

**Entrance into the Kingdom of God  
And the Validity of Contemporary Judaism:  
Jesus' View**

We continue our study today of one of Jesus' best-known messages. Jesus' forerunner, John, announced the advent of the Kingdom of God in the person of the "Lamb of God." His notoriety had spread throughout the land through His itinerate ministry, an unheard-of array of stunning miracles, as well as synagogue readings and declarations ("...today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing," he said having read Isaiah 61:1-2a in Nazareth). He announced, "The time is fulfilled the kingdom of God is at hand... (Mark 1:15)."

The dominate question of the people of our Lord' was this, "How do I enter this kingdom you are declaring?" They knew it required righteousness, but where was it to be found. Are our religious leaders telling us truthfully the qualification for entrance into the kingdom? Is your "righteousness" and their "righteousness" the same?

- I. The Setting, 5:1-2
  - II. The Introduction, 5:3-16
  - III. The Clarification and the Thesis, 5:17-20
  - IV. Argument Sustaining the Thesis, 5:21-7:6
    - A. The Scribes and Pharisees wrongly interpret the Scriptures, 5:21-48
      - 1. The Law, Jesus, and murder, 5:21-26
      - 2. The Law, Jesus, and adultery, 5:27-30
      - 3. The Law, Jesus, and divorce, 5:31-32
      - 4. The Law, Jesus, and deceptive speech, 5:33-37
      - 5. The Law Jesus, and vengeance, 5:38-42
      - 6. The Law, Jesus, and discrimination, 5:42-47
      - 7. Conclusion, 5:48
    - B. The Scribes and Pharisees distort religious practices, 6:1-18
      - 1. In the way they give, vv. 1-4
      - 2. In the way to pray, vv. 5-15
      - 3. In the way they fast, vv. 16-18
    - C. The Scribes and Pharisees' inconsistent personal practices, 6:19-7:6
      - 1. Relative to materialism or selfish hoarding, vv. 19-24
      - 2. Relative to selfish worry, vv. 25-34
      - 3. Relative to critical judgmentalism, 7:1-6
- The issue here is unjust and critical attitudes of censoriousness, not

the employment of wisdom and discretion. Jesus turns from a negative attitude of one's own life-experience to our attitude toward others.

a. The peril of judgmentalism, vv. 1-2

The issue with a critical spirit, or fault finding, is that it can be a boomerang if unjustly employed. The point is unjust criticism, not criticism per se.

Using a commercial metaphor, what 'often comes around goes around', verse 2 reminds me of the biblical story of Adoni-bezek who in conquering seventy kings cut off their big toes and thumbs. After suffering the same fate, he said, 'As I have done, so has God repaid me' (Judg. 1:7b).

b. A root of judgmentalism illustrated, vv. 3-5

Jesus uses an illustration to make his point (vv. 3-5). The speck-and-beam picture notes the inappropriateness of criticism. He seems to be indicating that what bothers a person may be a mirror image of a greater personal problem in themselves.

c. A balanced perspective, v. 7

Though we are to love our enemies (5:43-47) and avoid a critical spirit, there is a balance to keep (v. 6). We must be discerning. Dogs may become vicious and unruly animals, prone to rip and tear with their teeth, when presented with a piece of meat they might consider choice. Precious pearls would have no value for pigs; they simply walk over them. Criticism is not always wrong; it simply must be valid, offered in a proper manner, and with the proper motive. The principle is that of wisdom and discernment.

V. An invitation, 7:7-12

1. Stated, v. 7

Here is a triple imperative; clearly the point is to emphasize the urgency and importance of action. The tone of the sermon shifts from instruction to invitation, from an appeal to information to a call for a decision. The reoccurring words are 'ask,' 'seek,' 'knock,' and 'give' (five times). The commands in this verse are present tense indicating the need for ongoing action or persistence.

2. The reason, v. 8

In verse 8, the opening 'for' gives a reason for asking; there is a wonderful promise that God has given! God will hear the request of the penitent.

3. The surety of acceptance, vv. 9-11

Here is an illustration that argues for the potency of God's promise to receive a person who asks for entrance into the kingdom based on the analogy of a father's answer to a child's request. Second, the

greater kindness of God is mentioned (v. 11). If earthly fathers, being evil, act kindly to the object of their affection, how much more will our holy Father who infinitely loves us? God loves us far more than any earthly parent so we should expect good outcomes when requesting his help. In a parallel account, the 'gift' is designated as the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13), suggesting the topic is entrance into the kingdom, eternal life, which is the gift of the Spirit to us.

#### 4. Conclusion (7:12)

This verse is difficult to place contextually in an outline. The 'so' indicates an implication, but the content seems incongruous with verses 7-11, the gist of the paragraph being that we are to turn to our heavenly Father.

If this verse is a conclusion to verses 7-11, being about the treatment of others, it perhaps has a connection to 6:14-15. The treatment of others (such as in forgiving wrongs done to us being a sign of a change in our hearts because of Jesus and being in His kingdom) is not how we enter the kingdom; it is evidence that we are in the kingdom. Here, then, Jesus would be saying that love is the evidence of being in the kingdom, which is the intent of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Law and the Prophets (22:37-40).

The verse may be a summary of the sermon and a synopsis of the intent of the Hebrew Scriptures. The reference to 'Law and the Prophets' ties the verse to 5:17 (a phrase repeated at the beginning and end of the sermon). Taken in this way, the verse may function as a summary of the entire sermon.

Though the 'Golden Rule' was common among the rabbis of the Hillel school, they stated it in the negative ('What is hateful to you, do not do to others'). Only Jesus states it positively. The negative suggests the implementation of justice. The way Jesus stated it implies the need for grace, forgiveness, and mercy.

#### VI. A choice: two gates, 7:13-23

The way of life is described as two roads; the validity of the road is determined by the destination to which it brings the traveller. The road is to be chosen by the journeyed; again, the stress is on response. Jesus urged his hearers to enter the gate of discipleship on the road of persecution (5:10-12) that ends in heaven. The broad gate is attractive, the way of cultural and religious affirmation by the nation's leadership, but its end is tragic. Jesus is clearly asserting that there is only one way into his kingdom and that there is a literal hell, contrary to the thinking of

even some postmodern religious leaders and the Sadducees of Jesus' day.

1. The fact, vv. 13-14

The point of the metaphor of the two gates is that there are only two choices people can make in life, one leading to heaven and the other to hell. One is more temporally attractive than the other (it requires licence, not discipleship), but the less attractive is ultimately preferable. The narrow road, the road entered through Jesus, is not the most obvious or attractive way to go.

2. The difficulty of false teachers, vv. 15-23.

The reason that the broad gate is so alluring is that false teachers and deceivers abound. Specifically, the referent is to the teachings of the Pharisees and scribes in Jesus' day, but we have our own plethora of false messages and messengers.

a. The fact of false teachers, v. 15a

reminds me of the story of the false prophet Micaiah ben Imah and the four hundred prophets of Baal, who in opposing the judgmental message of Jeremiah, and prophesized peace, but only destruction came (1 Kgs. 22:5-28).

b. The deception of false teachers, v. 15b

The false teachers are deceptive; they come disguised.

c. The detection of false teachers, vv. 16-20

It seems that he is speaking of the religious leadership. See 23:2-7. What they said was true, but they do not bear the fruit of their teaching.

In verse 16a, he states the principle illustratively: trees and bushes produce what is consistent with their character. False teachers produce false fruit; they lead followers down the wrong path. The metaphor of grapes/figs and thorns/bushes (v. 16b) remind us that bushes produce after their kind. From a grape bush comes grapes or fruit; a thorn bush does not produce grapes but thorns. The metaphor of the trees (vv. 17-20) is lengthier. The emphasis here is on the quality of the fruit rather than the kind. The good fruit of teaching, when embraced, puts one on the narrow path and the destiny, as evidenced by fruit, is the kingdom. As the root, so the fruit, suggesting that the teachings of the nation's leadership was corrupt and, consequently the road they would have us travel (though attractive) only leads to destruction.

d. The fate of false teachers, vv. 21-23

These verses are as shocking as they are graphic and arresting. To make claims of affiliation without entering through the 'narrow gate' is

without validity. To suggest allegiance to Jesus based on being acquainted with miraculous powers, without entering the 'narrow gate', will only lead to terrifying consequences ('I never knew you' [v. 23]).

### Thoughts

1. We are often sensitive to the weaknesses of others because we share in them ourselves. Spiteful criticism is an art form in our culture; sadly, it is often found in the Christian culture. While criticism can be constructive, when it is employed to justify ourselves and condemn others in so doing, it should have no place among us. What we often find disturbing in others are characteristics we detect readily because we see them in ourselves. Do you find yourself negatively judging other's actions because you think you know that it springs from an evil selfish motive? There is a danger in doing this; it can come back to haunt you.
2. It is wonderful that the greatest gift, the gift of life, is simply for the asking. It does not require a college education; it does not matter whether you are well connected in society; who your parents were is of no consequence; financial security is not an issue. The best things in life come without cost, have you noticed? A walk with your best friend, a fresh cup of coffee with the one you cherish most, the availability of a painted sunset or a majestic sunrise are for everyone. So is the gift of life. O! There is a cost, but it has been paid. It is now free.
3. The way to heaven is a narrow way. It is through Christ alone. Our culture values tolerance, the equal value of all opinions, but that has nothing of resemblance to the message of the Saviour. There is only one way to God and that is through the provision of Jesus Christ. Many voices may seem attractive, but they will prove gravely disappointing. Are you on the narrow path that brings with it temporal restrictions because you are a follower of Jesus or are you on the broad path that offers temporal pleasures, but eternal failure?
4. The reason there is so much confusion over religious issues is that there are many hucksters peddling error in the guise of truth. When you listen to religious broadcasts can you spot wolves dressed in attractive attire? Do you hear error from the pulpits of our land? Truth does not come from wolves in sheep's clothing. The antidote to gullibility is knowledge of the true shepherd. Are you regularly reading the Word of God? What shepherd are you listening to these days?
5. The difficulty of spotting false teachers is that their words are often pleasant, and their appeal is attractive. You can only know the quality of a teacher by the fruit that comes from his/her work. 'As the root, so the fruit,' is the litmus test of truthfulness. The actions of a person often tell us more than his/her

words. Is their message in conformity to that of Jesus? If not, they are false teachers.

8. Knowledge of the Lord does not make a person a Christian. Clearly in our passage false teachers profess to be a follower of Jesus and are capable of miracle working. The fact of spiritual words or benevolent deeds does not make one a saint. You can have God in your mouth, while empty of him in the heart. The most important question in life is not, 'Have you met Jesus?' It is, 'Has he met you?' Though a person may know about him, redemption does not occur essentially in the mental faculties. It occurs in the heart, in the affections. False teachers speak of him, but they have no love for him. Their love is greed of place and cultural values.
9. Sand is a good foundation if there are no storms. When battering storms come to the shore of your life, sand is not stable enough to keep you erect. What you need is to stand on something that is impervious to storms, a rock. Jesus is that rock. All other foundations will prove inadequate, not in the good days and years of our lives, but when the storms come. The greatest of these storms will be the final judgment. Do you want to stand before God on a porous foundation of religious error or on the truth, the rock, Christ Jesus? What foundation are you building your life upon these days?
10. Do not miss Jesus' invitation. Now is the day to ask, seek, and knock. Are you willing to do that? Jesus will not ask you about significant accomplishments, pedigree, or your benevolences; he will ask you if you were willing to come to him, to enter the narrow gate. Are you willing to become a follower of Jesus? The choice is yours, but there will come a time when that choice will no longer be yours to make. Are you willing to embrace the love of God revealed in the person and work of Jesus for you?