

A Command of Love

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I invite you to turn to the Gospel of Matthew 7 for our text this morning. Matthew 7. I would have you hear God's word today with a great sense of anticipation and expectation for the good of your soul. This is a most important text and matter which we are addressing here this morning. Matthew 7:13 and 14 which we will look at for two or three weeks. Jesus says,

13 "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it.
14 For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

This text is preeminently a command. Jesus says, "Enter," eiserchomai in the Greek text, a second person plural aorist active imperative and it comes to us as an imperative, as a command that Jesus intends for us to obey. "Enter," he says, and so we need to understand that we are coming under the authority of Christ as we listen to what this text means.

Now, there has been a lot of buildup to this particular command that Jesus has given just within the flow and the context of the Gospel of Matthew and in the Sermon on the Mount in particular. The Sermon on the Mount is the first extended message as Matthew presents the ministry of Jesus. There are multiple extended discourses in the Gospel of Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount is the first one that he gives. And he prefaced it by giving a summary statement and we'll do a little bit of review here. He prefaced the Sermon on the Mount with the statement found in Matthew 4:17 and I ask you to look at that because it's very fundamental and key. Matthew 4:17 says, "From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" And the kingdom of heaven was at hand because now the King of heaven was present in human flesh. Christ was present and therefore he brings his kingdom with him, and there is this summary statement that says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and within a few short verses, Matthew records the Sermon on the Mount as Jesus delivered it on, I might say, one single occasion. The Sermon on the Mount is not a compilation of unrelated statements as some scholars try to say. This is at least a summary of a single sermon that is gave on one occasion. That's very important because it means that it's all

tied together in the thought and in the mind of Christ. Everything that he teaches is driving up and leading up to the conclusion that you find in the latter half of Matthew 7.

Well, we need a brief overview of those major themes so that we would understand exactly what the significance is of this command to enter that we have seen. As the sermon begins in the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:3 through, let's say, verse 12, Jesus has shown what the character of kingdoms citizens is like. He says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are the gentle, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," and so on. There is an inner dynamic to this kingdom, in other words, that we studied at length in the past. In his next section in verses 13 through 16, he explains his disciples' role in the world. The people who have this kind of character, he says, are going to function like light in darkness, like salt in the world, having this preserving effect against the otherwise unrestrained nature of sin in the world. He goes from there and he makes a central statement in verses 17 through 20 about the purpose for which he came. He said, "I am here in fulfillment of what has been said previously by the prophets of God. I came to fulfill the law. I come to fulfill the prophets." So he's coming in fulfillment of that which the spokesman for God had said in the past. Everything that they said found their culmination, found their ultimate outcome, their ultimate purpose, in Christ. From that position of authority and fulfillment, he speaks in verses 21 through 48 showing the nature of true righteousness and contrasting it with the false teaching and the hypocrisy of their religious leaders. That's the flow of chapter 5. In Matthew 6, he instructs his disciples on the true worship of God the Father and repeatedly tells them in verse 4, in verse 6, and in verse 16, that their Father in heaven loves them and will reward them as they respond to him with the kind of righteousness that Jesus lays forth. Then moving into Matthew 7, as we've seen in recent weeks, he teaches them about self-examination and spiritual discernment, and invites them in verses 9 through 11 to ask God for the grace that they need to live out this righteousness, and he ties it all up in the Golden Rule found in Matthew 7:12.

All of that to say this: what Jesus has done in the vast sweep of this magnificent sermon, is he has explained to them and said, "This is what life in my kingdom is like. This is the character, this is the spiritual attitudes, this is the worship that marks true life in my true kingdom." And now what he does, having completed everything that he has to say through Matthew 5:3 through Matthew 7:12, now he is pressing home to his hearers, to us today, he is pressing home the call for a response. This is not something that is just supposed to be heard and catalogued away as interesting spiritual information to perhaps one day influence what we do or think in a particular situation, Jesus says, "I have shown you life in my kingdom. I have shown you true worship." And as he speaks to his disciples, meaning speaking to those that were learning from him on that day, he calls upon them for a response, and in Matthew 7:13 through 14, he gives them a command, "Enter into my kingdom." In chapter 7, verse 15 through 20, he gives them a caution, "Beware of the false prophets." Then in verses 21 through the end of the chapter, he explains to them the consequences. There are consequences for the way that you respond to this command that have everlasting significance for your soul.

So as we move into this final section, we realize that Christ has given an exposition, an explanation of what his kingdom is, and now he is calling for a response. For us today, beloved, there are a couple of things that I want you to see. First of all, I want you to see that as Christ gives this sermon and as we read it here today 2,000 years after he delivered it, the same thing is true for you and for me, that this is a sermon that demands a response. One way or another, you are responding to this sermon and there are everlasting consequences to what you do with it.

Jesus, as I've said many many times, Jesus is teaching for keeps. Beloved, understand that when Christ left the glories of heaven to come down and take on human flesh, came down with a purpose, a saving purpose to seek and to save that which had been lost, he didn't come down to play games. He left the eternal glory of heaven to come down to talk about eternal matters that have eternal consequences. It's imperative for your own well-being to understand that and to respond well to what he says. This is momentous. This is of incalculable importance of what we are looking at, and what goes on in your heart in response to it. It's incalculable for those of you watching over the live stream.

So we're going to park it here. We're going to stop right here on this one word, "Enter," and contemplate exactly what this has to say to us, and I want to approach the question like this: how should we understand the spirit of what Jesus is saying here? How should we understand the sense in which he makes this command and asserts his authority over our souls? How should we understand this because that will frame our response to it.

Let me give you an overview. Let me make this as plain and direct as I possibly can. When Jesus says, "Enter through the narrow gate," he's saying, he's obviously calling and saying, "Enter into my kingdom," right, because it's an exposition of the kingdom. So he's presenting this command, "Enter into the kingdom. Leave behind where you're at and enter into this realm." And in what sense is this command given to us from Christ? Beloved, write this down and imprint it deep on your soul and consciousness: this is a command of love urgently pressed upon us by a gracious Savior, freely made to all who hear. This is a command of love urgently pressed upon us by a gracious Savior, freely made to all who hear.

There are three parts that we're going to look at here today and, first of all, I want you to see that this is preeminently a command of love. A command of love and we'll spend most of our time here today. You know, it is so easy, and I find this even in my own heart and life after a few years of pastoral ministry and preaching God's word, I want you to see something with what I'm about to say here. It is very very easy for us, for you and for me, to overlook some of the most important critical points because they are so basic, because they are woven into the fabric of everything that is said, and it would be so easy for you to overlook and to miss the fact that when Jesus says, "Enter through the narrow gate," he is making a command that is rooted in divine love for your soul. That is essential for you to see. What thought should frame our response when Christ comes and give a command like this, "Enter into my kingdom"? How should we think about that? With what spirit does he speak? Well, beloved, I'm going to show you within the context of the Sermon on the Mount and then expand out into some other biblical thinking that

Jesus is giving you this command in order to secure your eternal well-being. You must understand that preeminently, fundamentally, and that's why we are parking it right here. Jesus is giving this command to secure your well-being.

Now, stop for a moment and just realize that there is a very real sense in which how we respond to this command adds nothing to God himself. He is perfect in his essence. He is perfect in his being. God has everything within himself that is necessary for his own joy and eternal gladness. It's not like God is incomplete without us. God has everything that he needs within himself and so he is not commanding this so that it will add something to him. That's impossible. God doesn't change. He's immutable. You don't add to him, you don't improve him, you don't detract from him. So as Jesus has laid forth the glories of this kingdom and he commands us to enter in, it's for our well-being. It's for your good that he says this.

Now, someone might say, I'll come back to this in a little bit, there is a built in tendency in the human race ever since Satan tempted Eve to doubt the goodness of God and to question him when he gives commands to us. And you know the story, as Satan came and tempted Eve and said, "Has got really said that?" He insinuates to Eve's mind, which she was far too willing to listen to and hear, "God probably has a hidden agenda with you, and he knows that if you eat of that fruit, that you're going to enter into a realm that he does not want you to have. He's hiding something. He's hiding something good from you." And Eve says, "Well, I'm not going to have him deal with me like that. I'm going to take it." Passes it off to Adam and the destruction of the human race was at hand, rooted, here's what I want you to see, rooted ultimately in a distrust of the goodness of God and a suspicion when he comes and gives us commands. That's a lie of Satan and what we need to do here this morning is we need to peel back the onion of our bitter hearts, of our unbelieving hearts, and see God on his own terms and see Christ on his own terms with what he says in this sermon and what the text of Scripture says about the reason that God comes and offers his kingdom to you. He designs it, he commands it, out of love for your well-being.

We can see this very plainly, going back to the very start of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:3. Look back at it with me. This is so important. Everything hinges on this and, beloved, everything that we are talking about here today and that we are going to be talking about over the next week or two, I want you to understand that the way that you understand this, the way that you see it, the way that you believe it, the way that you respond to this, absolutely determines the direction and the trajectory of the rest of your life and determines the trajectory of the nature of your sanctification. It's that important. Everything in your life is affected by what you think about what we're going to see here over the next several minutes and the way that you respond to it.

Now, look at Matthew 5:3. You know what it says and I'm just going to highlight the initial clauses of each verse. Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the gentle. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." Verse 7, "Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of

righteousness. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Beloved, notice that there at the end Jesus says, "Rejoice. Be glad. Your reward in heaven is great." Why would he say that except that he has your well-being in mind? He seeks the abundant blessing of God upon you echoing throughout all of eternity. That's the spirit in which he comes.

Let me say a few things about this word "blessed." Nine times in those verses Jesus has been pronouncing blessing, blessing on the people of this character, blessing on the people that belong to his kingdom. And notice, notice, I should say this just to kind of so that all of this is very clear to you, in verse 3 he says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." In verse 10 he says, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." You see, he's talking about this realm over which he is King. As we come to Matthew 7:13 when he says, "Enter," the whole thing has been framed by the kingdom. He says, "Enter into my kingdom," is the idea, and he is pronouncing blessing here, and I need to say a word about this word "blessed," a few things about it, and what I'm saying, I'm repeating things that I said at the very start of our exposition of the Sermon on the Mount some 18 months ago, but I want to remind you of this because it is so very very important.

Now, this is essential. Some teachers, some commentators, men of skill and ability, when they talk about the word "blessed," they say this word means happy, as in an inner feeling of satisfaction, and he says that people that are like this are happy, by which they mean an inner subjective feeling of satisfaction. That is a common way to explain the meaning of this text. Now, sometimes people do, disciples of Christ do feel happy but, beloved, in love, I want to tell you that that superficial idea of happiness, at least as we mean it here today, as we use it in our world today, cannot possibly be the intent of what Jesus is saying here. That cannot possibly be the best and most accurate way to understand this term. Jesus, let me remind you, is talking about God's kingdom and the nature of spiritual character. He is building toward a conclusion, as we saw, that warns about eternal judgment; that warns about people being sent away from him, not having known him even though they did signs in his name. The context here demands something more significant than mere happiness.

Now, just to say, just to emphasize what I said just a moment ago, yes, disciples can be happy, but Scripture also talks, for example in Hebrews 12, that sometimes the way of the disciple is sorrowful; that sometimes it is a way of heaviness; that there is not always this buoyant feeling of gladness that expresses itself in the heart of a disciple. No, and when you look at some of the standard lexicons, you'll find terms about blessed and definitions of blessed like this that are far more fitting, as I will show you. One particularly standard lexicon says that this word "blessed" means "to be the privileged recipient of divine favor." To be blessed by God is to be in a privileged position of having received his favor. Now, that might make you happy but it far transcends just superficial happiness, and here's what I want you to see, this is so essential for you: Jesus is not describing a subjective feeling here. He is stating objective fact regardless of how you feel about it.

Let me say that again: Jesus is not talking about a subjective feeling that might come or go depending on whether you've got the flu or not. No, he's stating an objective fact that exists independent of your human feelings about the nature of it. Here is what he's saying and here's the meaning of this: when he speaks, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn," and on and on, here's what he's saying: people who are poor in spirit like the way I am describing, have received God's favor. They are in a privileged position because not everybody belongs to the kingdom of God and, therefore, if you are in the kingdom and you manifest these kinds of characteristics, you are blessed by God. You have it good. You have it well. God has been good to you in a way that not everyone experiences. You are blessed. It's an objective fact.

Now, sometimes early in the Christian life, sometimes when we go through really deep waters, we don't feel blessed, do we? I know that to be true of many of you because I've interacted with you in some of your sorrows and I'm glad to do that, don't misunderstand, but sometimes we interact because you don't feel happy. You feel discouraged. You feel weighed down. But do you know what? That has not changed the objective reality of the fact that you belong to God's kingdom, that you are in union with Christ, and that all of the blessings of Christ had been poured out upon you. It may not feel it at the moment but objectively speaking, you are blessed regardless of how you feel if you are in Christ and in his kingdom. It's an objective statement, not a subjective feeling, and what Jesus is saying is that the sphere of God's blessing is found in his kingdom. Those who are poor in spirit and manifest these other things are in his kingdom and, therefore, they are blessed regardless of how they feel. It transcends your perception of it, to reality as God states it and declares it to be. God declares in his word that those who belong to Christ, those who are in his kingdom, have been on the receiving end of his great grace, his great mercy, his great love, is great goodness and, therefore, they are blessed indeed. They have been on the receiving end of divine favor that not everyone tastes. So when we say this is a command of love to enter into the kingdom, understand the sense in which we are saying it. Jesus speaks to those who are outside of the kingdom, outside the realm of his blessing, and he says, "You, enter in. There is blessing inside the realm of my kingdom and I would have you enjoy it."

Now, that's odd, in one sense, odd in this sense: why would Jesus invite people who are rebels against him as King, why would he call out to them and say, "Enter into my kingdom"? Why not just toast them with a spark from the divine finger and say, "Rebel, die!" Because he's not like that. He issues this command, he commands and says, "Enter into my kingdom." Why? Because he would have you enter into the realm of his blessing, to the place of his favor, to the place of his goodness. Beloved, he commands those who hear in order to bless them. He commands us in order to extend his love further to yet more who are outside of his kingdom. That's why he does it. This is a command of love. This is a command to enter into the sphere of blessing objectively stated as it is viewed by God, not necessarily how it is felt by us. Do we feel happy sometimes? Of course. Does that come and go and ebb and flow? Of course, but the objective reality of being a privileged recipient of God's favor never, that objective reality never changes for the one whom Christ saves. We are always blessed. We are always under his favor no matter what because we belong to him; because we are in him; because we are united to him.

So he commands us to bless us. Beloved, we could say it another way: he commands us in love. He commands us in love, and I want to take you to some familiar passages, a half dozen of them, to reinforce this point. And why are we doing this? I'm going to say it again, I've already said it and I'm going to say it now and I'm going to say it again. Why are we taking the time to do this? It's because there is embedded in each one of our hearts, deep in our hearts there is this tendency to be suspicious of God when he commands us; suspicious of his intentions; what is he really up to; why can't I just do what I want; why is he the boss of me. All of that rooted, all going back 4,000 years or more to the garden. All of it rooted in a willingness to believe a lie about the goodness and the love of God, and we must do everything that we can to purge that sinfulness from your heart in light of the revealed word of God. He commands us in love.

Now, step back with me for a moment and realize that the one who is speaking these words, Christ as he commands us, is here on a divine mission of mercy. He has come down out of heaven in order to declare his kingdom and to declare the Gospel and to appoint his apostles so that they would carry it out to all of the world. Why is he doing that? What is in it for him viewed from a human perspective? If you're in heaven and you are receiving the adoring worship of angels and you are in the most exalted place in any realm of existence at the right hand of the Father, why would you leave that? Your experience in the moment can only go down deeply from there. Why did Christ become a babe at Bethlehem? Why did he live in obscurity for 30 years? Why did he preach and teach and ultimately live that perfect life? And why did he offer it on a cross? What was in it for him? Why was he doing it and what does it tell us about the Godhead that he was here doing that? John 3:16. This should move our hearts to trembling adoring worship. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Why did Christ come down from heaven? Because the love of God was being manifested, the love of God was being exercised in the advancement of the plan of redemption, and this was motivated by the love of God, from who God is in his own character. Go back to what we said, it wasn't because there was something great and worthy in us that he just had to have. God's not like that. God is independent of us but his love overflowed and from a loving Father, from a loving Christ, from a loving Spirit, Christ enters into the world so that there might be redemption, so that God might manifest his love and give his only Son so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. It's the love of God that's at work in the Incarnation and teaching of Christ, totally motivated by his love.

Romans 5:8, you can turn to these passages with me or just listen along. It might be something to be said for just listening along and jotting the text down and looking them up later. Romans 5:6, "while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die." Well, then why was Christ dying for us? If you won't die for a righteous man, generally speaking, people don't die for righteous men, and yet Christ is dying for us and we are helpless and we are sinners under the wrath of God, why? Why? Because in verse 8, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The love of God seeking the blessings upon

those that would hear. Seeking blessing, seeking goodness, seeking to dispense favor on sinful men.

Beloved, you must understand, you must understand, you must see that the fount of the Gospel is the Father's love. Why is there a Gospel? Why is there a Savior for sinners? Why does he call people to enter into his kingdom that don't deserve it? Why? Why? Why? It's because God is a God of love and in his Gospel he calls men everywhere to enter into that love. This is motivated by love. This is motivated by a concern for your well-being. It is motivated by a concern to give favor to those who hear. That's why.

Charles Spurgeon said this, and I quote, he said, "Christ did not die to make his Father loving, but because his Father is loving. The atoning blood is the outflow of the very heart of God toward us." You see, it's not that God was an unwilling participant in redemption and Christ died and then that changed God's disposition toward us, as if the cross changed God into a loving God. No, the Father's love was always operative. There was a divine harmony in the plan and that divine harmony found its unifying note in the love of God. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, in this the love of God is manifested, is demonstrated, and that while we were sinners Christ died for us.

Scripture emphasizes this in other places. Galatians 2:20, as I turn there in my own Bible. The Apostle Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." Do you see the side-by-side statements of the love of God, John 3:16, "God so loved the world he gave his Son," here in the second person of the Trinity we see the exact same thought expressed. He loved me and he gave himself up for me. He gave of himself in this unspeakably deep and even properly understood, mysterious self-emptying, Christ gives himself for us, and Scripture says and attributes the motivating factor of that in the heart of God to be his love. He loved us and gave himself up for us.

In Ephesians 2:4, it says after having expounded on how we were dead in sin, dominated by the devil, and doomed to suffer the wrath of God, in verse 4 of Ephesians 2, it says, "But God." But God, despite our unworthiness, despite our sinfulness, despite our unwillingness even, "But God," acting in his own realm, acting out of his own heart, acting according to his own eternal being, what did he do? Verse 4, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions," we didn't contribute anything to this. There wasn't anything in us that prompted this love of God that he otherwise wouldn't have had. "Even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." What a magnificent passage. Rich in mercy. Great love. By grace you have been saved. The surpassing riches of his grace in kindness. Do you see it, beloved? Kindness. Mercy. Grace. Great great great love. And the word echoes off the walls. The love of God echoing and reverberating in everything that it says about the reason that Christ came and gave his life for us.

Do you get the idea when Christ says, "Enter into my kingdom," he's speaking out of that same love? It's unmixed. It's unmingled. There is the purest, most sincere motivation in the heart of God, in the heart of Christ, when he says, "Enter into my kingdom." You hear those words and you should say, "He is speaking out of love for the goodness of my soul." As I track through Matthew, I see that later on he says, "The Son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many." Then I read about the crucifixion, I read about the cross, and I see the fulfillment of all of it, and there is this consistent undeniable theme that God is a loving gracious God, that Christ has come in furtherance of a gracious loving mission, and in love he has given himself for me and he commands me to come in. Why does he command? He doesn't want you to miss it. He would have you enter in and enter into this blessing. That's why. That changes your whole perspective on it, doesn't it? The Gospel command is a command of love.

I'm not done on this point. Over in 1 John 4:7, it says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Verse 19, "We love, because He first loved us."

One more, Revelation 1:5. It says, "To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood-- and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father--to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Beloved, we have just taken a journey into the depths of the character of God and we have seen that he has a loving disposition to sinners just like you and just like me, and that the coming of Christ was a furtherance of his love for sinners; that the command of Christ was a call to enter into the realm of the blessing of God so that rather than standing on the outside of the realm of his kingdom, that you would enter in and you would become a partaker of all of these objective blessings that God gives to those who believe in his Son. God in love gives salvation to sinners. God in love relieves suffering. God in love brings the Gospel to your ears today, right now in what you're hearing.

Once more we hear from Charles Spurgeon as he applies this principle of love to those of us that are in Christ and listen closely, discouraged believer. Spurgeon says, "The Lord loves you today, Christian, not because of anything that you are doing or being or saying or thinking, but he loves you because his great heart is full of love and it runneth over to you." I love that. He doesn't love you because of what you're doing or who you are, God loves you because of who he is, and his love spills out, as it were, from the inner essence of his being, and spills out in love to those that belong to him, and spills out in love in a call to those that are still outside and says, "Enter into my kingdom. I'm calling you in love. I'm commanding you. Why? Because I would have you in the realm of this blessing." That's who God is. That's who Christ is.

In the passages that I've read, as we've talked about multiple times really from this pulpit, you see the perfect manifestation of the love of God at the cross of Christ, don't you? It was there that Jesus Christ hung on the cross to redeem everyone who would believe in him. It was there that he made the payment for sin that allows a universal proclamation for all sinners everywhere to enter in, to come to him; that a complete perfect sacrifice has been made. Period. Full stop. End of paragraph. End of chapter. End of book. A full atonement for sinners has been made and Christ when he is presented to you, you have before you one who is sufficient, complete and infinite and eternal in love, ready to save you if you would but stand up, go to him and enter through him. Scripture says he bore their sins in his body. That's the measure of his love.

Does God love you, Christian? Speaking to Christians at the moment. I realize that circumstances can cloud that and make it difficult. You get fatigued. You get sick and your whole mind gets messed up with it. Don't measure, don't wrongly think and try to associate the love of God and to measure it by your temporal circumstances which shift and change. Don't measure the love of God by the way that you feel toward him because that shifts and changes also, doesn't it? None of us deliver to God perfect love, perfect obedience. Even the most sanctified saint has more progress to make. The love of God is not born out of a condition that he finds in you. The love of God is rooted in his own being and you have that certified to you in his inerrant word; you have it certified to you at the cross of Christ where he voluntarily lay down his life for you sins; and Christian, you have it certified to you by the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit who says to you and witnesses with your own spirit, "Yes, that is right. That is who God is. That is in accord with the revelation previously given." This is marvelous. This is liberating. This is assuring. This is encouraging.

Why am I belaboring this point? So that you won't miss it. I mean, I want to remind you again and help you to see that there are hidden crevices, there are hidden corners in your heart which I know are still suspicious of God, even though you are truly saved and you truly belong to him. All of that unbelief isn't purged out in a moment, and when circumstances come, you say, "Why, God, this? I don't like this God stuff," recognizing that that is a manifestation of a doubt about the goodness of his intentions toward you. And we're going to look at this more in another series down the road in a month or two or three, these things that I'm talking about, but to help you see that when the pressures of life come and the sorrows of life hit and there is that time temptation to say, "God, what are you doing? God, do you really love me?" to realize that that response of unbelief is traced all of the way back to the Garden of Eden. Ever since Satan tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, it is the natural state of man to question the character of God, to question whether he is really good, and to reject and rebel against his commands. To say, "No, God says this, I'll go someplace else." That is the natural tendency of man and while that principle of rebellion is broken in true salvation, Christian, there is still shattered debris of it still remaining in our hearts and we need to take the vacuum sweeper of the love of God and suck that out. We need to bring the broom to your heart to sweep out that remaining suspicion about the character of God, and the only way we can do that is by reminding you of what Scripture says and assuring you of the love of God for your soul. People hear the commands of God and they think that God is somehow violating their

liberty. "I'll be my own man, thank you very much." Or they think that God is being unfair, "Why can't I be just whoever I want to be? Why is God hiding something from us that we would enjoy? Why don't I get what I want because I know I would enjoy it? God must be opposed to me because I haven't gotten what I want."

Have I stated the matter accurately or not? And when we find our hearts thinking that way, beloved, when you find as we contemplate those reactions of men with their clenched fist against a loving God and we think about those reactions of the natural man toward the truth and character of God, we must have it clear in our minds based in light of everything that we've seen here this morning, there is only one three letter word that we say in response: lie. Lie. Lie. Lie. Lie. "No, that is a lie to suggest to me that God is anything other than a loving God toward me. That is a lie to think that he commands to restrict blessing rather than to give it." And you and I need to banish such unworthy thoughts from your mind.

And those of you that are here and you are not in Christ and you have heard the command of Christ to enter into his kingdom, to come by faith alone to him and say, "Lord, would you admit me too? Would you receive me into your kingdom?" What you must understand, my unsaved friend, is this: when Christ commands sinners to come, he does so in love. He does so for your supreme well-being, for the help of your eternal soul, and what you should see is that Jesus Christ would have you enter into the blessing of his kingdom if only you would. That is the command, "Enter in," and it is said and offered to you in all of the full sincerity of God certified by his word, that if you will enter, this blessing is all yours. If you don't enter into the kingdom after hearing these things today, beloved, what I want you to understand is that the fault of that, the reason that you would stand outside of the kingdom, is found entirely in you because God has presented with you, to you today, a sincere offer from his word, a command, "Enter into my kingdom because I will bless you if you do." And if you reject that, your blood is on your own head. There is no reason whatsoever for any man anywhere in the world at any time and any place to resist such a loving gracious command from a King who is willing to share the blessings of his kingdom with anyone who believes.

It's a command of love that shapes the way that we respond to it. Secondly, this is a command of urgency. It's a command of urgency. Go back to Matthew 7. Jesus says, "Enter through the narrow gate." Just want to consider this briefly. As I said earlier, this imperative, this particular verb is what they call an aorist imperative in the original Greek, and here's why I say that. A lot of our commands that we've seen before have been present tense commands, calls to ongoing character, or something of that sort. This is a different form of command in the original Greek, and this particular form is used – here is why this is important, here is why it's important, you might not necessarily see that on the surface of the English text – this is a form that communicates urgency. It is a command that is to be undertaken at once. This is not a suggestion for you to file away and say, "Do you know what? Here's what I'll do, I'll consider this later in life. I'll think about this maybe when I'm on my deathbed. For now, I'm not interested. For now, I want to live my own life. I'm happy with the way things are. It's not too important to me." The

form of this command pierces through all of that and says, "This is urgent! This is to be undertaken at once!"

And it is urgent for many reasons. It's urgent because these spiritual realities are unseen, and what you see tends to deceive you into thinking that the way things are today is the way that they will always be. That's not true. That's another l-i-e from the devil. It is urgent for you to hear and respond to this because the whole world system, the whole world environment in which you live, is arrayed against it. "Enter urgently," pierces the fog of the environment in which we live. It's urgent because the natural desires of your flesh are against it. The tenor of your heart is rebelled against God and Jesus urgently presses, "Set all of that aside. Forget all of that. Enter!" It's that important.

You know, I know that I raise my voice and I know that I'm kind of an intense preacher and that sometimes that makes it exhausting to listen to me. I get that. Sometimes I worry about it, but mostly I would have you know I can't help it. These things matter. These things are urgent and I can't talk about these things in a detached manner of a professor at a university. It's urgent and so the urgency sometimes comes out in my pulpit demeanor. It is urgent and presented to you urgently like that out of love for your soul. A pale morbidly imperfect reflection of the urgency of the love of the greater one who says, "Enter into my kingdom." So don't let the pulpit demeanor cause you to shy away. It's an urgency of love in response to an urgent command from Christ who desires your blessing and calls you in love saying, "I would have you share in the blessings of my kingdom." I can't help but speak as I do.

Why is it urgent? It is urgent, my friend, because some of you are dull and dismissive. It's urgent because these things are of eternal consequence. And beloved, beloved, it is urgent because the time is short. Thomas Boston, a Puritan preacher in the early eighteenth century, said this, and I quote, he said, "Now, Sirs, the last ship for Immanuel's land is making ready to go, therefore, it is now or never." Beloved, as we talk about these things, you should view them from a perspective of urgency that says the plane is leaving the gate. The train is pulling out of the station. The plane to heaven is about to take off. The train for glory is about to blow the whistle and depart and some of you linger on the platform, some of you are not hurrying to the gate, and this command from Christ in love, he calls you and says, "Wake up! Time is short!" Come in faith to Christ that you might enter in and that you won't watch the ship leading to glory from the shoreline and watch as it slowly diminishes into the horizon and leaves you behind. Don't do that.

Why is it so urgent? The Lord in love is seeking your well-being. Thirdly and finally as we close here, it's a command for all. It's a command in love. It's a command of urgency. And it's a command for all. No one in this room, no one who hears over the live stream, no one who hears this on subsequent media, should think that, "No, that's not for me," in the sense that Christ doesn't intend it for me. No, Christ intends it for each one. You should see the utterly free nature of this command.

Look at verse 13 with me again, Jesus says, "Enter through the narrow gate." Notice he doesn't qualify it. He doesn't say, "Now for some of you, I call you to enter in because I

see you're not as depraved as those reprobates over there." No, he says, "Enter in." If you hear the words, if you have ears to hear, hear. Understand that Christ is inviting all men without distinction to enter into his kingdom.

Let me reinforce that for you. Matthew 28:19, Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." All the nations and all the people within the nations. Go out and make disciples of them. Why does he say that? Why does he say enter without any qualifications? It's because he's calling everyone to enter in. This general external call goes to everyone to hear. Jews and Gentiles. Rich and poor. Joyful and sorrowful. Male and female. Boys and girls. Young and old. You say, "I've squandered my life in rebellion," to which the reply of Scripture is, "Don't talk about that, enter in." Perhaps a broken hearted woman from her sins says, "But not only have I sinned, I've dealt with the consequences in such a dark way and there is so much guilt I can't even bear to look up my eyes," to which the call says, "Don't focus on that, focus on the command to enter in. Christ is calling even you to enter in."

This call goes to every individual and, beloved, he addresses you by name. He says, Gary, Jerry. He says Catherine. He says Joy. He says Michael. He says Jim, enter in. I highlight their names not because I don't think they are Christians, but just to illustrate the point. This is a broad call that applies to everyone by name. Come to Christ and enter in.

He places no conditions on the invitation. Beloved, you do not have to – oh, please listen to me and hear me soundly on this point – you do not have to improve yourself before you can enter; you do not have to feel a certain level of guilt before you can respond; you do not need to go through any rituals; you do not need to go through a priest; you don't need to go through anyone else. The command is made to everyone and the command says, "Enter into my kingdom." No restrictions, no qualifications, just the command of Christ to enter in. Sometimes he states it as an invitation, "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden." Sometimes it's in the pleading of Paul, "I beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." The form of the invitation sometimes is different but everywhere along the line, the call goes out to enter his kingdom. The invitation Christ extends is to come to him and to be saved.

So, my friend, so, my friend, I say it to you reverently but I say it plainly: for the love of God, my friend, enter in. Go to Christ now and ask him to save you. And for those of you that are within, look around at the glories of the kingdom and realize that it was love that brought you there. And it's not your performance that's going to keep you there. The love of God, if God loved you when a sinner, certainly he loves you even more, if we can put it in those terms, certainly his favor has been extended – let's put it this way – in an eternal unchanging way toward you now that you are in his family. He saved you apart from any conditions in yourself. He keeps you without any conditions in yourself. Scripture practically ends on this invitation in Revelation 22:17 and it says, "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost."

Would you have forgiveness and eternal life? Would you have this blessing be as yours? Would you be under the reign of this loving and benevolent King? Enter today.

Father, be gracious to us as we respond to this deep in our hearts. Thank you for the love of God manifesting Christ and providing the coloring to everything that you say to us, all the commands that you make. May you erase from our hearts the suspicions of the natural man that we might trust you and take you at your word, that your blessing is intended, your blessing is commanded, and it is ours now to rise, leave behind the world and enter in. In Christ's name. Amen.

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