

**Principles for Changing the Word: #4 - With Jesus, There Is No Middle.**  
**From the Series, "The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe"**  
**By Phil Brainerd**  
**Presented to Trinity Church of Teaneck, NJ**  
**On Date - Sunday, June 6, 2021**

**Introduction**

Like many children, I grew up hearing fairy tales. Fairy tales can be very helpful. They're a great way to entertain children. Before there was television and video, you could read to children. Fancy that – reading! At one time the "bedtime story" was a big part of many homes. In fact, even before books, people who were good story tellers could just pass along what they heard as children.

That's a little-known fact about fairy tales: Many existed well before someone wrote them down.

A good example is the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Everyone has heard it. A little girl named Goldilocks wanders through the woods and comes upon a house. No one is inside. So, she wanders in.

Goldilocks sees some bowls of porridge on the table, and decides to try some. The first bowl belongs to "Daddy Bear". It's really hot. - Too hot. The next bowl belongs to "Mama Bear". Goldilocks gives it a taste and finds that it's cold - Too cold. Finally, the little girl comes across a bowl belonging to "Baby Bear". She tries some – it's just right. So, she downs the whole bowl of porridge.

After eating, Goldilocks is tired, so she decides to try the chairs in the living room. She runs into the same situation. "Daddy Bear's" chair is too something. "Mama Bear's" chair is too something else. "Baby Bear's" chair is just right. So, Goldilocks has a seat. At this point, she's a little bored, so she starts rocking back on the chair, even though it's not a rocker. This results in the chair breaking apart.

Now, Goldilocks is ready for a little nap, so she checks out the bedroom. Daddy Bear's bed is too hard. Mama Bear's bed is too soft. Baby Bear's bed is just right. Goldilocks curls up and falls asleep.



"WHO HAS BEEN TASTING MY SOUP?"

Well, the bears come home. They aren't too pleased to find that someone has helped themselves to their dinner and their furniture. Here's where things can be very different, depending on who's telling the story and when. In the olden days, some fairy tales could be a little rough. In those stories, little Goldilocks gets eaten. Forget porridge! As I said, these stories could get rough. Some stories have Goldi's parents showing up to rescue her. In the most recent years, you see this: Goldilocks runs screaming from the house, never to return again.

Now, here's something striking: Depending on who's telling the story and when, the moral can be different. Let's ask - Why are we telling this story to our children? If you think about it, you might say we're trying to teach children to respect other people's property. You don't walk into a house uninvited. You don't eat someone's food without asking. You don't plop down just anywhere without permission. When you get a seat, don't rock back on it. And you certainly don't sleep in people's beds without asking permission. There's plenty of good things to learn here.

Recently though, there's been a change to the moral of this story. It comes from the way the story is told. Children love the part about, "Too hot, too cold, just right." "Too hard, too soft, just right." So, from this you get the idea that the moral of the story is this:

*The world is full of extreme things and extreme people.  
- Too much this or too much that.  
If you look long enough, you'll find something in the middle.  
**And often times, that's what's best.***

This is where we learn about "Principles for Changing the World", number four:

***With Jesus, there is no middle.***

Let's read:

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. (Matthew 7:13-14)

The story of the Three Bears appears nowhere in the Bible. The warning of two gates does. So, let's take it apart.

## **I. THE Gate**

First, Jesus tells us that we are to enter by THE gate. Throughout the book of Matthew, Jesus talks about the Kingdom of Heaven. According to Jesus, there is only one way to get there.

We've said in other places in this series that Jesus isn't saying anything new. He is merely restating things that have appeared in the Scripture many times before.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

The first sentence in the Bible states that there is one God who created the heavens and the earth - Only one. It was not a team effort of many gods. The universe was not sitting around for a long time when multiple gods magically came out of it. One God existed before anything in the universe. The reason the universe exists is that this God created it out of nothing. This is the God who appeared to Abraham. This is the God who appeared to Moses. This is the God who gave Moses ten commandments on the mountain.

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. (Exodus 20:2-3)

Many would add, "no other (so called) gods." There is only one God.

Jesus later taught us that he is God:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. (vs 14)

Jesus tells us that we are to enter by one gate, THE gate. What is it? It is Jesus.

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:5-6)

The apostles of Jesus clearly believed and taught this. Later, we hear from Peter:

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

This is very different from what the world around us says. The world says that there are many gates, many ways. You've all heard the phrase, "All roads lead to God". So, it doesn't matter what religion you choose. You can be Christian or Jewish, Muslim or Hindu - or a whole host of other choices. It doesn't matter what lifestyle you choose. Strict or easy-going. In the end, whichever path you choose, you'll find God.

We don't need to spend time on the philosophical questions this idea raises. For example, do mass-murderers go to heaven? Is Adolf Hitler, who caused the deaths of 7 million people in the Nazi death camps in heaven? If Joseph Stalin, who caused the deaths of 20 million people, in

heaven? Is Mao Tse-Tung, who some say is responsible for the deaths of 45 million people in heaven? How many people do you have to kill to be removed from the list of “all roads lead to heaven”?

No, we don't need to spend time on that right now. For now, we'll just trust Jesus. To those who say that all roads lead to heaven, Jesus simply says, “no.” To enter the Kingdom of Heaven, you must enter by THE gate. The gate is Jesus.

Before Jesus starts to describe the gate, he says something very important.

## **II. ENTER the Gate.**

You must ENTER through the gate. That means, you must make a decision. Again, this is nothing new.

14 “Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. 15 But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:14-15)

Joshua told his friends 1300 years before the time of Christ that they needed to make a choice. Either serve the false gods of their ancestors or serve the one true God. Sadly, this had to be repeated on numerous occasions. One of the greatest prophets of ancient Israel was Elijah. He lived 400 years after Joshua. During his time, the people were tempted to follow a god named Baal. Here's what Elijah said:

Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.” (I Kings 18:21)

Jesus tells his followers the same thing. We all have to make a choice. You can't stand around wavering. You must enter the gate.

## **III. Two Gates**

Jesus tells us that there are two gates - A narrow gate, and a wide gate. What is implied by these two gates?

### **A. You enter one at a time.**

A narrow gate implies that you must enter alone. Some commentators use the image of a turnstile. You've seen them at airports and bus stations. In olden days, they were made out of wood, and they were used for livestock.

The point of a turnstile is: One at a time - And not too fast. A narrow gate implies that you enter alone.

### **B. it's not easy to find.**

A narrow gate is hard to find. Jesus says, "few are those who find it". This is hard. What is "few"? Is it ten percent? Is it five percent? Is it one percent? Jesus just says, "few are those who find it. That means, not only that you must enter alone, but you may have to leave behind friends and other people you care about.

### **C. You can't take anything with you.**

The narrow gate also implies a lack of baggage. No one with a lot of baggage fits through a turnstile. You can't carry very much. In fact, when you go through this gate, you may not be able to carry anything. When Joshua told his friends to make a choice, he didn't just say that the choice only involved an attitude. It clearly involved an action. He said, "Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped..."

The great hymn, "Rock of Ages" has these words: "Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to thy cross I cling..."

## **IV. Two roads.**

After telling us that there are two gates, Jesus tells us that there are two roads. One road is broad. One road is narrow. If you take the narrow road, life does not instantly become a life of ease.

### **A. Narrow Roads Require constant attention.**

A narrow road requires that you pay constant attention. If you turn to the left or to the right, you will find yourself in danger. You may fall. You may wind up in a dangerous place.

Fortunately, there is help:

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
6 in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight.  
Proverbs 3:5-6

If you trust in the Lord with all our heart, he will help you. But, you must constantly trust.

How do we move away from our own understanding and learn to trust God? Learn from God's Word.

Your word is a lamp for my feet,  
a light on my path.  
(Psalm 119:105)

So, we need to be in God's Word. We need to be constantly learning.

That brings us to the next part of a narrow road.

### **B. Narrow Roads require constant movement.**

Narrow roads require that you keep moving. There's not a lot of people on the road, but there are others besides you. If you stop moving, you're in the way. Here's how the Apostle Paul puts it:

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. 2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ( 1 Corinthians 3:1-2)

Here's the apostle Paul talking with his friends in the city of Corinth. The church was started several years before. So, at that time it was full of what Paul called "infants in Christ." Because they were infants, Paul gave them the equivalent of milk. But now, some years have gone by. And these people haven't grown. They haven't learned how to walk by the spirit. So, Paul has to scold them.

Later, Paul has to say this again to other groups:

11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But

solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews 5:11-14)

To all our friends who have been in churches for a long time: Where are you in your spiritual journey? Are you mature, able to walk by the Spirit? Able to teach? That doesn't necessarily mean stand in front of a room and give a lesson. It involves being an example. Paul says, "...able to distinguish good from evil." Or, are you infants, only able to hear the same simple things over and over again.

All of us have dealt with babies. They take a lot of time. When you have babies around, you're not going anywhere quickly. That's OK, because we love babies. But, we all hope they grow up sooner or later. If you want to walk on the narrow road, you must be constantly striving, constantly learning, constantly growing.

If not, you're in the way.

What's the alternative? The wide road. On the wide road, people go everywhere, every direction. You can stop whenever you want for as long as you want. Or, you might find yourself pulled along with everyone else. At speeds faster than you would like. You know what that's called? When you're dragged along by a fast-moving crowd? That's called a stampede.

One of my favorite cartoons show some cattle in a stampede. One turns to the other and says, "As if anyone knows where we're going!" Imagine the picture. You've got hundreds of animals running at full speed. One turns to a friend and says "Hey, where are we going?"

That's how stampedes work. No one knows where they're going.

But Jesus says he knows where people are going when they're on the broad road. He knows, and he tells us.

## **V. Two Destinations**

Depending on which gate you take and which road, there are two destinations. Jesus says that one road leads to life, and one leads to destruction.

It's interesting – The word "Life" is often used for the destination of those who follow Jesus Christ.

11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (I John 5:11-12)

“Life” is easy to understand. It’s not just length of time – it’s the quality of eternal life. This life is lived in the wonder and beauty of heaven.

Now, there are different words for what happens to those who don’t choose to follow Jesus. The word “Death” is sometimes used. Here though, we see the word “Destruction”. Destruction, in a sense, is worse than death. Destruction refers utter and total ruin. It’s one of the words used for the place of Judgement and the forces at work there.

They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer). (Revelation 9:11)

That name, “Destroyer”, is based on the same word that Jesus uses for the destination at the end of the broad road.

Today we won’t go into a long study about that place. We’ll just say two things.

- 1) It’s a terrible place that lasts for eternity.
- 2) You don’t want to go there.

## **VI. Our Response**

How do we respond to all this? First, we repeat principle number one from the “Principles for Changing the World” list: Start with yourself. YOU – Enter – through – THE- narrow – gate.

Have you ever entered the gate? Contact us – we’d be happy to share how you can know you’re on the right road to the kingdom of heaven with Jesus Christ - The road to life! There will be some helpful links at the end of this article.

Next, be prepared to leave things behind. The gate is narrow - No baggage. Throw away the gods of this earth. Throw away the things that hold you back when it comes to life in the kingdom of God. Sadly, you will often have to leave behind people. Not many find the narrow gate. Do the best you can to convince others to follow once you’re in. But even after the best efforts, some will choose the other gate.

Third, once you’re in, don’t stop growing. Study God’s Word. Find other believers to help you. Move on from the milk of simple repeated truths and learn to chew on the meat of God’s Word. Let God help you to grow into someone who can be an example for others.

Finally, remember your motivation. The narrow gate leads to life. The wide gate leads to destruction. No one wants that for themselves or for others.

Let's pull this all together.

## **Conclusion**

We started today with the story of Goldilocks and the three bears. The modern moral of the story: Life is full of extreme things and extreme people. Look for something in the middle.

But then we learned an important principle from our Lord Jesus: With Jesus, there is no middle.

You have a choice: The narrow gate, or the wide gate. The narrow road, or the wide road. Life, or destruction.

Take the narrow path yourself. Then encourage others to follow.

After that, you will be on the way to changing the world.

---

**Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:**

Trinity Church  
[www.TrinityTeaneck.org](http://www.TrinityTeaneck.org)

Phil's Site  
[PhilBrainerd.com](http://PhilBrainerd.com)

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:

[PeaceWithGod.net](http://PeaceWithGod.net)