

At The Crossroads

Matthew 7:13-14

Introduction

The Sermon On The Mount has been full of surprises. Remember Christ's theme; true righteousness. True righteousness pictured by Christ (chapter 5:1-48) and practiced by believers (6:1-7:12). Jesus has spoken about our worship; our wealth; and our walk. In the closing section of the Sermon On The Mount Jesus will speak about a series of tests; the test of self-denial; will I walk the narrow way (vv.13-14); the test of fruit-bearing; "what comes from my life (vv.15-20); the test of obedience; "am I doing as well as saying" (See Wiersbe's New Testament Outlines; pp.23-24).

Most people hate tests. But the tests Jesus gives are purposeful tests; to prove that our righteousness is from God; counterfeit citizens and counterfeit kingdoms and counterfeit Christianity will fail the tests.

The Sermon On The Mount is also full of choices.

Two roads; the broadway to hell; the gate is wide and many choose to stay on the path that leads to destruction (v.13); the narrow road to heaven (v.14); the gate is narrow, and only a few find it. Later two animals (false prophets); one that pretends to be a sheep; appears harmless but proves to be harmful (v.15); and can rip you apart; and true and false disciples; on judgment day the true disciples will be separated from the false disciples; one rewarded the other condemned (vv. 21-23).

Two gates.

Two ways.

Two ends.

Two travelers.

Two decisions.

I'll never forgot the song that played that night. The group was called "Country Faith" and it featured Bill Sprouse and a young youth Pastor named Tom Stipe. The song;

Two roads from which to choose,
The rocky one or the Lord's new freeway.
Choose before the Savior comes, the road to glory or the rocky one,
Please decide before the Lord descends,
Sweet road to glory or the bitter end.

Jesus was calling me to make a personal choice, between the broad gate or the narrow gate. Some choices are easy in life and others hard. Every person eventually finds himself or herself at the Crossroads. The place where consideration meets commitment. We either believe or we don't. Ignoring Christ and His claims is itself a choice and still results in a destination; however undesirable. The exclusive claims of Christ and Christians bothered me. Christians told me;

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“Jesus is the way and the truth and the life.” I thought—“these people are narrow minded bigots.”

Two Roads From Which To Choose (v.13a)

Matthew 7:13–14 (NKJV) 13 “Enter by the narrow gate;

The statement begins a brand new direction in Christ’s sermon. Jesus has just said; “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (v. 12). Even most unbelievers concede they like Jesus, they like miracles, they like a moral compass. Some have even said, “If people could just base their lives on Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. But then they hit this wall. Jesus invites his listener to enter the narrow gate. Soon Jesus will warn about false prophets. There is a danger of being deceived. “But the greatest danger is self-deception. The Scribes and Pharisees had fooled themselves into believing they were righteous and others were sinful” (Jon Courson). Some people—even self-described Christians have fooled themselves into thinking that Jesus is simply one way among many ways; one way of many ways to enter into a right relationship with God. Still others have fooled themselves into thinking they are on the narrow path; but their bags are packed and loaded down with extra-biblical supplies and they remain on the broad way.

The Lord Jesus says; “Enter.” Throughout the history of God’s dealings with human beings He has called them to Himself. This is not some philosophy you admire from a distance. He did not say “admire” or simply accept but enter. Many people admire Jesus but they are unwilling to obey Jesus. Jesus does not even say; “choose from a number of gates” but rather enter by the narrow gate.

In order to enter the narrow gate you must leave the broad path.

The Fool’s Highway (v.13b)

13b “. . . for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.

Before I accepted Christ I believed with all my heart that wide was the gate and broad the way that led to life. I could not bring myself to believe that Muslims and Mormons and Hindus, Hare-Krishna could possibly be on a road that led to destruction. And yet here it is—Jesus believed that a wide gate and a broad way leads to destruction.

Believe what you must—but you can’t say that Jesus holds the position you hoped for. You may not like it. I certainly didn’t at first. But I have come to believe and accept and defend the Lord Jesus Christ. Not that He needs my vote. Jesus is not in Heaven thinking—“Wow—Gino finally agrees with Me”.

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I thought there must be several ways. Why are so many people convinced there are many paths to God—many roads to righteousness? Jon Courson writes; “I suggest to you it is because our culture—our generation in particular—is more interested in equality than truth. We are more afraid of being thought prejudiced or bigoted than being wrong. We are scared to death of being labeled narrow-minded” (p.160).

Another choice. Narrow mind and narrow path. Broad-open mind broad open path.

Two roads. One narrow leading to life. One broad leading to “destruction” (*apoleia*). D.A. Carson wrote; “definitive destruction, not merely in the sense of the physical extinction of physical existence, but rather of an eternal plunge into Hades and a hopeless destiny of death” (p. 189). There is not majority rule in the Kingdom. The Citizens of the Kingdom will not vote out the King.

Is it possible that the narrow road and the broad road are simply metaphors of two-life-styles? Does it simply refer to an easy life, comfortable life, popular life; as opposed to a difficult life, or a dedicated life or a life of self-denial?

Is one gate a gate marked surrender and another gate marked self-sufficiency?
Jesus has spoken at length on the issue of true righteousness and false righteousness.

Later in Matthew’s Gospel (8:19-22); A certain Scribe (v.19) comes to Jesus and says to Him, “Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.” (v.20) And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man, has nowhere to lay His head.” Then another of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”

What do you think? A test? Or something more?

Clearly both paths are marked and have a destination. One leads to destruction. Another leads to life. The path seems consequential. Both roads seem to begin in this life and end in the next life. The wide gate is broad enough to accommodate the ease and comfort of this world. Those who seek to avoid conflict, persecution, opposition can travel the road marked undiscerning toleration. Those who reject God; or see God as a massive myth projection, a fabrication created by man; and man as creation of the cosmos; who believe matter created mind; rather than Mind creating matter; have no problem rejecting the Bible’s concepts of Heaven or Hell. To some **destruction** is a return to the pre-molecular state, a swirling mass of hydrogen star dust, ready for the next cosmic merry-go-round. Destruction is the eventual destination of those who reject God, reject Christ and renounce God’s plan of salvation.

There have always been two roads and two religions. One that includes repentance, return, and reconciliation; and one that includes remorse, rebellion, ruin. The choice is not between religion or no religion; the choice isn’t even between bad verses good people. The choice is between

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truth and error. The choice is between God's grace or human achievement. The choice is between the religion of hypocrisy or a relationship with Christ. If a person has to be born into a certain race, or achieve a certain intelligence, or obtain a certain economic status or vote a certain party that would exclude people. Apart from Christ all are lost in sin. In Christ all are saved.

Jesus says; 'there are two ways'! One away from God—the other towards God. Why? For our own safety and security. We are limited, frail, gullible people. God decided to make the opportunity for salvation simple. There are two simple choices; eternal life or eternal death. The road to glory or the fool's highway.

No! No! Some will object. "There are many paths to God. God is like a mountain, and the many paths lead to the top of the mountain; but all must ascend the summit. Life is like a flowing river and we all empty into the Godhead. You can embrace any teacher, any guru, any enlightened master"! Some people reason the only thing we have to worry about is if the person is sincere and tolerant of other views. Theologian Emery Bancroft wrote (the 1893 World's Fair); "Some years ago a Parliament of Religion was held in Chicago, in connection with the World's Fair. At that Parliament the great ethnic faiths of the world were represented. One by one the leading men arose and spoke for Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Islam. Then Dr. Joseph Cook of Boston who had been chosen to represent Christianity arose to speak. "Here is Lady Macbeth's hand," he said; ". . .stained with the foul murder of Duncan. See her as she walks through the halls and corridors of her palatial home, stopping to cry, "Out (cursed) spot! Out I say! Will these hands ne'er be clean?" Then turning to those seated on the platform, he said, 'Can any of you who are so anxious to propagate your religious systems offer any cleansing efficacy for the sin and guilt of Lady Macbeth's crime?' An oppressive silence was maintained by them all. . . Only the blood of Christ can purge the conscience from dead works to serve the living God."

Listen to this letter to Dear Abby and her response:

"Your answer to the woman who complained that her relatives were always arguing with her about religion was ridiculous. You advised her to simply declare the subject off limits. Are you suggesting that people only talk about trivial, meaningless subjects so as to avoid a potential controversy? . . . It is arrogant to tell people there are subjects they may never mention in your presence. You could have suggested she learn enough about her relatives' cult to show them the errors contained in its teachings." Abby's response: "In my view, the height of arrogance is to attempt to show people the "errors" in the religion of their choice".

What an amazing answer! For some reason it doesn't seem to occur to Abby that she is exercising the height of arrogance in her response—since her very advice suggests the reader is in error! Human choice, human will, human decision is more important than truth and Biblical Revelation. Abby is saying it is arrogant to discuss errors in someone's religious beliefs. It is morally offensive, it is the height of intolerance.

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“In the past, intolerance meant bigotry or prejudice—that is, judging someone or excluding them because of the color of their skin or their country of origin, or because of a superficial understanding of what they believe. It also implied a desire to use force to oppose other points of view. . . .” “. . .Intolerance in the old sense, offends most of us. . . .” “. . .in post-modern usage, intolerance has come to mean simply disagreeing with anyone else’s beliefs. Its off limits—arrogant to use Abby’s word” (Dennis McCallum pp. 199-200).

The moment we admit that we believe the words of Jesus; we admit there is only one road that leads to life and all other roads have as their ultimate destination—marked “destruction”—; we are labeled arrogant, intolerant, mean-spirited, insensitive.

Do you think the followers of David Koresh or Jim Jones deserved to die? Do you think the deluded followers of Marshall Applewhite of the Heaven’s Gate Cult deserved to die? Do you think that sincerity and passion and discipline are sufficient virtues to turn the deluded captive away from Hell? Do you think that militant atheism or the gospel of human self-sufficiency will exonerate Hitler, or Stalin, or Mao or Pol-Pot? Do you think the fanatical zeal of Islamic Terrorists guarantees them some consideration at the final judgment? You might say, those are extreme examples of people who are obviously deceived.

Ok. How many paths are there? Six? Sixty? Six hundred? Six hundred and Sixty Six? Even if there were 10 real paths (and there aren’t) Satan would counterfeit thousands that are not real. Jesus Christ, speaking with the wisdom of His heavenly Father puts the dispute to rest when he says; “I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by me” (John 14:6). In context Jesus is speaking about the future—about Heaven—about an eternal destination. Jesus is speaking about Heaven and how to get there.

Billy Graham held a Crusade in Melbourne Australia. After the Crusade this letter was published in the local papers; “After hearing Dr. Billy Graham on the air, viewing him on television and reading reports and letters concerning him and his mission, I am heartily sick of the type of religion that insists my soul (and everyone else’s) needs saving—whatever that means. I have never felt lost. Nor do I feel that I daily wallow in the mire of sin, although repetitive preaching insists that I do. Give me a practical religion that teaches gentleness and tolerance, that acknowledges no barriers of color or creed, that remembers the aged and teaches children of goodness and not sin. If in order to save my soul I must accept such a philosophy as I have heard preached, I prefer to remain forever damned” (MacArthur p.458).

Some refuse to leave the broad way.

The Road To Glory (v.14)

14Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

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The way is narrow, to protect us and proclaim an exclusive gospel. God became a man. Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us. The Sovereign God became a human being of flesh and blood and never ceased being the unchanging God of the Universe. This same Jesus died a public, humiliating death. He never complained. If there were any other way to save you; would God allow such a painful, humiliating event to occur? **If there were any other way God would be a fool not to take it. God is not a fool.**

The next time a person says to you; “But there must be other ways to have a right relationship with God.”

Ask them; “how many religions admit human sin is a problem.” How many religions offer a solution to sin. How many religions admit God is offended by sin, and must punish sin. How many religions offer a permanent solution to the problem of sin. Jesus came to do away with sin. Did Mohammed die for you? Did Buddha sacrifice his life for you? True Buddhism is atheistic. It neither demands, requires or even suggests there is a personal god. Buddha never claimed to be god or that he was a reincarnation of god. True Hinduism is pantheistic and believes that everything and therefore nothing is god. In their world view Jesus is simply another ascended master. People involved in Witchcraft or native American Shamanism, may or may not have different views of God—as personal or impersonal; a person or a force.

Jesus alone says; “I am the way.” Jesus is the one and only Son of God. Everyone else is an imposter. The narrow gate strips us of all we possess so that you may possess Christ. It is not Jesus and everything else. Salvation is exchanging all we are for all He is. The narrow gate demands repentance. Being an American or having religious roots does not grant you special privileges. Charles Spurgeon said, “you and your sins must separate, or you and your God can never come together.” You can’t keep one sin. You must give them all up. Your life must change. To almost change is not enough.

“I was almost your person today, Lord. Then I thought what it would have been like if Jesus had done the same thing. What if God had almost revealed himself in Jesus Christ. What if Christ were almost born and almost lived and almost died? What if he would have said, “Ask and it will almost be given you; seek and you will almost find; knock and it will almost be opened to you?” What if he would have said, “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will almost give you rest?” And what if Jesus had told his disciples, “For whosoever would save his life will lose it, and whosoever loses his life for my sake will almost find it.?”

My Almost Christianity took on a different light. I realized how many times I had played the game of being one of Jesus’ almost disciples. I recalled how many times I had prayed almost believing and walked through my days as if he were almost risen. It was not a question of theology. It was a question of life-style. Whether or not I had a life-style that could match what I said I believed, whether or not, as some have said, I could walk my talk” (Tim Hansel; When I Relax I Feel Guilty; p. 51).

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“The way of life is narrow, lonely, and costly. We can walk on the broad way and keep our “baggage” of sin and worldliness. But if we enter the narrow way we must give up those things. Here then is the first test. *Did your profession of faith cost you anything?* If not, then it was not a true profession. Many people who “trust” Jesus Christ never leave the broad road with its appetites and associations. They have an easy Christianity that makes no demands on them. Yet Jesus said the narrow way is hard. We cannot walk on two roads, in two different directions, at the same time” (Warren Wiersbe p. 31).

In a few short verses there will be another test. False teachers can only produce false doctrine, which can only produce false changes. Did Jesus change your life? If the teaching of Jesus and the person of Jesus has not changed your life you have every reason to express concern. The narrow gate requires you to abandon your selfishness—conceit—pride—lust—you are not allowed sinful luggage! The narrow gate has a sin detector. Sin and self set off the alarm. Those who attempt to walk down the narrow path with anything other than Jesus—will set off the alarm. The train is bound for Heaven. The plane for glory. The path is marked. Whether train or plane or path—those who ride—who fly—who walk must be holy.

Conclusion

Samuel Logan Brengle was one of the truly great leaders in the Salvation Army movement. A man of scholarship and singular spiritual power, he spoke of the narrow road that leads to life.

“It is not won by promotion, but by many prayers and tears. It is attained by confessions of sin, and much heart-searching and humbling before God; by self-surrender, a courageous sacrifice of every idol, a bold, deathless, uncompromising and uncomplaining embracing of the cross, and by an eternal, unfaltering looking unto Jesus crucified. It is not gained by seeking great things for ourselves, but rather, like Paul, by counting those things that are gain to us as loss for Christ. That is a great price, but it must be unflinchingly paid by him who would be not merely a nominal but a real spiritual leader of men, a leader whose power is recognized and felt in heaven, on earth and in hell.”

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