

The Law and the Prophets Point to Jesus, the Narrow Gate

Rev. Samuel Gullixson Ser. #314-16

We pray: Merciful, righteous God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, open to us the Narrow Gate, Jesus, and to see His work alone for our redemption and salvation. Make us rightly to regard our good works as the fruit of this faith so that we are not inclined to seek glory for ourselves. And give us faithful preachers, true prophets who proclaim Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

As you listen to this rather short text read this morning, consider what the two main thoughts are and how they fit, both together, but also with this Sunday's theme of "Beware of False Prophets."

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We read as follows in Jesus' name.

[Jesus said,] "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."^(ESV) *So far the Words of our text.*

These are Your Words, heavenly Father.

Sanctify [us] in the Truth. Your Word is Truth. ^(John 17:17)

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In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit, Who always leads us to Life through Jesus.

The key to understanding how the "golden rule" and entering by the narrow gate to life fit together is recognizing the bigger context in which Jesus is preaching. Right after these 3 verses, Jesus starts in on today's Gospel, "Beware of False Prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves." But what has come before is two chapters worth of preaching the Sermon on the Mount that we shouldn't ignore.

In it He started by declaring blessedness to those who are meek, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who are merciful and peacemakers, among other things.

Then He went on to more fully explain the Law of God, hitting particularly on the way we treat our neighbors. He showed how God doesn't just look at our words or actions, but also at our thoughts and motivations; how unjust anger and hatred are just as damnable as murder; and lust as promiscuity; and coveting as robbery, and hypocrisy as rank unbelief.

What He said at that time to His audience is no less true today. In fact, as you hear and recall to mind what He said back then, He is speaking to you today. That blessedness is still available to the meek and merciful. But who of us can claim that blessedness on our own? It seems like a carrot dangling on the end of a stick. At times I am merciful or meek, or make peace, but other times I am vengeful, proud & contentious. And even when I am merciful or meek, or make peace, does God think I am as gracious as I do?

Instead, all too real and personal is the threat of condemnation for the evil thoughts and motivations I have even before I can inhibit or reject them: my quick temper, my wandering eye, my jealousy & pride. And how much more then is my guilt when I fail to stop them,

when I feed and let my anger, lust, jealousy and pride fester.

With fear & guilt driving us to avoid eternal suffering in hell, we seek a way out, a way to become blessed. And so, as you hear Jesus give you the "Golden Rule" you're inclined to think, "Hey, this is it! I can do this! This is the gate out of hell!" It seems that this "do what you wish to be done to you" rule is an easing up from God's more difficult commands for unconditional love and mercy. It seems like eternal life is attainable by obeying this command.

That thought is so basic to our human understanding that in theological studies, it has retained its Latin phrase: the *opinio legis*: our opinion (or better: "fantasy") of the law, that we can save ourselves by the law.

But if you remember the context of this text, this is exactly the thought that Jesus was preaching against in the Sermon on the Mount. As sinful humans are wont to do, the teachers in His day read the Law & Prophets (the OT), like a "How to..." manual, with stories of what happened when you did/didn't obey. And used the sacrificial code as a work they were performing in order to appease God.

This is the opinion of many, even those claiming to be Christian, especially as they read the Law and the Prophets (the OT), even the Sermon on the Mount... especially the "golden rule." It's not uncommon to hear people use the "golden rule" as if it were the "good news," the Gospel. "Yes, Do this and you will live."^(Luke 10:28)

Sadly, neither is it unusual to hear preachers preach such things. These preachers will preach little or nothing of Christ, as if they assume that you already know "all that stuff," but they'll preach and preach about what you need to do now as a Christian.

But what is just as sad, is those listeners who will say "amen," whether out loud or in their minds, and praise the preacher for his "relevant" sermon, when all he has done is reinforced that *opinio legis*, which, when one realizes that God's law is much bigger than just our actions and words, is terrifyingly impossible for us. And it becomes more impossible when it demands right thoughts and motivations in regards to loving the true God. These preachers are opening the gate that looks wide and easy, but leads to more guilt, condemnation, death, & destruction. They are false prophets, false preachers, false teachers. Though the word "grace" comes out their lips, and "Jesus" and "God" come off their tongues, they teach a different spirit than Jesus. And those who hear/follow them are not heeding/following Jesus when He seriously warns, "Beware of false prophets."

Yes, Jesus spoke the "golden rule" but not as the gate to life. The false preachers of Jesus' day and ours have failed to see God's sacrificial code for what it truly is: God's work to appease Himself, reminding Himself of and point His people to His solution: the Lamb of God. The sacrificial code was really both law and gospel: showing God's judgment and condemnation of their sin, but having a substitute in their place so they wouldn't bear it.

This Substitute, the One the sacrificial animals all pointed to,

would not only bear the burden of their sins in death,
but would also have to bear the burden of God's perfect law,
completing it fully and perfectly in life on their behalf.
And this too, Jesus preached about earlier in the Ser. on the Mt.
when He said, **"Do not think that I have come to abolish
the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them
but to fulfill them."**^(Mt.5:17)

And so as we hear Jesus open up the Law to us:
do not murder or hate, do not commit adultery or lust,
do not steal or covet, or be jealous, proud or hypocritical.
And while it stings and cuts you because of your guilt,
it also relieves and comforts you to know that God held Jesus
to this high and perfect standard... in your place.
He is the Peacemaker, making peace between you & the Father,
so you are blessed.
He is the Merciful, and gives you His righteousness to the full,
so you are blessed.

And when you hear Moses' sacrificial laws of the OT expounded
and see in your mind's eye the blood, and gore, and the death,
you also see Life and Light in Jesus hung on the cross for you.

Jesus is the Narrow Gate; the Gate He described as hard.
It is not hard because you must now follow more rules;
it is hard because you must disregard your *opinio legis*,
your natural inclination to fantasize you can save yourself
by obeying God's perfect Law.

Jesus is the Narrow Gate that few enter through,
not because He is stingy and miserly with His grace,
or hides Himself from their view,
but because many do not give up hope in their own works.

Sadly, many Christians also see the Sacraments as if they were
a continuation of what they think the OT sacrifices were:
a work of man to please God;
rather than what they really are:
a work of God to give man peace and blessedness,
leading them through, and uniting them with, Jesus.

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So now that we have the context for our text,
how should we regard the "golden rule"? Is it bad or good?
The "golden rule" is bad... if you're looking at it as a way
to earn eternal life.
But it is "golden," if knowing your sins are forgiven in Jesus,
you desire to curb our sinful inhibitions.

It's a good weather-vein for when you wonder how you might
treat your neighbor, to show him God's gracious love.
It's especially good for when you wonder how you might
treat your neighbor when he is your adversary,
and your sinful heart and initial motivation is not right.
You can still treat him as you wish to be treated,
with respect and charity, even love and compassion,
as a fellow redeemed sinner.

And who knows, perhaps that will open up doors for him
to a better relationship with you.
And... even better yet, it might open him up to seeing
the Narrow Gate, leading Him to His gracious, loving Father.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be forever more.
Soli Deo Gloria*