

## Jesus Explained the Wide and Narrow Ways

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand why we are not to judge others but instead leave all judgment to the Lord. We saw that we also want to help them understand why some in the world attack Christians. In this topic, we will see that Jesus encouraged His followers to pray and then explained the wide and the narrow ways.

Jesus taught His disciples about asking and receiving. Matthew 7:7-11 says, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” We see that Jesus wanted His followers to know that they could feel free to ask God to meet their needs.

We see that God enjoys meeting our needs. Jesus had said earlier, in Matthew 6:8, “Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.” Here, we see that He wants us to tell Him about our needs even though He knows what those needs are. Jesus used three words to show the importance of bringing our needs to God in prayer: ask, seek and knock. First, we are to ask. The word translated “ask” means *to beg, desire or ask*. 1 John 5:14-15 uses this word three times when those verses say, “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.” We see that we can know God will answer our request, if it is His will.

Second, we see that we are to seek. The word translated “seek” means *to seek in order to find something*. This is the word that is used in Luke 15:8, where we read, “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?” In this verse, the word is translated “search” and the woman searched until she found the missing coin. In the same way, Jesus said that the Father wants us to keep praying until He answers our prayers.

Third, we are to knock. The word translated “knock” means *to knock at the door*. This word is used in Acts 12 when Peter was knocking at the door after the angel led him out of the prison. Revelation 3:20 says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” In this verse, we see that the church in Laodicea had gone so far from Jesus that He is outside the door and He knocks on the door and asks any individuals who want to have fellowship with Him to open the door. In contrast to the church at Laodicea, Christ promises that as we pray and knock, the Father will certainly open the door for us.

All three of these illustrations show us that the Father is eager to answer our prayers. If we will ask, we will receive. If we seek, we will find. If we knock, the door will be opened. Philippians 4:6 says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” In this verse, we see that we are free to pray to the Father about everything that happens in our lives. The Father wants us to come to Him in prayer with our requests. He also tells us that we are to make our requests to Him with thanksgiving. This is a step of faith because we thank God in advance that He is going to

answer according to His will. Such an attitude brings great joy to the Father.

Jesus went on to illustrate how human fathers usually respond when their children come to them with their requests. Jesus said that an earthly father will not give his son a stone when the child is hungry and asks for bread. If the child asks for a piece of fish to eat, a father will not give his son a poisonous snake that will hurt or kill the child. Jesus said even though people are sinful and evil, they will still feed their children when they have a need for food. Even a very evil and sinful father is still concerned about the physical needs of his children. Then, Jesus went on to explain that our heavenly Father will certainly give good things to His children when we ask Him. The Father enjoys our fellowship when we come to Him with requests regarding our needs.

Jesus went on to say, in Matthew 7:12, “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Here, we see that Jesus gave a summary of how to obey all of the commandments in the Old Testament. Jesus said that we are to treat other people the way we want to be treated. He said that if we will treat people the way we want to be treated, we will fulfill the commandments in the Old Testament. The Jewish rabbis had given a similar summary of the Old Testament, but they always made it a negative rule, instead of a positive action. One rabbi wrote, “What is hateful to yourself do not to someone else.” This says to avoid doing something hateful to others that you would not want to be done to you. In contrast, Jesus said it in a positive way, so that we would make it our goal to treat others the way we want to be treated. Jesus made it possible for us to do that by giving us the Holy Spirit so that He can give us the power to do what is right. Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Here, we see that true liberty gives us the freedom and power to follow the example of Christ and to serve one another in love.

Jesus then went on to point out to His disciples and to the others who were gathered there listening to Him that every person faces a very important choice in life. Matthew 7:13-14 says, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” Here, we see that Jesus said there are two gates. One leads to a wide way and the other gate leads to a narrow way. The choice that each person makes is very important because it will determine where each person spends eternity. Jesus then gave an invitation to all to enter the narrow way as He warned that many will choose the wide way.

Jesus explained why He encouraged each one to enter the narrow gate. Jesus said that He knew that most people would choose to enter the wide gate that had a wide road. The wide gate is a very easy choice because people go through the wide gate by depending on their own works to get them to heaven. These two ways were first illustrated in Genesis 4:3-5 where we read, “And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.” Cain chose to bring a sacrifice to God based on his own works. As a result, he brought a sacrifice of fruit from his garden. He had the attitude that God would be pleased with his works.

In contrast, Abel brought the firstborn of his flock as a blood sacrifice as a covering for his sin. Abel realized that his own efforts could never pay for his sin. Instead, he needed to offer a blood sacrifice so that the blood would cover his sin. God had shown that need for a blood sacrifice as a covering for sin when he killed animals to provide coverings for Adam and Eve. Genesis 3:21 says, “Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.” Even that sacrifice was not enough to take away sin, because Hebrews 10:4

says, “For *it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.” However, that sacrifice did show faith and covered sin until the time that Christ came to take away sin. Hebrews 9:11-12 tells us that Christ paid the full penalty for sin by presenting His own blood to the Father as the payment for sin. That verse says, “But Christ came *as* High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.”

Most of the Jews in the time of Jesus were like Cain and thought that their own works would be good enough to get them to heaven. That is why Jesus warned that the wide gate and the broad way actually lead to destruction. The word translated “destruction” means *complete ruin or the destruction which consists of the eternal misery of the lake of fire*. Revelation 20:15 says, “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” Jesus also warned that many were making the choice to enter that wide gate. People still think their own works are good enough to get them to heaven.

In contrast, Jesus said that the narrow gate is a difficult way but it is the way that leads to eternal life. The word translated “narrow” means *a way with suffering and tribulation*. Jesus later said in John 14:6, “...I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” The way is narrow because Jesus had to experience suffering and death for us in order to make the narrow way possible. In addition, in 1 Thessalonians 3:4, Paul wrote, “For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.” In this verse, the word is translated “suffer tribulation”. As we follow Jesus, we can also expect suffering because the world does not want to come to God through Christ. People want to come to God by their own works. We want to prepare our physical and spiritual children for suffering because Jesus said that all who follow Him will suffer persecution, but they will also receive eternal life. May the Lord richly bless you as you prepare your children to be ready to suffer persecution for Christ.