TWO WAYS

"Go in through the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the path that leads to final ruin is broad, and there are many who go in that way. <u>But</u> how narrow the gate is and <u>confined</u> the path that leads to life, and there are <u>few</u> who find it."
Matthew 7:13-1 4

These verses stand as a climactic admonition to the very demanding ethical teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. Rightfully so, the Sermon on the Mount seems an impossible challenge to the disciple and is followed by this reprimand of *narrow gates and confined paths* which sums up the absolute difficulty of the sermon itself and the lifelong path of the disciple.

This is a turning point in the sermon in that no more ethical teaching is given. From here, the sermon gives warnings followed by a concluding parable of building a house on the Rock.

And someone said to him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" And he said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.
Luke 13:23-24

Luke parallels this passage, but he does so as an answer to a question which places the passage as more of a thought than the challenging words that Matthew portrays it in.

Note that Luke refers to only one entrance, not two and makes no mention of the paths.

Again, we Jesus and/or Matthew using the parallel formula so common throughout the sermon.

The narrow gate / wide gate;
the broad path / the confined path;
the path that leads to ruin / the path that leads to life;
many enter / few find it.

Jesus states the imperative *"Go in through the narrow gate"* as a certain truth such as 1+1=2. Afterward, he provides the grounds for that imperative, *"the broad path leads to final ruin."*

The metaphor of the *"two ways"* is common in Jewish, Hellenistic, and early Christian writing. We can find writings implying a choice between two opposite ways with opposite ends in the following texts.

"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil."
Deuteronomy 30:15

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that your and your offspring may live.
Deuteronomy 30:19

"And to this people you shall say: 'Thus says the LORD: Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death.'"
Jeremiah 21:8

For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.
Psalm 1:6

There is also another thing; A city is built, and set upon a broad plain, and is full of tov (good) things: the entrance thereof is narrow, and is set in a dangerous and precipitous place, so that there is fire on the right hand and deep water on the left: and there is only one path between them both, that is, between the fire and water, so small that there can only be one man walk thereon at a time. If this city now were given to a man for an inheritance, how shall he receive the inheritance unless he shall pass through the danger set before him? And I said, He cannot, O Yahweh. Then said HE to me, so also is Yisrael's portion. Because for their sakes I made the world: and when Adam transgressed MY statues, then was decreed that now is done. And so the entrances of this world were made narrow, full of sorrow, toilsome and travail: they are but few and evil, full of dangers and involved in great hardships and very painful. But the entrances of the future world are broad and safe, and really yield the fruit of immortality. Therefore unless the living labor not to enter this strait and narrow way to pass through the difficult and vain experiences, they can never receive those things that have been laid up for them. *4 Ezra 7:6-14 late First Century*
*(*note how much of the Sermon on the Mount is incorporated into this text)*

All the children of righteousness are ruled by the Prince of Light and walk in the ways of life, but all the children of falsehood spring by the Angel of Darkness and walk in the ways of darkness.
1QS 3:20-21

There are two ways, one of life and one of death; but a great difference between the two ways. The way of life, then, is this: First, you shall love God who made you; second, your neighbor as yourself; and all things whatsoever you would should not occur to you, do not also do to another.
And the way of death is this: First of all it is evil and full of curse:
Didache 1-6

It is also not uncommon for ancient texts to describe the path of the wicked as easy and the path of the righteous as difficult.

The path of sinners is smooth stones that end in the depths of the nether world.
Sirach 21:10

Many are the afflictions of the righteous and his ears toward their cry.
Psalm 34:19

Go in through the narrow gate,

The metaphor for a gate, be it an entrance to eschatological blessing such as the Heavenly Jerusalem, or the entrance to the place of judgment such as hell, is not uncommon in Jewish literature.

The Gemara describes the location of these lulavim (leaves of the date palm tree). Rabbi Maryon said that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, and some say that Rabba bar Mari taught this baraita in the name of Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai: There are two date palms in the valley of ben Hinnom, and smoke arises from between them. And this is the place about which we learned in the mishna: A lulav from the palms of the Iron Mountain is fit. And that site is the entrance of Gehenna.
b. Sukka 32b

The sequence of gate and way is not significant. One does not enter the gate to get upon the way or at the end of the way enter the gate. The two metaphors together refer to the same thing which is *the difficulty of discipleship to which Jesus calls his people.*

the gate is wide and the path is broad

The metaphors here are spatial but imply the easiness and comfort of the one who would travel this way. Note that there are no stated demands to be met, no discipline to gain in order to go through this gate and down this path.

"the path that leads to destruction" or *"final ruin"* – as found elsewhere in the New Testament, is the judgment rendered at the eschaton.

"the path that leads to life" – is the counterpart to the path leading to final ruin.

"But how narrow the gate is and confined the path" – The word *"but"* serves as a strong contrast between the two ways.

Here also the metaphor for *narrow gate* and *confined path* is spatial which highlights the genuine difficulty of taking this way.

"Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."
Matthew 19:24

If we look at the totality of the difficulty of the ethical teaching given in the Sermon on the Mount, then the context of the radical character of the disciple found in today's study should press us with the weight that Jesus demands from those who follow him.

But how narrow the gate is and confined the path . . .”

The ESV words the verse as follows:

“For the gate is narrow and the way is hard . . .”

The idea here is one of difficulty, *but the emphasis is on the reason* for this difficulty. In Greek the word *“hard”* or *“confined”* is τεθλιμμενη – *te-thlim-me-ne*.

The voice of this word in Greek is passive which indicates that the subject on the way *receives* the action instead of performs it. In other words, the tribulation *(narrow and confined)* encountered upon this *“narrow gate”* and *“confined way”* comes from outside of oneself and not from inside.

The word is derived from the noun θλιψις - *thlipsis*, meaning pressure or [social] constriction.

This noun is often translated as tribulation or trouble but that's far too specific and emotional. Instead, our noun describes a decidedly mechanical presence of a force that comes from all sides, which cannot be immediately acted upon and has only to be endured.
Source – Abarim Publications

Again, note that Jesus is warning the disciple that following him will cause painful pressure from all sides and that pressure will come from whatever society the disciples finds themselves in. It is a pressure which cannot be acted upon but one that must be endured simply because the Kingdom of God is contrary to the ruling governance of world societies.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
Matthew 5:10-12

“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.
Matthew 10:16-18, 21-22

When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.
Matthew 14:21-22

"that leads to life" – life here refers to eternal life in the eschaton.

And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to inherit eternal life?" and he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments."
Matthew 19:16-17

"and there are <u>few</u> who find it." – this phrase finds good examples in the ministry of Jesus as he and his disciples braved the cultural wrath of Judaism and their misunderstanding of the faith.

"Many are called but few are chosen."
Matthew 22:14

The *"few"* here could be seen as hyperbolic but Scripture reveals – perhaps with deep grief – that such is not always the case.

Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you."
Matthew 11:20-24

The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.
Matthew 12:41-42

These are the people who claim and come under the auspices of *this faith* but go down the broad path to final ruin.

That those who follow Jesus are a minority and that their path is a demanding one should come as no surprise, nor should it be discouraging either. After all, Jesus said that *"the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few."*

> *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."*
> *Matthew 9:36-38*

Let's contrast the final parallel of today's passage.

> *"many who go that way / many who go in that way / many who go through it"*
>
> *there are few who find it."*

There is an intentional choice made by the author here in the use of the words *"who find it."*

In effect it supplies the answer to the *ask, seek, knock* petition that was posed a few verses earlier. This reveals to us the privilege that is implied in these words for the faithful disciples who persevere against the political, religious, economic, cultural, etc., forces that will come against them as the historic kingdoms of this world do their best to arrest or destroy the Kingdom's subjects.

"Finding" implies a quest fulfilled and the joy that comes from that fulfillment. And all of this is possible because of God's grace and the call that is proclaimed to the individual with the reception of that grace .

> *Jesus here invites his disciples to travel upon the way he has outlined in the high ethical teaching of the preceding material. The narrow gate and the confined path of the disciples are quite the opposite of the broad path and wide gate chosen by the masses. The ends of the two ways are also radically opposite, as was the already well known from this frequently used metaphor. But the way taught by Jesus upon which the disciples are invited to travel, is inestimably superior despite the various demands it puts upon its travelers. It is a rigorous way, it is unmistakably also a way of grace. The disciples are not to worry that they are a minority, the few over against the many. It is not the point of the passage to speculate over the number who are saved or lost. The concern is the challenge afforded by discipleship. But the disciples are not to worry that their path involves the rigors of discipleship as well as the experience of suffering, sacrifice, and persecution. For they, by the grace of God, have found the way to life; they are the privileged.*
> *Hagner – Matthew, page 180*