

# The Way Is Narrow

by Michael Koulianos

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*The Christian message has become confused and diluted, and we must return to the importance of the cross in our salvation, denying ourselves and taking up our cross daily to experience daily death and life and joy and ecstasy in Jesus' presence.*

**Duration:** 41:36

**Scripture:** Matthew 16:13

**Topics:** "Narrow Way", "Discipleship", "Surrender to Christ"

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## Description

Michael Koulianos emphasizes the narrow path of true discipleship in his sermon 'The Way Is Narrow,' urging believers to prioritize Jesus above all else. He critiques the modern church's tendency to dilute the gospel, advocating for a return to the basics of faith, which include self-denial and embracing the cross. Koulianos highlights that true life in Christ comes through daily death to self, and that any message that deviates from this is a perversion of the gospel. He calls for a reformation in the church, reminding listeners that the essence of following Jesus is to say 'yes' to Him and 'no' to everything else, including personal ambitions. The sermon serves as a powerful reminder that the way to true fulfillment and purpose is through surrendering to Christ.

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## Transcript

Take your Bibles, I'm not going to preach long. But when I'm teaching the Word, get settled in, please. And we'll see what the Lord will do.

Oh, thank you, Lord. Go to Matthew 16. I want you to go to verse 13.

Alright, I'm going to say some stuff that may ruffle some feathers, but it's the Bible. So I'm going to just obey the Word. Is that okay? Before we read verse 13, I have my opinions, but my opinions really don't matter.

Only the Lord knows. The Bible says, thy word is truth. So I don't know how all of it happened, but it's happened.

The Christian message on many fronts, not all, but on many fronts, has gotten so confused and diluted. And part of that is because we've made people preeminent rather than the Lord. And if you want to love people most, love Jesus most.

The more you fall in love with Him, the more His love fills you for people. And what we've said is, instead of saying the way is narrow, we've said the way is wide open. We've told the world the way is broad to life, but Jesus said the way is broad to destruction.

And I don't know how we got there. I don't have all the answers. Help me on that feedback guys.

I don't have all the answers. But we got there. And if I taught on the basics of the gospel tonight, many of you, on the basics of the gospel, many of you would say, I've never heard that before.

And I'm not taking a shot at you. I'm talking about the condition of the church. If I were to teach on the prophetic promises of the coming of Christ, many of you would go, I've never heard that before.

If I taught on the humanity of Jesus, many of you, certain things I'd say, which are basic, which were elementary to the early church, and I know this because I preach this nonstop. I've given my life to it. I've watched students come in, many who were in the ministry, or pastors, or missionaries, or worship leaders, I'll teach something that you would have learned on day one in the early church, and they'll go, I've never heard that before.

Or the deity of Jesus. Or the reason for the Old Testament. The reason for the New Testament.

The reason Jesus said what he said. And why is that the case? Why are the basics of what it means to follow Jesus such a mystery to the church today, but what we can talk about is how to make our dreams come true. How to add Jesus to our life so that our life is more successful.

And we make Jesus an additive, or an addition, when that's an absolute impossibility because he's all. So all cannot be added to. I said all cannot be added to.

All cannot be a fraction of something. He's all or nothing. And he's all in all.

Is this making sense to you? And I feel like part of the mandate on this house is, well, the mandate on this house is to minister to the Lord, to bring his presence, and declare who Jesus is. And when you do that, miracles happen. And when you do that, people get saved.

And when you do that, marriages are healed. How many of you came in from outside the city of Orlando just to be in the room tonight? Look, it's amazing. It's humbling.

Yeah, you can welcome them. That's beautiful. It's an honor to have you.

How many of you came outside of the state, from outside of the state of Orlando, of Florida, to be here? Wow. It's amazing. It's incredible.

Think about what drew you. What drew you? I mean, we have very gifted people. We have gifted musicians and vocalists and camera operators and all that.

But that's not what drew you. That is a dime a dozen. What drew you is the Lord himself.

The reason that intangible flows from our team is because they're in love, not because they're just gifted. So you come in, and it feels different in the room here. Not that we're better than you.

We're not. We have so much to learn from other people, and we have a lot to learn in general. I don't want to be our biggest fan.

That's dangerous. You don't want to be your biggest fan. However, as your pastor, I need to remind you consistently that who is in the air here, this is very special.

That's special. Worshiping like that was special tonight. I don't know about you, but I felt like I got caught up in glory.

Anyone else? That doesn't happen through strategy, through initiative, through great planning. That stuff's important. That stuff's a wineskin, but that's not the secret to the sauce.

The secret sauce is his presence. So I don't know how we got to this place in the church, but I live to see it reformed. I said I live to see it reformed.

So in Matthew 16, let me read this to you. Verse 13. When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, which was called the gate to hell, by the way, he asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? So they said some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.

He said to them, But who do you say that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed are you, it's actually Simon Bar-yona, son of Yonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Remember Caesarea Philippi was called the gate to hell. It's a long story, but there were springs in a massive cave where there was bestiality taking place. Literally, child sacrifice right there and incredible idol worship where Greek gods had statues.

So it was called the gate of hell. So Jesus takes them to the gate of hell. You've heard me talk about this before.

And then looks them in the eye and says, Who do men say that I am? You see, some of you are tackling every issue in the world thinking that by you focusing on that issue with your ability to debate and reason that that issue is going to bow. Not going to bow that way. It will bow to Jesus.

It's one of my issues with some of the directions the church is going right now. It's creating a hero complex in individuals when there's one hero. Just one hero.

That'll help you out a lot. You don't have to be a hero. You just have to die.

In this story the hero dies. If you're writing your own hero story, you just die. A little different than Superman.

Maybe he died once. I don't know. I don't think so.

Jess would know. Alright. Verse 19.

And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

And then he commanded his disciples that they should tell no one that he was Jesus the Christ. Why did he do that? Because he understood that for him to sit on the throne as the perfect God-man that only his father could coronate him. In other words, he refused man's promotion.

He wanted the kingdom his father's way. And he refused a gateway outside the cross. Isn't that wonderful? Verse 21.

From that time Jesus began to show to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and be raised the third day. That's pretty clear. Jesus said, OK boys, I'm going to go to Jerusalem.

I am going to die and be raised on the third day. I'm going to be persecuted by the elders. He gave them the entire passion layout and they still couldn't see it.

Outside the Holy Spirit the second person of the Godhead himself is sitting there telling you how he's going to die and they still could not see it. Because he had not yet been glorified. And after his glorification the Spirit would come and then they could see.

Say, I need the Holy Spirit. Yeah. Now old Peter.

Oh, I love Peter. He's like a lot of my Jesus school students. Here comes the hero.

Ready? Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. How do you say you're the Christ, the Son of the Living God and then go to rebuke the Christ, the Son of the Living God? That's proof that flesh and blood didn't reveal it to Peter. In other words, Peter got it right for a moment because his father, the Lord's father in heaven helped him get it right.

Now we're seeing real Peter here. Peter without the revelation. You ready? This is just Peter on his own rebuking God.

You'll never win that one. Saying, far be it from you Lord this shall not happen to you. What shall not happen? The cross.

This shall not happen to you. I will not let you go to the cross because I love you too much. Remember when he said, where shall we go? For you alone have the words of life.

Imagine a man walking up to you and calling you to follow him. You leave everything. Your wife, your home, your livelihood.

Peter was a fisherman. And he follows Jesus everywhere. Now he's saying, no, no, no, no.

You're not going to die. That sounds loving. That sounds caring.

It sounds right and proper. Sounds like church. Talk about everything but the cross.

Let's talk about missions but leave the cross out of it. That's how you become your own hero. Let's talk about evangelism and leave the cross out of it.

Then you just start getting fans to follow you. And post all your pictures. But he, Jesus, turned and said to Peter, Get behind me Peter.

Did I read that improperly? Or is there a typo in my Bible? Did he say, get behind me Peter? Did he say, get behind me one of my top three? What did he say? Does your Bible say Satan? Get behind me Satan. Verse 17 he says, The Father just showed you who I am. Six verses later.

He says, get behind me Satan. That's quite a night for Peter. He's like, wait, wait.

You just told me. Jehovah gave me a revelation. The Ancient of Days, your Father just gave me a revelation.

Now you're calling me Satan? Which one is it? I guarantee you he needed some inner healing. I don't know what to do with this. Which one is it? You are an offense to me, or a stumbling block.

For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men. Bill Johnson paints this beautifully. He says, Human thinking outside of the person of the Lord is satanic in nature.

It's true. But notice here that Jesus, listen, calls anyone, even one of his three closest friends, anyone who begins to obstruct his pathway to the cross, Satan. I want the Holy Spirit tonight to draw a line in the sand in your consciousness.

Any offer of the Christian life outside of the cross and Christ crucified is satanic perversion. It is not the Christian life. It is not the Christian message.

Any path to a breakthrough and a kingdom outside the cross is a stumbling block that Satan has erected. Often times in our desire to alleviate suffering we inherit demonic agendas. I want you to see how seriously Jesus took the cross.

You say, this is heavy. We talked about this this morning. This is heavy.

It is, but it's glorious. It's glorious. You'll never come alive until you die.

Die to what? Everything. I mentioned to the church this morning when God asked me to give golf up, which was my life prior to the ministry, I gave it up. And this is what I said to the Lord.

Is this okay? If it's okay for one, I'm going to preach to you. If you're one of the one, just wave at me. I'll look at you.

If you're not, I won't look at you. I love you, but I'm not going to look at you. If this is boring to you, the Christian life is boring.

You say, I've never tasted this or heard it. You've never heard Christianity. Dave Pompavisi says it this way, you take the cross out of the Christian life and you take the slug out of the shell.

This is where the power is. So I said to the Lord, you can't take golf from me. You gave it to me.

And he just gently whispered in my heart, I did give it to you. That's why I can ask for it. It's amazing the theologies we come up with.

God will never take what he's given you. Really? Really? Last time I checked, God gave Isaac to Abraham. God would never ask for a blessing.

Isaac was a blessing. What are the Isaacs you're holding on to? Everybody wants to give God their issues so he can nail your porn to the tree. Yeah, yeah.

Because that makes you feel condemned and shameful. Your sexual issues, whatever it might be, your anger, the stuff we all say, that we wish we wouldn't say, the way we are, that we wish we would not be like. We all say, take the filth and nail it to the tree.

But have you ever given God something good that he initially gave you? That's death. That's yieldedness. That's a beautiful invitation.

Ever been on your knees weeping and tears for days? Struggling, trying to negotiate with God? Only to discover that the harder you negotiate, the deeper that resounding drumbeat in your soul won't budge. Lord, I'll give you this, if you just come off of that. You have nothing I need.

I want you. All or nothing. If you'll just let me keep this, I'll go there.

God says I can raise up 7,000 others to go there. I don't need your gifting. I don't need your ministry.

I need you. I'm married to you. And I'm not changing the channel.

You can't pray it away. You can't give enough offerings to be free from that deep drumbeat in your soul that is the voice of the Holy Spirit, that river inside of you that refuses to change the channel until you yield. You can't fast it away.

You can't pray it away. You could move into the secret place if you want with a jug of water and a sleeping bag and God still will not change the channel. You can't write enough psalms.

Can't plan enough churches. Can't preach enough messages to get him to change the channel because he's not after your ability. He's after your heart.

He wants you. You. You.

And what happens is you go into the secret place thinking I'll just pray it away. Certainly I can get him to I can get him to change his mind on this and you go into the secret place and it's as dry as a bone and all your prayers bounce off the ceiling and the Lord just stands by very gently and goes, are you done yet? Oh, I don't feel the presence of God. Yep, that's the way it goes.

And it's going to be like this forever. How you like it, Michael? You know, spending time with Jesus without his grace is difficult. What's he looking for? Yieldedness.

Death to self looks like giving him what he gave you because the stuff he gives you seems so magnificent and our small thinking we begin to believe certainly he can't give me anything better than you die and realize that what you gave up was a drop in the bucket. Let me keep reading. Is this alright? You say, I don't want to hear the word tonight.

I want people to fall down. Well, the Lord has a plan. I want you to stand at the throne in purity like a spotless bride.

You need to hear the scriptures. Verse 24 after Jesus calls Peter, Satan. Then Jesus said to his disciples listen carefully now, listen carefully.

If anyone desires to come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me for whoever desires to save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake you can't lose your life for your sake and all you do, you have to do it under the Lord. Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Look at verse 24 again.

If anyone what does anyone mean in Greek? Hebrew. Aramaic. That means anyone.

Say that's me. Desires to come after me or be my disciple let him first follow me. No.

Everybody wants to follow Jesus. The man in the white robe. I mean he multiplies food and he heals all of our sicknesses and he's got the answer at the right time and he's beautiful and wonderful and peaceful.

He walks on water. Who wouldn't want to follow him? So exciting. Cast out devils.

His teachings are incredible but we don't come to Jesus for the sake of his teachings alone. What we've been preaching for generations is if anyone desires to come after me let him first follow me. No, no, no, no.

Let him deny himself. You want to come through the front door or preview week or day, whatever it is. Preview day in Jesus' discipleship program.

Deny yourself. I have to say no to me? Yep. What do I get to do? After I do that can I start following him? No.

You deny yourself and then you put that death mechanism on your back. Carry it. And Jesus said this.

We must take up our cross daily. Now what is the life of the cross? The life of the cross is simple. Yes to Jesus.

No to everything else. Yes to Jesus. No to me.

Yes to Jesus. No to other voices. Yes to Jesus.

Even if it costs me comfort. Yes to Jesus. Even if I'm hated.

Yes to Jesus. In place of self preservation. Yes to Jesus at all costs.

It's the life of the cross. And this is the front door. Now you might be saying Michael this is not the right sermon to preach in front of a Christmas tree.

Because this is a jolly season. This is the time for candy canes and little Oompa Loompa elves and carbs. This is a happy time for fake snow and stockings.

It's all great. But this is the point of the coming of Jesus. Jesus came as I said this morning to die.

And what I want you to get and what the devil does not want you to understand is this. The moment you let go and let the cross have its work he will come alive in you. When I think of Judge Jesus School it's just the big journey into death.

Jess is like horrible branding. Why would you say that? But because it's an invitation to daily death it is an invitation to daily life. Daily joy you can ask him.

Beautiful ecstasy in his presence. Joy unspeakable and full of glory. And they leave.

They sit there and leave. And when their friends ask them what's going on over there most of the time they just go we don't know. It's just Jesus.

You're so different. You're so much nicer. You stopped arguing with your parents.

First year you were arguing. By second year you're vacuuming when you went home on break. You stopped all the garbage.

You're lowly. And not because we're making you be lowly outside of the presence of the Lord. It's you die a death.

You're like that's not grace. Oh yeah it is. See you think grace not you.

I'm not pointing at anybody individually. Okay. You think grace is just God taking all your junk and getting rid of it in a way that you didn't earn.

That's a small piece. A small fraction in the pile. If that was if grace was limited to that then why would Jesus grow in it? Jesus didn't need forgiveness of sin.

I said Jesus you better say amen to that. Jesus didn't need forgiveness of sin. Jesus is perfect in spite of what some people are preaching today.

I don't even understand how they can hold a Bible and say that stuff. You can't be the spotless perfect lamb and be a sinner. If Jesus is a sinner his blood doesn't atone and he stays in the grave and you have no faith Paul said.

If Jesus is a sinner all of us are going to hell. You better say amen faster than that. When I say something like that you better say it quickly.

I said Jesus is not a sinner. There you go. I love the New King James in this verse.

Romans 8.36 Don't you feel the Lord here? Don't worry. I'll dismiss you soon. You know I look back at the way I was and in many ways still am.

I am blown away how the Lord put up with me. Thanks Court for saying amen to that so quickly. She's like amen, amen, amen.

Court's been with us now for five, six years. I just think of the way I was. The way I viewed ministry.

What I valued only to discover God didn't value so much of it. And only to discover that a lot of what I gloried in God could have cared less about. And some of the stuff I didn't value he really cares about.

But aren't you glad God doesn't throw us away? That if we stay before the Lord's presence and before the word and live humbly before one another that he takes us on this journey. And the ultimate goal according to verse 29 that I'm not going to read in Romans 8 is to conform us into the image of Jesus. I rarely listen to myself preach anyways.

But when I listen to myself when I was young and I go oh my God how did you use that sermon Lord? Hopefully you feel that way about you if you're in the ministry or whatever you do. Verse 36 of Romans 8

let me read this to you. Let's go to verse 35.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword as it is written listen for your sake we are killed all day long. This is the apostle talking. For your sake with a capital Y for Jesus sake we are killed all day long.

We are counted as sheep for the slaughter. For your sake we are killed all day long. A daily death that lasts all day.

That process will continue until you get your new body. Until you breathe your last or until Jesus cracks the eastern sky. Let me say this very clearly.

You cannot receive life consistently unless you receive his invitation to death consistently. Some of you might just be so confused what he's talking about. I'm not talking about physical death here.

For some that's been the price but I'm not talking about that necessarily for you. What I am saying is that the Christian life is not our own life. Paul looked at it this way he said It is nevertheless it's not I that live but Christ who lives in me.

Say this. When I die I come alive. And the hour is too late to hold on to your own will.

Listen friends. The hour is too late to hold on to your own will. Psalm 104 I'm going to read this to you and then pray for you.

The pattern has always been before I read it. The pattern has always been listen always been death burial life. Say that out loud.

Death burial life. Say it again. Death burial life.

The Lord said as long as the earth remains that there shall be seed time and harvest. The seed goes into the ground it is buried and then comes into life. It goes into the ground it dies its outer shell breaks I feel the Lord its outer shell breaks and then breaks the ground.

Which is why seeds broke the ground on the third day in Genesis. The third day. That sounds familiar.

What did Jesus say in John chapter 12? When the disciples said the Greeks want to see you. In other words the Gentiles want to know you. There needs to be a harvest.

They didn't know they were saying this but this is how Jesus responded. Speaking of the Gentile harvest Jesus responds by saying unless a kernel of wheat go into the ground and die it abides alone but if it goes into the ground and dies it shall bear much. We've talked about this before.

Imagine the disciples response. Can they see you or not? What did you just say? What does a kernel of grain have to do with them saying hello? Jesus doesn't answer on our terms. Neither is he bound to answer our questions.

You can ask Jesus a question and he will answer you regarding what he thinks you need to know even if you think it has nothing to do with your question. That's one of the ways he calls you higher. His thoughts are not our thoughts.

And his ways are not our ways. So Jesus says unless a kernel of grain or seed goes into the ground burial in death it cannot bring life. This is the pattern of the Christian life.

If you don't feel alive tonight if you feel dead and dormant and stagnant what needs to be nailed to the tree? What is it you're holding on to? Because holding on to stuff makes you tired. Holding on so protecting your reputation makes you tired. You know what is a wonderful liberating breakthrough? Is when you stop caring what people think.

Now that doesn't give you a license to be a jerk or to act weird. I'm not saying the Holy Spirit can't touch you and destroy your dignity. Oh he'll do that.

But some of us think that if we act weird that will give us the encounter with God. No. Just seek Jesus and whatever he decides to do with you is what he decides to do with you even if that just looks like you sitting in your seat.

Some might shake under the power the other might just sit in their seat. Some of us try to create the encounter with the flesh. Doesn't work.

That's what Samson tried to do after he lost the anointing. He tried to shake them off as he did before. He figured maybe his physical demonstration would bring the anointing.

No, he found out real quickly he'd lose his vision and be led away captive. You live in the flesh, you go blind. Then you become a slave and then you're employed by demon power like he was to entertain the devil.

No. The pattern is daily death, daily life. Let me read this to you.

Verse 29 Psalm 104 You hide your face and they are troubled. Listen, listen, listen to this carefully. You take away their breath.

They die and return to their dust. You take away their breath. They die and return to dust.

Say burial. Say death and burial. Look what happens next.

You send forth your spirit. They are renewed. Listen.

And they are created or and you renew, I should say you send forth your spirit, they are created. And you renew the face of the earth. Hold on.

I thought I'm created. Then I die. Now that's the old you.

The real you came alive when you died to yourself and were born from above. God took away Michelle's breath. The old Michelle.

He took away her breath, her life. Because breath is life. And nailed it to the tree.

And then the real Michelle came alive. And they are born again experienced. You know why people don't experience the breath of the spirit? Because they are holding on too tight.

They want life first and then they want to die. And then it turns into self condemnation. I don't know why God won't touch me.

Why God won't use me. Why I'm not as special as so and so. Are you dead? Let them take your breath away.

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