

ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW GATE

Matthew 7:1-14

Key Verse: 7:13,14

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

In this passage Jesus teaches us not to judge others, but to practice the love of God toward others. This is not an easy way of life. It is a challenging way of life. It is like going through a narrow gate to walk a narrow road. Still, it is possible when we depend on God in prayer. Let's listen to Jesus' words and enter through the narrow gate.

First, do not judge; repent and serve others (1-6).

Look at verse 1. “Do not judge, or you too will be judged.” What does it mean to judge others? Simply speaking, it is to make a spiritual, ethical or moral declaration about others as though we are in the place of God. Jesus tells us, “Do not judge.” We are all fallen sinners. The Bible says, “...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” and “there is no one righteous, not even one” (Ro 3:23, 3:10). Therefore, when one judges others, he also judges himself. Judging others is like pointing a finger at them; three fingers point back at us. They may represent return judgment from our conscience, those we have offended, and from God, who opposes those who usurp his sovereign right to judge. One who judges others will suffer condemnation in his own soul. Missionary Isaac Kim of Los Angeles was a prominent judge in Korea. His job was to condemn criminals all day long. He confessed that he had a hard time sleeping at night, for he felt condemned by his own judgments. Finally he left the judge's bench, saying he could not be a shepherd and judge at the same time. Look at verse 2. “For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” Therefore, let's not judge others.

Look at verses 3-4. “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?” A speck of sawdust in one's eye is irritating and needs to be removed, but it is not fatal. On the other hand, a plank in one's eye is serious and requires emergency care. Objective reason tells us that one should be more concerned about a plank in his own eye than about a speck of sawdust in another's eye. However, sinful human beings are blindly biased. We are eager to find the minor sins of others, while ignoring our own grave sins. In a word, we are deceived by our sinful pride. 1 John 1:8 warns us, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” If, in this condition, we judge others, we become fools who compound our sin of self-deception with the sin of hypocrisy.

Missionary Joseph Ahn told an interesting story of a Cuban delegate in the U.N. who one day began to criticize America in a formal meeting. He cited the bad news he read in the New York Times and gave details about murder rates, robberies, tenant abuse, and so on. His conclusion was that America was an ugly country and full of human rights violations. The U.S. delegate said, “Sir, I have just one question. Why are so many Cubans trying to enter the United States?” The U.N. assembly broke into laughter and the discussion ended.

Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount are the highest moral, ethical and spiritual teachings. If we use them to criticize others, we can do so endlessly. But we will be hypocrites. Jesus said in verse 5, “You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.” Jesus teaches us to repent of our own sins. We must apply Jesus' teachings to ourselves first, and repent. This doesn't mean that we ignore others. After repenting our own sins, we can be useful to serve others.

Among us there are those who have followed Jesus for 20, 30, or even 40 years. During that time we could grow in faith and spiritual understanding in many ways. There is a temptation to look at younger people in light of our extensive experience and pass judgment on them. The moment we do so, we become self-righteous sinners. We cut ourselves off from grace and from meaningful fellowship with young people. We should remember what kind of sinners we are. We should remember the marvelous grace of Jesus upon us. Then we will discover that we have much in common with young people. We can be happy in Jesus' grace and be good friends for them.

Among us there are many young people who are beginning to open their spiritual eyes and are full of idealism. They may look at their parents or elders with a critical eye. They may remember one injustice that was done to them and

never let it go from their hearts. In doing so, they overlook many acts of kindness and love that have been poured out on them without cost. Among us many Bible students look at their Bible teachers with a critical eye, forgetting the marvelous grace they have freely received in the name of Jesus. We must take Jesus' words to heart. In these first five verses, Jesus is telling us, "Don't judge; repent and serve others."

We must always remember the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. While we were still sinners Christ died for us. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." St. Paul, as a mature servant of Christ, wrote: "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst" (1 Ti 1:15). Paul did not say he had been the worst in the past, but he was the worst at the present moment. Paul always remembered what kind of sinner he was and the marvelous grace of Jesus toward him. Then he could be a good spiritual father to many kinds of people. Let's all remember the grace of Jesus and overcome the tendency to judge others.

Look at verse 6. "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces." Here "dogs" and "pigs" refer to those who despise sacred things. They will abuse and destroy sacred things if given the opportunity. "What is sacred," and "pearls," refer to Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3). When we know Christ through obedience, we become rich in spiritual wisdom and knowledge. This is a precious treasure. We must be discerning in sharing it. This does not mean that we should limit our gospel preaching to those who look decent. It means that we realize the great value of our treasures and not allow them to be desecrated. Rather they must be entrusted to reliable men of spiritual quality (2 Ti 2:2).

Jesus showed us how to do this. Jesus taught his chosen disciples all the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. To others Jesus spoke in parables. Only those who valued spiritual knowledge received enlightenment from Jesus' teaching. We can see this further in Jesus' conversation with Pilate. Jesus invited Pilate to stand on the side of truth and see the kingdom of heaven (Jn 18:37). Then Pilate revealed his compromising heart and contempt for the truth, saying, "What is truth?" After that, Jesus did not answer Pilate, except to warn him of impending judgment (Jn 19:8-11). The gospel is good news of great joy for all people. Whosoever will can accept Jesus. But our spiritual treasure should be greatly valued and carefully guarded. One-to-one Bible study is free of charge, but it is not cheap. It is a privilege worth more than gold. As we struggle not to judge others, we must not forget the value of the gospel. We must share it with spiritual discernment. One-to-one Bible teachers shine like stars in the universe as they hold out the words of eternal life in a dark world (Php 2:15).

Second, depend on God and love others positively (7-12).

Obviously, to practice Jesus' teachings in verses 1-6, we need help. We need spiritual strength and wisdom that only God in heaven can give us. Jesus teaches us how to obtain them. Look at verse 7. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." When we become aware of our spiritual needs, we should not panic, we should ask God. We must ask God to remind us of Jesus' grace. We must ask God for the spirit of repentance. We must ask God for spiritual discernment.

When we study verse 7 carefully, we can learn something important about the life of prayer. There are three verbs in this verse: "ask, seek, knock." There is a progression in the development of a life of prayer, as well as in some individual battles of prayer. We begin by asking. We do this with our mouths and hearts. It seems simple enough. But in reality, it may be difficult. If our hearts are proud, we cannot ask God. If our hearts are full of human struggles with others, we cannot ask God (Ja 4:1-3). To ask God in prayer, we must humble our hearts and overcome human conflict. Sometimes husband and wife struggle with one another and lose the harmony of their relationship. Then they cannot pray. They must restore mutual love and respect through sincere repentance. One young man was very sorrowful because, after he had behaved childishly, his wife did not respect him. He feared that his family might break up. He did not want his precious children to suffer. So he cried out to God with tears of repentance. God worked to restore mutual love and respect between he and his wife. Now they pray together with all sincerity and their children are growing remarkably. Prayer begins when we turn from the world, humble our hearts, and ask God.

Next comes seeking. Sometimes God's answer to prayer is not obvious. We must seek out how God answered our prayer. This requires the use of our minds and other faculties to search. St. Paul had to search hard for the open door

to Macedonia (Ac 16:6-10). Many Christian doctors are searching hard to find God's answer to their prayers by going through a nationwide interview process. May God lead Dr. Joshua H. Choo as they seek his answer to prayer.

After seeking comes knocking. This requires the use of the feet and hands, and the will, and the expenditure of energy to knock until the door is opened. There is a mature shepherd in Korea named Moses Kim. When he wanted to establish a family of God he trusted in God through prayer. An answer came through God's servant, and a bride candidate was suggested. But Shepherd Moses had to go to her house and ask her father for her hand in marriage. The problem was a big dog with big teeth and a loud bark that sat in front of the house. Upon meeting that dog, Shepherd Moses turned back, shaking his head. Dr. Lee encouraged him with a story about picking an apple from a tree. If one only sits down under the tree waiting for the apple to fall into his mouth, he may wait several years to eat an apple. But if he goes to the tree, climbs up, and picks an apple, he can eat it. Shepherd Moses got the point. He went back to the house. This time he took a sausage. When the dog started barking he threw the sausage to the dog. While the dog was distracted, he entered the house. The rest is part of God's eternal history. Many young people want to establish families of God this year. I pray that God may establish 12 house churches in Chicago in 2006. For this, we all need to ask, seek and knock until God helps us to do so.

Look at verse 8. "For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." Jesus promises that God will answer our prayers. To assure us, Jesus teaches us the heart of God. Look at verses 9-11. "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" Human fathers are all evil, without any exception, because we all have a sinful nature. Nevertheless, there is enough of the image of God in us that we know how to give good gifts to our children. Many fathers who are in prison for their crimes give nice Christmas presents to their children. How much more will our Father God give us good gifts. God is good, completely good, always good. God is love. God loves us so much that he sacrificed Jesus for us. Our Father God in heaven will answer our prayers by giving us the best gifts.

God is wise in his distribution of gifts. The gifts God gives are perfect in every way. The best gift of God is Jesus Christ. Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit to enable us to live a happy and holy life with all power and wisdom. Further, God gives the good gifts of world mission vision (Ro 1:11), his divine love that embraces others, and the grace to reveal Christ in the midst of hardship (2 Cor 12:9). Both Joseph and Daniel received great spiritual gifts of being able to interpret the dreams of top leaders of world power countries. God gives each of his children spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ (Ro 12:6-8). When we receive these gifts from the riches of God's goodness and love, we find every resource necessary to serve God powerfully. We can love others and do many good things for the glory of God.

On this basis, we can accept Jesus' next teaching. Let's read verse 12. "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." This has been called the golden rule. It is a short sentence, yet Jesus says that it summarizes the Law and the Prophets. It is putting the love of God into practice. Jesus fulfilled this teaching. When we were helpless in our sin problem, Jesus could have judged and condemned us. But Jesus did not do so. Instead, he put himself in our places and felt the full agony of our sin problem. Jesus took the punishment that we deserved through his death on the cross. Because Jesus died, we can live. Therefore, we must throw away our self-righteousness, sinful bias, and arbitrary human standards. Instead of judging others, we must understand them, love them with the strength God gives, and do to others what we would want them to do to us. This pleases God and fulfills the law of God.

Third, enter through the narrow gate (13-14).

Look at verses 13-14. "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." Finally, Jesus challenges us to make a decision. Each of us stands at a fork in the road with two ways before us. One is a narrow gate opening to a narrow road. It appears to be hard and demanding, but Jesus says that it leads to life. The other is a wide gate opening to a broad road. It appears to be free and easy and full of travelers. But Jesus says it leads to destruction. Jesus wants us to make a decision with the final goal in mind. Jesus wants us to count the cost and make a firm decision to bear the hardship and difficulty of following him through the narrow gate, down the narrow road.

In light of this study, entering the narrow gate means to repent before the word of Jesus instead of judging others, and to learn to love others until we can do to them what we would have them do to us. We are weak, but God promises to answer our prayers. God can enable us to take this narrow road that leads to life. May God bless all of us to enter through the narrow gate, depending on God in prayer.