

Enter by the Narrow Gate

Introduction

The Book of Deuteronomy is the final words of Moses to the children of Israel before they are to enter the Promised Land.

In Deuteronomy, Moses represents the Law of God to the second generation of God's people who were saved from Egypt

And near the end in [Deuteronomy 30](#), Moses states the following,

Deuteronomy 30:15–18 *ESV*

¹⁵ "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶ If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess.

Moses tells God's people that two ways have been set before them:

1. One way is the way of life and the good.
2. The other way is the way of death and evil.

We see similar themes at the beginning of the Psalms.

Among other things, the Psalms are a meditation upon God's Law and [Psalm 1](#) speaks of the blessed and righteous man and the ungodly man:

Psalm 1:1–2 *NKJV*

¹ Blessed *is* the man

Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,

Nor stands in the path of sinners,

Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;

² But his delight *is* in the law of the Lord,

And in His law he meditates day and night.

The blessed man delights and meditates on God's law.

But the ungodly does not.

This theme continues in [Proverbs 9](#):

Both Lady Wisdom and Woman Folly sit and call to the young men of the city to come to them and follow their ways.

Those who follow Lady Wisdom will enjoy long life and will learn to built a house like hers; established by seven pillars and filled with the choicest of meats and mixed wine.

But those who follow Woman Folly, follow her down to the depths of Sheol to join the guests of her house.

Throughout the Bible, there is a regularly theme of two paths being presented to God's people.

So it shouldn't surprise us that Jesus presents two ways before his disciples at the end of his Sermon on the Mount.

In this morning's passage, Jesus presents four vivid images that set the way of destruction alongside the way of life.

1. Two Gates (v. 13-14)
2. Two Trees (v. 15-20)
3. Two Claims (v. 21-23)
4. Two Foundations (v. 24-27)

I will use these four images to structure this morning's sermon:

The Two Gates (vv. 13-14)

Jesus begins by setting before his disciples two gates and two ways:

[Matthew 7:13-14](#) ***"The gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. But the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."***

The Wide Gate

Particular to His Audience

This statement of Jesus is often used by a certain strain of Christian teachers to argue that the number of true disciples of Jesus will be small.

But with this statement, Jesus is likely speaking particularly to his audience of first century Jews.

As God's covenant people, Israel had a vocation in the world.

They were to shine the light of God's truth to the surrounding nations and, in so doing, become a conduit of God's blessings to the nations.

However, a part of the tragedy of the biblical history is the fact that Israel failed at this vocation on countless times.

Rather than becoming a blessing to the nations, Israel themselves became accursed of God in their disobedience.

Whether it was in their:

- i. Rebellions in the wilderness,

- ii. Their failure to conquer the Land in the book of judges,
- iii. Or their descent into idolatry in the times of kings...

Israel failed in their vocation to be a blessing to the nations.

But now Jesus comes to Israel as the final prophet, inviting Israel to fulfill their national calling *in him*.

He is the offspring of Abraham and through him the nations will be blessed.

They can be a part of that blessing only as they follow Jesus *who is the way, the truth, and the life* ([John 14:6](#)).

So, when Jesus says that “***the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many***”, he is speaking to the Israel of his day.

Throughout Israel’s history, the nation had failed to follow God’s path and had instead chosen the wide gate.

And, in Jesus’ day, many in Israel will again fail to follow God’s path.

As [John 1](#) states, “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.”

The Narrow Gate

So Jesus’ words here are not a council of despair!

Many have turned to Christ and many will continue to do so.

The narrow gate is not narrow because God is stingy with his grace.

No, the gate is narrow because the old creation cannot fit through it.

The narrow gate that opens into the life of the kingdom is the gate that leads through the Cross and the Tomb.

The narrow gate is a gate that leads to death.

But it is the death of the old man so that the new man of Christ can be formed in you.

It is as Paul wrote to the Galatians:

Galatians 2:20 ESV

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

In his day, Jesus called many to follow him on the road to calvary and the tomb.

Some did so and were willing to be despised for the association with Christ.

But others found such a path too narrow.

The treasures of the Rich Young Ruler couldn’t fit through the gate.

But, the narrow gate becomes wide as you take up your cross.

Two Gates: Summary

In summary, the disciples of Christ must know that following Christ does involve sacrifice and renunciation.

But, it is a sacrifice of all that is passing away in order to receive the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven.

Two Trees (vv. 15-20)

In verses 15-20 Jesus turns from gates to guides; from the path itself to those who would lead you along one path or the other.

You will be lead by one of two kinds of prophets:

- a. False prophets who bear bad fruit.
- b. True prophets who bear good fruit.

The Bad Tree: False Prophets

One of the chief problems in Jesus' own day was that the leaders of Israel were leading the people astray.

Jesus did not advocate rebellion against the lawful authorities, but notice his teaching.

Jesus tells his disciples to consider the fruit and outcome of the lives of those who are providing spiritual leadership.

Jesus tells them to look at the fruit.

False prophets bear bad fruit in their doctrine and their life.

Their Doctrine

In their doctrine they teach what is contrary to the Gospel.

The gospel is the message of Christ's death, resurrection, and future return.

It is an announcement of the forgiveness of sins in Christ and of the call to follow Christ in newness of life in love toward God and one's fellow man.

False doctrine will most often err in these areas.

False doctrine will deny who Christ is and what he has done.

False doctrine will deny the free forgiveness of sins on the basis of Christ.

False doctrine will deny the call to follow Christ in obedience to God's Word.

Or, false doctrine will soften the demands to love one's fellow brethren in the church or the unbelievers outside the church.

Their Life

But it isn't just their doctrine, it is also the outcome and fruit of their lives.

False prophets and leaders bear bad fruit.

Their lives do not match their platform and most of the time this bears itself out relationally.

There is a reason why Paul tells Timothy and Titus to consider a man's family life when considering men for leadership in the church.

The fruit of a false prophet's life testifies to their teaching and leadership.

A Pressing Warning

I believe this is a particularly pressing for you in our day in age.

Teachers abound in our day in age.

Pretty much anyone can gather a following.

This means that false teachers also abound:

But the Bible is clear, you must beware of false teachers, especially those who as Paul says in [1 Tim 6](#) are:

“puffed with conceit and understand nothing. Who have an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions.”

The Good Tree: True Prophets

But if a bad tree bears bad fruit, a good tree bears good fruit.

Leaders who will lead you down the path of life are those men whose lives meet a standard in both doctrine and living.

Their teaching accords with the doctrine of Christ, and their lives bear the marks of faithfulness, especially in their relationships and their homes.

Here Jesus calls his disciples to discernment by giving an objective standard:

“Look to the fruit”

A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.

As [Hebrews 13:7](#) states, “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.”

Two Claims (vv. 21-23)

In verses 21-23 Jesus turns from the external to the internal by addressing issue of the heart.

Workers of Lawlessness

In these verses Jesus describes a scenario where those who have prophesied in his name and cast out demons in his name and done many mighty works in his name will be told by him, “***I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.***”

Jesus is describing here the simple truth that there can be people in the church who do not truly know Christ.

They live as followers of Christ.

They may even do many things in the name of Christ.

But, at the end of the day, they are workers of lawlessness because they never knew Christ.

As [Hebrews 11:6](#) states, “without faith it is impossible to please God.”

You can claim to act in Christ’s name, but if you don’t know him, then you will prove to be workers of lawlessness in the end.

Those Who Do the Father’s Will

But verse 21 presents the contrast, “***Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.***”

The contrast to the worker of lawlessness is not the one who works greater miracles, but the one who does the will of the Father.

It is not the person who performs great works, but the person whose life is marked by genuine obedience and faith.

It is the person who knows Christ and is known by Christ.

This is what the Apostle John teaches in [1 John 2](#),

1 John 2:3–6 ESV

³ And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. ⁴ Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, ⁵ but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: ⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

Two Foundations (v. 24-27)

Our passage concludes with Jesus’ most vivid image: two builders, two houses, and a storm.

The House on the Sand

The person whose house is built on the sand does not survive the storm when it comes.

Sand cannot hold back the flood of the storm.

I mentioned in my homily at vespers on Wednesday that this image always reminds me of building sandcastles at the beach.

Children, have you ever tried to build a sandcastle near the waves at the beach?

What happens? » It doesn’t last.

The wide gate, the false prophet, the worker of lawless, and the house on the sand all share this in common:

They hear the word and do not act upon it.

The foolish builder isn't the one who hasn't heard Christ, he is the one who has ignored Christ.

As James writes in [James 1](#),

James 1:22–25 ESV

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

The House on the Rock

But the man who builds his house on the rock *is blessed*.

His house stands in the storm because it was established on the rock of Christ's word.

He has heard Christ and heeded Christ's words.

With all of these images, Jesus calls his followers toward that which is good and lasting.

The narrow gate is hard, but it leads to life.

The good tree bears lasting fruit.

The one who does the Father's will is known by Christ.

And the house built upon the rock stands.

The storms comes no matter what.

It's not whether things will be difficult, but whether you will be able to stand in the storm.

Those who establish their lives on Christ will never be moved!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!