

2009-07-11

Matthew 7:13, 14 *Two Gates*

Jerry Arnold

“Father in Heaven, bless us now as we open Your word. We pray that You will speak to us that You will teach us. You will move our hearts, and give us an experience today, maybe one we didn’t anticipate. But we pray that we will leave with You in our heart. And we pray that You will bless us to that end, in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

I was studying at the library yesterday and for my break I kind of drifted over to periodical section. That’s where all the magazines are. Oh, they are so many neat magazines with colorful covers. And when you want to take a break in the library, it’s a great place to go. You just kind of peruse through articles and stuff. Well one of my favorite magazines is “Saturday Evening Post” started by Benjamin Franklin. And my favorite section is to go through it, and I might note a few articles and, oh that may be interesting, but I am looking for a page or two where they have funny stories. I like funny stories. I just like to laugh. And I read one yesterday, I’ll share with you.

There was a farmer standing along side the road, and a gentleman pulled up in his vehicle and stopped. And he said, “Is this your farm?” He said, “Yeah, it’s my farm.” And the guy said, “Well, I am the state farm inspector, and I am going to inspect the farm.” And the farmer said, “Well, okay.” And the inspector said, “I’m just going to go in this gate.” And the farmer said, “I wouldn’t go in that gate if I where you.” And it kind of irked the inspector, and he said, “Look! I am the state farm inspector, I have authority. I can go anywhere I want on this property.” And then, he took out his billfold and he held up a card that said, “State Farm Inspector.” He started for the gate, and the farmer said, “I wouldn’t go in that gate.” And it just annoyed that inspector; he went in that gate, walked a ways, went down, was out of site.

Didn’t take too long and he was inside again running for his life with a big bull right behind him. And the farmer kept hollering, “Show him your card; show him your card.” I like that story. And the reason I like it for this morning, is that it’s about a gate because that’s what we are going to be studying today. Two gates in fact; we find them in Matthew 7 verses 13 and 14. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount has ended. He is done preaching. He is now wrapping it up. He is calling people to a decision. In this story He talks about two gates. The next thing He will say, He will talk about false prophets and “You can know them by their fruit.” And there are two trees, a bad tree and a good tree.

And then He talks about not everyone being able to go into heaven just because they think that they have done service to God. And then the last thing He will talk about is two builders; one that builds on the sand and one that builds on the rock. So Jesus is done preaching. He is wrapping it up and He is calling us to a decision. Let’s read verses 13 and 14: “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.” Now this verse is pretty straight forward. It doesn’t seem to have a lot of secret things to it. It has two ways; one is narrow, one is wide. Two groups of people; one group is few, one group is many. Two

experiences; one is difficult, one is easy. Two destinations, one is life and one is destruction. So there you have it.

Most people, when they read this, they think in the context of their own experience. Christians generally consider themselves as being on the narrow road and all non-Christians as being on the wide path to destruction. And then, if you look at the individual denominations with their particular beliefs and practices, they stand and they say, well we are on the narrow road and all other Christians are on the wide road. And then even within denominations you have groups of people that think they are right and other people are wrong and so it ends up that they are on the narrow road, and everybody else, even within their own denomination, is on the wide road.

And in principle, there is a lot of application to that, but what did Jesus mean? What did it mean in His day? Our purpose, when we study the scriptures, is to seek and understand what did it mean to the people who heard it when Jesus told it. Then we can make an application to our lives. So we will seek to answer a couple of questions today, simple ones. What is the wide gate? And, what is the narrow gate?

Well let's look at this sermon in its context. And if you go to Mathew 5, verse 20, Jesus says something fairly early in this Sermon on the Mount. He says in verse 20: "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." The purpose of the Sermon on the Mount according to Jesus is to help people get through or get passed the deceptive teachings and practices of the Pharisees so they can go into the kingdom of heaven. It's about the kingdom of heaven.

Now, the Pharisees had a righteousness. Jesus acknowledged they had a righteousness. Maybe He is saying they think they have a righteousness. But whatever they have, Jesus says you can't go to heaven with that. You need something else. So, what do the Pharisees believe? What do they practice? Well let's go to Mathew 23 and you will see a tie-in here by the nature of what Jesus says. In Mathew 23 Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees and He throws in the scribes along with them. In 23, verse 23 Jesus says this: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone."

Well one of the problems that the Pharisees had was that in their law keeping they had neglected the weightier matters of the law, which was justice and mercy and faith. Now, Jesus actually is quoting from the Old Testament prophet Micah. If you will hold your hand here and turn to the left until you slide into the Old Testament, slide past Malachi and Zechariah and Haggai and Zephaniah, Habakkuk, are you with me? Nahum, you come to Micah. Seven hundred years before Jesus, Micah wrote this. Micah 6, verse 8: "He has shown you, o man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

Now when we come back to the New Testament, Jesus talks about faith. “You have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith.” In reality He is talking about walking humbly with God. You see faith is trusting God. Faith is, believing in God. And any person who has faith and is walking with the Lord will by the very nature of that experience become humble. And they will walk humbly with God because God is God and we are His creation. And God is so much greater than we will ever be. And God is so much grander than we can even begin to imagine.

So walking with God, the very nature of walking with God brings humility to the human heart. So what we discover about the Pharisees is that in their neglect of justice, mercy and faith, they were not walking humbly with God. In fact, they were walking proudly without God. You see that? Now, what else can we learn about this? The scribes and Pharisees were very religious, but according to Jesus, they were not serving God. So they are religious, but they are not serving God. Let’s go to another thing Jesus says, back in Matthew 23. Matthew 23, verse 24, Jesus said: “Blind guides, you strain out a net and swallow a camel.” They have a distorted concept of what is important. We would say in today’s language, they major in minors. What is not as important, they make to be really important.

In fact, Jesus has some unkind things to say about them. Look at verse 4, same chapter. Jesus says regarding these Pharisees and scribes and hypocrites, verse 4: “They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear and lay them on men’s shoulders. But they themselves would not move them with one of their fingers.” This straining a net, swallowing a camel, this imbalance in thinking, this majoring in minors is demonstrated by an attitude where they give people a heavy burden. “You have to do this, you have to believe this, you have to practice this, you have to do it this way.” And then they do nothing to help them to do it. Now what happens with that attitude is ultimately, a judgmental spirit is created in the heart. Because you are looking at other people to see if they are doing your list the way you think they should do.

So we see that the Pharisees had two problems. One, they didn’t have faith in God. They weren’t humble before the Lord. And if you are not humble before the Lord, you are proud. So they have an issue with pride. Number two, they majored in minors, and it created a judgmental spirit. So they are judging. They’ve got pride going on, and they’ve got judging going on. Well there is another thing that they had going on, in verses 27 and 28, same chapter Jesus says: “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are like white washed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

There is nothing that has changed on the inside. Everything is exterior. They are void of God’s presence in their heart or their inner soul. God is not in their life. Another way to put it would be: they walk in the flesh, not in the spirit. So we see three things that Jesus identifies with the Pharisees. Their pride, judgmental spirit, and they walk in the flesh. Now you may be wondering, well what does this have to do with a wide gate and a narrow gate? Well stay with me, we may learn something together today. Remember the

context. Jesus is preaching to the Jews. He is preaching to a people whose lives are governed by religion. The temple is the center of their country. The priests are the political leaders and they are the medical doctors. The scribes are the lawyers. Their calendar is structured around religious gatherings. The land is filled with history of eighteen hundred years from Abraham to their time of contact with God. And they actually were taught that they are going to heaven because they are Jewish.

They are very religious. And this whole discussion that Jesus is having with them about the Sermon on the Mount is a religious discourse. The context is this: the wide gate that Jesus is talking about in Matthew 7 is the religion of the Pharisees. It is the flesh, it is self-righteousness, it is serving self instead of God. Now I know, immediately you are thinking, "Now wait the minute. Only religious people are on that wide road?" Well let's be practical and let's be wise. Certainly we would agree that a secular humanist that's in rebellion to God and doesn't want to serve God no matter what evidence comes his way would be on that wide road. That road would accommodate them because of a single common factor. And that is this: they are serving themselves instead of God.

So the wide road is peopled by folks who are serving themselves instead of God. There is room for the zealous religionists and there is room for the Godless humanists. They are all welcomed on that road. They are serving themselves. But what about the narrow gate? What is the narrow gate? Let's go back to Matthew 7, 13 and 14. Jesus says, and we'll repeat it again: "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." Jesus says that that narrow gate, and that narrow way leads to life. He is talking about eternal life. He is talking about salvation.

Well that gives some clues. And what is fascinating is when you read the Bible, and you use several different translations, it flavors your understanding. If you go to John chapter 10, verse 1, we'll find very familiar words. In John 10 verse 1 Jesus talks about a door to a sheepfold. Now in the New King James Version which I am reading, the word "door" is used. In the NIV, (The New International Version) the word "gate" is used. Now that gets our attention because we are talking about gates. So when I come to the word "door" as I read today, instead of saying door, I will say gate, and this will help give us an understanding.

John 10 verse 1: "Most assuredly I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." Go to verses 7-9. Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly I say to you, I am the gate of the sheep. All whoever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the gate. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture." Perhaps we should change our question from "What is the gate?" to "Who is the gate?" It becomes even clearer if you go to John 14 verse 6, again another familiar verse to us. But hopefully in this sermon it will make more sense. John 14 verse 6, Jesus says this: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

Jesus is saying life comes through Him. You can't go to heaven except through Jesus. He is the way, He is the truth, He is the life, and nobody gets to heaven except through Him. Jesus, my friends, is the gate. Jesus is the only way to heaven. Now, here is what happens. When Christ enters the heart of an individual, faith in God begins to grow. And when faith in God begins to grow, humility is developed in the heart of the believer. When Jesus comes into the heart, the Holy Spirit comes with Him. An understanding about life comes in it, and balanced positions, majoring in minors happens less, and a judgmental spirit towards other people begins to leave. In fact, we begin to love other people. When Christ comes into the heart, God's presence is in the life. And rather than living a life in the flesh, we begin to live a life in the Spirit.

So Jesus, being the narrow gate, is in opposition to the wide gate of the religion of the Pharisees. Their gate was pride, His is humility. Their gate is judging, His is, loving. Their gate is the flesh, His is the Spirit. Now, some of you are thinking right now, "I don't get this. I don't understand it," because there is one thing I haven't addressed. Let's address it. I am anticipating your question. Go to Matthew 7 verses 13 and 14. "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." Verse 14, "...because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it!" Now we've just read that the Pharisees heap burdens upon people. And we have read other times in the Scriptures that Jesus' yoke is light. His burden is easy.

So how can Jesus be saying the narrow way is the difficult one, and the wide road is the hard one? When the wide road is the one in the religious realm, is heaped with all kinds of things that you cannot do, and all kinds of things which you are supposed to do; yet, that is called easy. Well the word, in the New King James Version that they translated "difficult" is translated "narrow" in the New International Version. And when you go to the Greek, the word actually means "to be confined, to be pressed down." And it is the word that they used for persecution. Jesus is saying the difficulty of being on the narrow road, of going the narrow way is, "You will suffer persecution." Now let's look at that in the scriptures. Look at Matthew 10 verse 22.

Jesus is sending out His twelve apostles, and He says, "I'm sending you out among wolves. You are like sheep and I'm sending you out among wolves." Well, who were the wolves? The nation of Israel and their religious teachers, and they were seeking to devour the followers of Christ. He says in verse 22, "And you will be hated by all for My name sake. But he, who endures to the end, will be saved." "Hated by all!" Now, let's put our categories together. Let's say over on this side you have the secular people who don't want to serve God, don't want to believe in God, the science is their religion, whoever, whatever? There they are. Then you have religious people. They are right here. These Godless people will always harass, ridicule, mock, and if they can, persecute people that are religious. It's just natural, all right?

So, a person can be a Pharisee, can have the wrong understanding of God, be filled with self, and actually be serving self, but be very religious and they will be mocked by the

person who does not seek to serve God. And many times that makes this person think that they must be right because Jesus told us in His word through the Apostle Paul that all who live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But there is another category. The other category is people who are following Jesus. They are in the way. Jesus said, "All will hate you." Obviously the secular person will have the same disgust for that individual as they do for the religionist, and the religious person will have an attitude against the person who is trying to serve God by grace.

Grace is attacked by people who are religious. And grace is attacked by people who don't understand God, religion, any of it. Hated by all! That's the difficulty. Jesus says, "When you get it right, when you have Me as your Savior, and you are walking with Me, you will suffer." Suffer from whom? From the religious community and from the non-religious community! The religious community because theirs is a religion of self; it is a religion of doubting, and it is a religion that fights against grace. This is an incredible picture in the Word of God. Look at John chapter 16, it is even clearer. In John chapter 16 at the Last Supper, Jesus said this: "They will put you out of the synagogues. Yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service."

"People in the synagogue," that means religious people who are persecuting and harassing the servants of Jesus Christ. And they've reached a point where they think that by killing them they are serving God. They are doing what God wants. And so can you see how difficult it would be following Jesus Christ in a religious context where people would rather be Pharisaical than to be converted? And what we have is a picture of the flesh fighting against the spirit.

Now I want to say something here, and I hope that this will put a comment to rest. And that is this. You know, we are saved by grace, and what does that mean? That means it's a gift from God. There is nothing we can do. In fact, the claims of God upon us, as Jesus taught in His Sermon on the Mount, are so extreme, none of us can attain it. None of us can get there. We need a Savior. That's it! We need a Savior! God provided a Savior in Jesus, that's grace. Well, people say, "Yeah, but if grace is preached and it's preached, and it's preached, then people will get the impression that well, you can do anything you want it's okay because we are under grace."

Let's think about that for a moment. If you enter through the narrow gate, and who does that narrow gate represent? Jesus! And you are walking on the narrow way, whose path are you on? You are on God's path, walking with Jesus. Well, I'll tell you right now, I've been married thirty one years; thirty one and a half years to Karen. And in many ways, she is like a conscience to me. Here is how I've learned. When I get around the guys, I might relax a little more and say some things a boy would. But when Karen is there, I just won't even go there. Not saying that with her around, because I'll hear about it.

When you are walking with Jesus, you are not going to be seeking ways to sin. You are with God. You don't say, "Well, I can do anything I want." No, you say, "I will do what He wants me to do." That's what grace does for us. Grace doesn't – you know, you preach grace and people think, "Oh, no they are going to run out and do this, run out and

do that.” Folks, if they do that they are not walking with Jesus. Because when you have Christ in your heart, and you are walking with Him; He is holy. He doesn’t like to do things that are unholy, and you won’t want to either.

So let’s just put that silly argument away. And let’s insert a real argument and that is this. Without grace you are lost. So what do you need? You need grace. You need a gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ. We must have it or we are lost. We cannot arrive at a righteous position. We can’t get there. He is already there and He gives it to us in Himself. But people who don’t understand grace, and they are imbalanced, you know, they are straining nets, swallowing camels. It’s got to be painful! They are judgmental. They aren’t serving Christ out of self, I mean out of love for Him but out of self. There is a lake of fire to avoid. Who wants to go to hell? I don’t! (A child yells “I don’t!”) Thank you, I don’t either. That was good, that was really good. It reminds me of a story, but I can’t share that.

And, I completely forgot the point I was making. Let me share a story from the Scriptures with you. If I remember the other one, I’ll come back to it. You know, there is nothing like a *Senior Moment* in front of all your friends. Paul is talking about the struggle between the flesh and the spirit. And he tells the story, it’s an allegory. It’s a true story of what happened but he uses it as an allegory about salvation. He said Abraham was promised by God that he would have a son. And through that son he would have lots of descendants, more than he could count. “Go outside, look at the stars. You’ll have more descendants than the stars.” Well, time went on, time went on, time went on, and Sarah, his wife, said: “Abraham, look, why don’t you take Hagar, my handmade, we’ll have a son with her. And he’ll be your son, and we’ll just get on with life.”

“Okay!” So he does that and they have Ishmael. Now, that was an activity that was out of the realm of God’s will. It was an activity of the flesh; it wasn’t an activity of the spirit. And it caused problems. Later, Ishmael was about fourteen years old, they estimate, when Isaac was born. Isaac is a miracle. Sarah is dead in the womb. She can’t have children but she does. It’s a miracle. He is a child of faith. He is a child of the supernatural. Ishmael is a child of the natural. So Paul calls him the child of the flesh; Isaac, a child of the spirit. You see that? Now, when Isaac was three years old, he was being weaned. I don’t know what all that involves, but they had a party to celebrate. I imagine the mothers did that. “Yahoo,” you know, “this is over!”

And so they have that party. And at the party Sarah notices that Ishmael is giving real dirty looks towards Isaac. Now Ishmael is seventeen. Isaac is just three. And she can sense, “This is dangerous. That older boy could take out this little baby. He could take him right out.” So she says to Abraham, “You’ve got to send that kid and his mother out of here.” Abraham didn’t want to do that. This is his firstborn son. He loves him, Ishmael. But God sided with Sarah. Told Abraham, “Yep, they have to go.” And Paul picks up on that allegory. Look at Galatians chapter 4. And this is how Paul sums up the whole thing. In verse 29 he says this: “But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the spirit, even so, it is now.”

Folks, Jesus greatest struggles on earth were against the religious people in His day. They were of the flesh. He was of the spirit. Paul's greatest struggles and persecutions came from the Jews in the cities that he visited and tried to plant churches. They were of the flesh, he was of the spirit. It was a conflict within a context of religion. The Sermon on the Mount was to a religious people and its context is religious. The wide road was people who were serving themselves in religion instead of serving God. The net result was a righteousness that could not go to heaven.

Now you may be wondering what road you are on, and how can you tell? Well there is a way to tell. And that is this. Now listen to me carefully. There is nothing that our denomination teaches or encourages you to practice; there is none of it that you need the Holy Spirit to accept or to do, none of it. You don't have to be converted to believe that Christ died for you. You don't have to be converted to believe in the Trinity or to keep the Sabbath, or to be a vegan. You don't have to be, not that we teach you have to be, you understand what I'm saying. You have to cover every base these days. Many people are disciplined to do these things and they are not converted. They believe them.

There is only one thing; one thing you have to be converted for. And that is to love. You can't love in your own heart. You have to have a supernatural conversion; then you can love. In fact Jesus says in the Book of Matthew when we are studying The Sermon on the Mount, He said, "In fact, you will love your enemies." Now on my own, there is no way. In fact, even with a super saturation of the Holy Spirit upon me, when that does happen; it's still hard to love your enemies. That's the bottom line. We cannot love without the Holy Spirit. That is walking in the spirit.

Now, so, let's make it very practical. What does this mean? How do I know if I am walking in the spirit? How do I know if I love my enemies? Do I just ignore them; do I stay away from them? Do I have to like them? I am not going to seek to answer all of those questions. But I am going to ask you to ask this question of yourself. How do you treat people whom you disagree with? How do you treat people whom you disagree with? That my friends will determine what road you are on! You see, the Bible is written in such a way, I believe on purpose, by God, that it's impossible for all of us to just come to the same conclusion.

You take twelve honest people who read the text; you are going to have twelve honest variations of that. You take two people happily married, comfortable in their marriage together. They love each other; they are committed to each other. There is not a couple on earth that the husband and wife completely agree with how you are supposed to keep the Sabbath. They'll have different opinions, or that this is the right music. You can only go this far. The Bible is written in such a way that there is a flex there. There are extremes obviously, but there is a huge area of acceptability apparently in the realm of God.

In Romans 14 when one takes one day, one takes another day; one has one diet, another has another diet. In that whole thing Paul never says, "Hey folks, come on, can't we get together on this? Let's pick a day, let's pick a diet, let's all be together on it." No, in fact he says, "Let's learn to love each other in our varying opinions." How do you treat people



whom you disagree with? If you seek to destroy them, you have the spirit of the wide road which hates those who are walking in the spirit. If you seek to undermine them and put everything they do in the most critical light possible, that is not the spirit of God. How do you treat people who disagree with you?

Now I've said this before and I believe it. Right now, where I am at spiritually, I believe it with whole of my heart, when we get to heaven we are going to be straightened out on a lot of things that we thought were just crystal clear. Stuff we fought over; stuff that we took other people on saying, "No, my Bible says this." The issue, every time I read the Scriptures, just keeps bubbling up. The issue is not that we have every doctrine right, but that we treat people right when we don't agree.

Jesus is bringing us to a decision today. It's a simple decision, and that is, wide gate – wide way; narrow gate – narrow way. It's Jesus and His way or it's religion and your way. What will it be? What will it be today? He's just finished the sermon. All these things you can't even think, impurities in your heart, without committing adultery. You can't even be angry with your brother, without murdering him. You are supposed to be merciful. You are supposed to be pure in heart. You are supposed to be perfect in your love like God is perfect in His love. We are to love our enemies. We are to be peace makers. You read that list and it surely comes upon you as it should, "I cannot do it God! I can't do it!"

Praise God if you are there because Jesus could and that's what He offers you today. His victories! He did it! It's yours in Christ! He is the narrow gate. He is the narrow way. And in Him, we have victory. We have perfection already in God's eyes. Can't get any better in His eyes. You are one who has never sinned when you accept Christ. And as we walk with Jesus, nobody, nobody could look in His face and say, "Man, this is cheap grace." And everybody who is walking with Jesus would have basically one question on their heart: "Lord, what do You want me to do? Where are we going today? How are we going to live our life today? Because I am with You! Nothing else matters."

I offer you that today or I offer you religion with the list. And work hard at it folks. Strive with all your might; strive with all your energy, and when it's all over, you'll be lost! You'll be lost. What we need is a hiding place. We need Jesus Christ! What's your decision? What will it be; grace or the flesh? Will it be the spirit, or will it be, "I'm just going to keep working hard?" It's your decision. I want to know if there is anyone here who would like to say to God today, "Lord, I want Jesus Christ, I am going in that narrow gate and I want to walk with Jesus. I want to be on that narrow way." If you want to tell that to God, please stand.

"Father in Heaven, we come to You. We thank you that You are a refuge for us. You are our salvation; You are our eternal life. We hide in You today. We thank you in Jesus Name, Amen."