salvation is who you’re living *for*, who you’re doing this *for*, whether I’m doing this for myself to get God to do good things for me, or whether I’m just simply doing this to love God because I know He saved me - who are you doing it *for*? Then that is an *absolute* difference. And on judgment day, you’re going to be judged as to whether you’ve made that choice or not. Whether you have gotten into that relationship or not.

This is what we mean when we say that Christianity is a relationship not a religion. I mean of course it’s a religion – on an historical social scale - but when you understand the gospel, it is a religion of relationship, not requirements.

You know, Elisabeth Elliot, the famous missionary widow, used to tell a story. It’s a fictional story. It’s not a true story. It’s a legend. I promise it’s not in the Bible so don’t go looking for it! But it’s an interesting way to make this point. One day Jesus says to his disciples, “I want you to carry a stone for me.” Peter looks around, and he takes the smallest stone he can. They walk along. At lunchtime, Jesus says, “Okay, get out your stones.” And he waves his hand, and all the strokes turn into bread.” He says, “Now let’s eat.”

Peter is looking at his little dollhouse panini, and he eats in a bite. And he is very hungry. Then afterwards, Jesus says, “Now carry a stone for me.” And Peter says, “I’ve figured this out.” So what he does this time is finds a boulder. He puts it on his shoulder, and they walk along. He is crushed, every step is a burden, but he can’t wait for supper!

And when they get to suppertime, they walk to the riverside, and Jesus says, “Now everybody throw your stone in.” They all throw their stones in. And then he says, “Now follow me”, and he keeps on walking. And Peter stands there just staring at him. And Jesus looks back and says, “Peter, who were you carrying the stones *for*?” You see, *that’s* the question on judgment day.

If you say, “I *am* a Christian,” let me just remind you of this. You can lose your spaciousness. You see, only Christians have this spaciousness of *not* feeling superior to the people who they’re opposed to. Even to their enemies. There’s a spaciousness about Christians. They don’t look down. They’re not condemning. They’re not judgmental. Jesus says, “You’re not a judgmental person if you’re carrying the stone for me” Isn’t that weird? The mark of the broad way is you feel superior and judgmental to other people on the other side, and the mark of the narrow way is you’re not judgmental at all.

*That’s* what the Sermon on the Mount says. And there’s a spaciousness of freedom. It doesn’t matter what people *do* to you, because you’re not chained to that. “My life is hidden with God in Christ.” But you can lose your spaciousness - not so much through sin - but forgetting the gospel. If I wake up on Sunday morning and I look at my sermon and I say, “Oh, I don’t think this is very good. Nobody is going to like it,” I’m losing my spaciousness. I’m losing my freedom.

Why? Not through *sin* so much. It’s because I’m forgetting to rejoice in Jesus. You see? Everybody in this room has something like that. You’re losing your spaciousness. “Broad is the way that leadeth unto deadly narrowness. Narrow is the way that leadeth unto glorious spaciousness. And few there be who find it.” Jesus found it for you. Do you believe that? Then you can find the way.

Let’s pray...