

Only a Few

July 12, 2020

Matthew 7:12-14

12 "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. 13 "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. 14 For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it (NRSV).

The Scripture starts off with the Golden Rule. I mentioned last week that Jesus' sermon was well thought out and organized and built up to the Golden Rule. In the Sermon on Mount Jesus is teaching some hard lessons that contrast what was being taught by the religious leaders. The lessons that Jesus teach are tough to follow because they go against human will. The focus of Jesus' teaching is God, the Kingdom of God, and the will of God, above all else. The key is to surrender human will to the will of God.

This is not new for the religious community. These lessons parallel with the law that is taught in the Bible. The religious establishment had access to the Old Testament scriptures. They knew the law; they knew what God requires. The problem of society and the problem that Jesus faced was that the religious leaders and the people did not follow the scriptures. The law in Leviticus applies to the whole congregation. The worship of God was mandatory, expected of everyone, and was a joyous occasion of appreciation. The Lord spoke to Moses saying speak to all the congregation and tell them "You shall be holy" (Lev 11:45). From the very beginning as a nation all the people are to be holy. The whole nation is to be holy. They are not to pick and choose which Scripture to obey and follow. The whole congregation is to be holy.

The problem is not that they did not have the law. The problem is that they did not follow the law. If they did not have the law then the solution would be simple, just give them the law. But the law has already been given to the people from God through Moses. The audience that Jesus is talking to should already know this because they already have the law: gleaning, justice, honesty, care for the alien, love your neighbor, etc. This is the problem that Jesus is up against. The people of God have turned away from the word of God because the religious leaders were leading them further away from God instead of leading them closer to the word of God. Jesus brings the law back them. The problem continues and repeats throughout history into society today because of human nature. Society was focused on self gratification. The religious establishment was focused on institutionalism and controlling the people when they should have been focused on God, the will of God, and the kingdom of God.

There are two aspects of the law. These are well developed throughout the Old Testament. It is easy to see these two aspects in the ten commandments (Ex. 20, Dt. 5). The first aspect of the law deals with our relationship with God - be holy, honor the Sabbath, sanctuary reverence, no idols, offering your very best. The second aspect of the law deals with human relationships - gleaning, honesty, justice, treatment of the alien, love and care for your neighbor.

This brings us to today's Scripture. It is one that we are all familiar with. It is so well know it has its own title "The Golden Rule." Do to others as you would have them do to you. This is easier said than done. It is easy to understand but hard to follow. It is easy to teach but hard to live by. I invite you to stop and think how hard it is to live by. Every conflict whether is political, social, in church, at work, or within your family, is because someone is not living by this Scripture lesson from Jesus. The Scripture is one of the toughest commandments ever to follow. I repeat something that I have said before; if we all followed the teachings of Jesus there would be no crimes against humanity regardless of race, gender, social status, and sexual

orientation. There would be no war, no crimes, no homeless, no hunger, and no jails. Notice how tough and demanding the Scripture actually is. Jesus says "in everything" that means always 100% all of the time. It may be a good idea to print this in big bold letters, post it on your mirror, make a poster out of these words and frame it. Always treat others as you want to be treated yourself, this means no matter how bad, mean, or antagonistic the other person may be. In everything, in every aspect of human relations, all the time, always, with everyone, you are to treat them as you want to be treated. It is not about how the other person has treated you. It is never about the other person. It is about how you treat others. This is a hard commandment to follow especially when you are in a society where very few follow it, but it covers all of the law that deals with humanity. The Bible is full of stories where people get it wrong because they do not follow this founding principle.

Then Jesus teaches a very tough lesson. The gate is narrow. We all want to get through the gate and we prefer to think that we are getting through the gate. Notice the contrast between the gates. One leads to life and one leads to destruction. The gate for the kingdom of heaven is narrow and the gate that leads to destruction is wide. Not only is it wide but it is also an easy road that many people will travel. Jesus is talking about the kingdom of heaven, God's way, God's will, and righteousness. Notice Jesus said that there are few who find it. We prefer to think that it is easy, all you need for salvation is belief - I believe, I'm in, I win, hallelujah, praise the Lord. However, Jesus calls for discerning wisdom, to have enough sense to know that there is a lot more to it than that. We know from Bible study, that there are several scriptural lessons that call for devotion, holiness, reverence, dedication, commitment, righteous action, conforming to the will of God, and seeking God first.

Jesus finishes his sermon with a warning that will be covered next week. It is not a matter of whether or not you do, or do not do, one or two things. It is not a matter of ... oh no, I did this one sin and I need to repent, oh boy, I'm glad I repented, now I'm back in God's good graces, hallelujah, praise the Lord. It is a matter of orienting your whole life to God, the will of God, and the kingdom of God. It is not me that tells you that the gate is narrow and the road is hard and only a few find it; it is Jesus.