

WON'T ALL PEOPLE ULTIMATELY GO TO HEAVEN?

Leader pages on pp. 148-151

THE POINT:
GOD'S KINGDOM IS
RESERVED FOR THOSE
WHO OBEDIENTLY
FOLLOW HIM.

MATTHEW 7:13-23

MEMORY VERSE

¹³ "Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who go through it.

¹⁴ How narrow is the gate and difficult the road that leads to life, and few find it.

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¹⁵ "Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves.

¹⁶ You'll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles?

¹⁷ In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit.

¹⁸ A good tree can't produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit.

¹⁹ Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

²⁰ So you'll recognize them by their fruit.

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²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?'

²³ Then I will announce to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers!'"

KEYWORDS

Narrow gate (v. 13)—This gate symbolizes the exclusive nature of Christ's kingdom. Entrance requires the disciple to do the will of the Father in heaven (v. 21).

The gate is wide (v. 13)—This gate symbolizes that hell grants unrestricted entrance and that many will go through its gates.

Difficult the road (v. 14)—This phrase may symbolize the life of hardship and persecution the disciple must face.

I never knew you (v. 23)—This phrase shows those who were really not disciples.

WHY WON'T ALL PEOPLE GO TO HEAVEN?

Many people think of heaven like a mountain. There can be many routes and paths for climbing a mountain, but no matter which path you take, you eventually make it to the top.

That's fine for climbing mountains, but heaven is not a mountain.

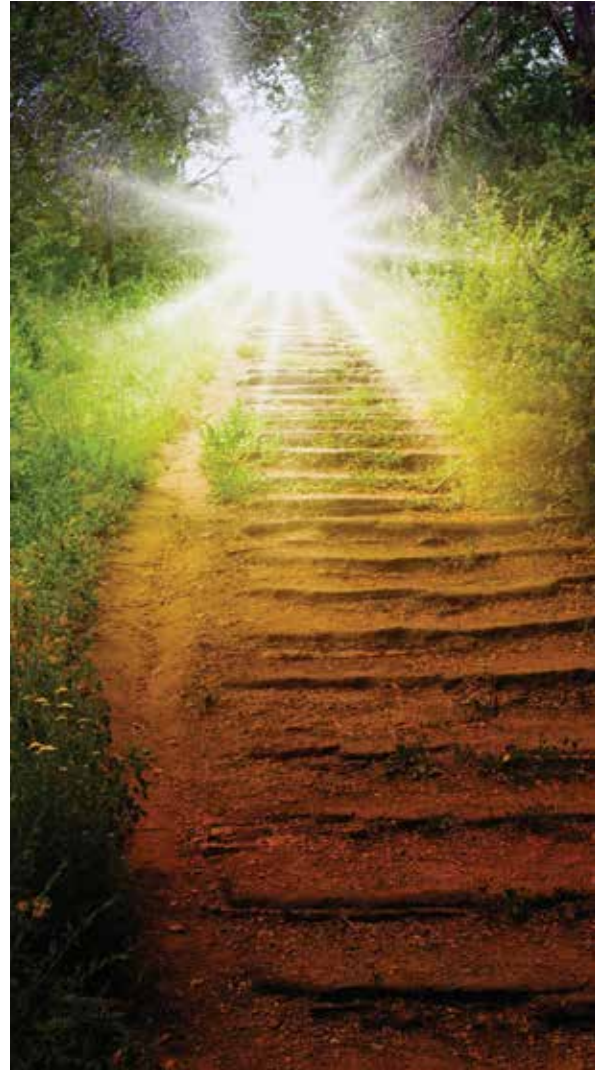
The belief that everyone ultimately goes to heaven is called Universalism, and it is a rather common belief these days. For instance, when was the last time you attended a funeral and heard someone say that the deceased would not be in heaven? No, what we mostly hear is, "We know that he is in a better place."

As hard as it might be to face the truth, not all people will end up in heaven. Scripture tells us that more people will reject God and enter eternity separated from Him than those who will receive Him and go to heaven.

Wrong Road // Matthew 7:13-14

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the organization that governs intercollegiate athletics, released a commercial in which they stated, "There are more than 400,000 NCAA student-athletes, and most of them will be going pro in something other than sports." Check out these statistics:

- Roughly 853 football players make the pros each year out of an original population of nearly 1.1 million athletes (0.00075 percent).⁶
- The percentage of high school baseball players drafted into professional baseball is 0.5 percent.⁷
- Of the 541,054 male high school basketball players, only 3.5 percent of them will play basketball in college. Of those who play in college, only 1.2 percent of them will play for the NBA. For women, one out of 5,000 players (.02 percent) will be drafted into the WNBA.⁸



Athletes are not the only ones who end up doing something other than what they thought they'd be doing. According to a Federal Reserve Bank of New York survey, only 27 percent of college graduates work in a field related to their major.⁹

There are obvious reasons, of course, why so few people end up becoming professionals in the fields they trained for. One reason is that there is not enough demand in the workplace for everyone who is trained, and only the cream of the crop make it in. The rest have to find some other field where there is a need for them.

THE POINT: GOD'S KINGDOM IS RESERVED FOR THOSE WHO OBEDIENTLY FOLLOW HIM.

While the great majority of athletes won't go pro, there's a noticeably greater and more serious statistic: Most human beings won't go to heaven. This truth has nothing to do with capability or demand; instead, the reason for so few getting into heaven has to do with their lack of belief in Christ. According to one poll, about 54 percent of Americans believe they will go to heaven when they die. In addition, 48 percent believe they will go to heaven if they are "generally good" or "do enough good things." Another revealing statistic is that only about one-third of people believe salvation comes by accepting Christ as their Savior.¹⁰ These statistics reveal a serious problem.

One of the deepest teachings we have from Jesus is His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7). Toward the end, Jesus spoke specifically about how a person can enter God's kingdom, and He painted a rather gloomy picture. Beginning in verse 13, Jesus spoke of a choice people have to make. They have to go through a gate that is small and walk down a path that is narrow, therefore more difficult. The other option is to go through a gate that is wide and walk down a path that is broad, which is the easier way.

WHY WOULD ANYONE FOLLOW JESUS IF THE ROAD IS DIFFICULT?

The wide gate and broad path represent a life that is not concerned with God, the things of God, or a personal relationship with Him. Entering through the narrow gate calls for a desire to follow Jesus by faith, but that calls for setting aside the sins and easy way of life found on the broad path. This requires a level of self-discipline—a surrender to Christ's lordship—to live life in that relationship. Following Jesus is not the easy road, but it is the only path that leads to abundant and eternal life.

Strange Fruit // Matthew 7:15-20

As Jesus continued His sermon, He warned His listeners to be on the lookout for those teaching false beliefs. "Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves." In the end, if a false belief teaches a wrong way of salvation, it is pointing people to eternal death rather than eternal life.

One of those false beliefs is Universalism, the belief that all people will go to heaven regardless of what they believe or how they live their lives. There are different kinds of Universalists:

- **Non-Christian Universalists.** Examples include the Church of Christ, Scientist, and the Unity Church. Both groups embrace unitarian concepts, and despite their Christian-sounding names, there is nothing biblical in their theology and teachings.



DIGGING DEEPER FOLLOW DIRECTIONS

In Psalm 32:8, God exhorted the people not to be like the obstinate horse or stubborn mule that refuses to go where its rider leads. David was like a wild horse that rushed into sin, but when it came to confessing his sin, he held back like a stubborn mule. David often did not follow directions. Verse 8 provides a clear warning for the person who will not humble himself before God's sovereign rule. If we do not submit to the Lord, we will be controlled by bit and bridle (Ps. 32:9). This means God will use severe means to get their attention and gain control. Jesus graciously makes it clear the importance of following directions or choosing the right way to get to God. We cannot make up our own way. That is what religion is—man's pursuit of God. What Jesus explained about how we go to heaven means we are totally dependent upon Him and our relationship with Him. Proverbs 3:46 makes the point: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight."

How can you respond when people accuse you of narrow-mindedness for believing in only one way to God?

- **Denominational Universalists.** In 1961, the Universalist Church merged with the Unitarian Church to form a new denomination: the Unitarian Universalist Church. In spite of this, they have strayed so far from their Universalist roots that they now don't even believe in Universalism. They don't hold to any Christian beliefs at all.
- **Independent Universalists.** These are individuals who believe everyone goes to heaven, but they are not members of any church.
- **"Christian" Universalists.** Some Universalists consider themselves Christian, and they attempt to justify their beliefs from the Bible. This group includes "closet" Universalists who self-identify as Christians and silently stay within traditional and evangelical denominations.
- **Latent Universalists.** These individuals may not think of themselves as Universalists, but their beliefs fall in line with Universalist beliefs. A 2022 Gallup survey found that 81 percent of Americans claim to believe in God, and Pew Research found that only 58 percent believe in hell. The gap between those two percentages leads to the conclusion that as many as 23 percent of people believe in God but no hell, and so, they believe all people go to heaven when they die.^{11, 12}
- **Experiential Universalists.** These are people who believe in Universalism based on some kind of "spiritual" experience (like a near-death experience or some form of mystical religious experience).

WHY ARE FALSE PROPHETS OFTEN DIFFICULT TO SPOT RIGHT AWAY?

People who refuse to receive Christ because they think everyone is going to heaven anyway are living in a way that opposes the clear teaching of Scripture and are destined for an eternity separated from God. Just because someone believes something does not mean it is true. And just because a person claims to be a Christian does not necessarily mean he is. False beliefs come in all shapes and sizes, and it is critical for

Christians to be able to separate false beliefs from the truth that is found in Scripture..

Regarding these false teachers, Jesus said, "You'll recognize them by their fruit." The fruit of false teachers is their false teaching, and we can recognize such fruit as we hold it up to Scripture.



All Talk // Matthew 7:21-23

Jesus made a very sobering statement. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." This truth from Jesus not only dismisses the universalist belief that everyone will go to heaven, but it speaks against being religious or just good people. Jesus knew how religious people would respond when they were turned away from the kingdom of heaven. "On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?' Then I will announce to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers!'"

Entering the kingdom of God has nothing to do with how religious you can be. Jesus told us that the one who can enter His kingdom is "the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." That speaks of obedience, but what is the first act of obedience? It is accepting the gracious gift of God and believing in Jesus. God calls us to His salvation, and when we obey that call, we experience His grace and salvation.

THE POINT: GOD'S KINGDOM IS RESERVED FOR THOSE WHO OBEDIENTLY FOLLOW HIM.

Obedience is more than believing about Christ. The belief that matters is the belief that confidently places all trust in Christ—and that trust is reflected in our willingness to follow Him and obey Him in all things. The apostle John also said this:

“This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commands. The one who says, ‘I have come to know him,’ and yet doesn’t keep his commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps his word, truly in him the love of God is made complete. This is how we know we are in him: The one who says he remains in him should walk just as he walked” (1 John 2:3-6).

To be clear, God does want all people to be in His eternal kingdom with Him. As the apostle Paul told Timothy, God “wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4), but access to heaven is on God’s terms. But there’s good news in God’s terms! When we recognize we are lawbreakers—no matter how good or religious we see ourselves—and turn in repentance to Christ for forgiveness and salvation, we are made new creations (2 Cor. 5:17) and granted citizenship in His eternal kingdom. That’s how we enter heaven.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE WHAT IS NECESSARY TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?

DID YOU KNOW?

Even though there are many viewpoints falsely claiming to be Christian, we can know when God’s truth is being taught because of the Word of God. Most people reject teaching that isn’t popular culturally or that requires change. The teaching that is accepted often includes elements of materialism and earthly pleasures. In today’s world, the belief that everyone is not all right and there is room for all to improve isn’t common because we live in a “You’re okay, I’m okay,” self-centered culture. These are all foolish notions. The opposite of foolishness is wisdom, which involves knowing God’s Word and applying it in our life. From the Old Testament to the New Testament, we’re ensured wisdom doesn’t fail us. Psalm 19:7 promises that God’s Word is perfect and renews.

How can your growth in godly wisdom lead others to Jesus?

LIVE IT

How can we be sure we are going to heaven?

Whenever we engage someone who identifies as a Christian, we cannot assume that their definition is the same as ours. Because there are so many options available for people to identify with and self-define themselves, we have to be careful that we have the same meanings for the foundations of our faith. Here are things you should do to help others go to heaven and confirm that you are going there too:

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- **Accept Christ.** Because a relationship with Christ is the only way to heaven, pray and trust Christ for salvation. The inside cover of this book can help you.
- **Research the truth.** Meet this week with one to two others from your group and discuss why a belief in Universalism is faulty and dangerous. Consider why Christ is the only way to eternal life.
- **Share Christ.** Pray and look for an opportunity to talk with a friend or acquaintance about how he or she can go to heaven through faith and trust in Christ.

DAILY READINGS

1. A RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST // ROMANS 12:2

In our lives we are faced with many opportunities to develop and shape our beliefs. We learn through our lived experiences, what we read, from those close to us, what we study and from what we observe. We are given options to shape our thinking, how we feel, determine our next move, and what we choose to say. When we follow Jesus, no matter what we encounter, we should align our belief with His will for our lives. Paul tells us in Romans 12:2, to be transformed by renewing our minds, not conforming to this world. In doing so we may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Fostering a continued relationship with Christ molds our heart to His will so we can receive the promises of God.

2. NARROW IS THE GATE // MATTHEW 7:13-14

Next time you are entering a public place I challenge you to take time to look at all the security measures and rules that are in place. You must check in at the front desk to enter a doctor's office. You may have to get buzzed in trying to enter into your child's school. There are even restaurants that may have dress codes. The local church usually has a "come as you are," open door policy. All are welcomed but not all will stay and become part of God's family. God is a Holy God and a God of order. There is no security system at the gate to heaven. All will have an opportunity to gain access into God's kingdom, but not all will enter to be saved.

Jesus tells us that the gate is narrow and difficult to enter. But He gives us power to overcome.

3. ALMOST THERE! // MATT 7:13-14

There is a story known as "Three Feet from Gold." It describes a young man who was mining for gold during the gold rush. It is said that he spent several months trying to strike it rich. After not being successful and a lot of disappointment, in

frustration he decided to call it quits. He sold all of his equipment to an unknown person. This person decided to finish where the young man left off. After getting some advice and direction, he discovered that the young man was only three feet from striking the gold. He completed the work and with only three feet of digging left, the one who took over became a rich man.

Don't give up because the way is difficult and narrow. Remember who lives in you.

4. PREPARE YOUR HEART // 1 CORINTHIANS 11:31

As we prepare to go into the next session, we must ask ourselves if we truly believe in a heaven and hell? I was told by a co-worker one time that he believed if he was a good person, he would enter into the kingdom of heaven. But Paul is very clear about how to get into heaven. We will not only have a relationship with God but we must receive and follow His Son. God promises that we will be paid if we live according to the flesh and not according to the Holy Word of God. In other words, a time will come when we have to answer for our actions in this world.

First Corinthians 11:31 tells us that if we examine ourselves, we will not be judged by God when Jesus returns.

5. DON'T BE FOOLED // MATTHEW 7:15-20

Our modern society uses celebrities to motivate and influence. From a business point of view, this is a great marketing strategy. It only becomes an issue when we choose to focus on the celebrity and not the message that they are trying to convey. I don't have an issue with a commercial trying to persuade me to buy a product. But I cannot look to a magazine ad or a famous face or voice when it comes to important decisions in my life based on the social status of a person. Jesus tells us not to be deceived by the presentation. It is our duty as Christ followers to use discernment so that we may be able to distinguish between good and evil.

You will know them by their fruits.