

The Commands of Christ

Sermon # 16

“Choose The Narrow Way”

Matthew 7:13-14

In our last examination of the commands of Christ we looked at the command recorded in Matthew seven and verse 12 and called “the Golden Rule,” is probably the most universally praised statement that Jesus ever made. You will remember that Jesus said, *“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”* The imperative command in this verse is the verb (*poiete*) where it is translated, “you do to them. Therefore we are to not let our conduct be determined by how others treat you, but rather by how God treats you.

The next imperative command is found in Matthew seven, verse thirteen. *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. (14) “Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”*

It Demands A Choice

The imperative command is found when Jesus very directly and very strikingly says (*eiselthete*) “enter.” What is depicted here is life’s greatest choice. This word in its imperative form stresses immediacy, “do it now!” There will not always be time. The gate will not always be open.

The choice is between the way of life and the way of destruction.

I never read this scripture without thinking of the famous poem by Robert Frost entitled “The Road Less Traveled.” I don’t know that Frost intended any spiritual application when he wrote the poem but it sure describes the choice give in Matthew 7:13-14.

Let me share with you “The Road Less Traveled.”

Two road diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveler, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,

And having perhaps the better claim,

Because it was grassy and wanted wear;

Though as for that the passing there

had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay

In leaves no step had trodden black.

Oh, I kept the first for another day!

Yet knowing how way leads on to way,

I doubted if I should ever get back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost

[Richard Le Gallienne. The Le Gallienne Book of English and American Poetry. Garden City, New York: Garden City Pub, 1935) p. 298]

There Is A Way of Life

“Enter by the narrow gate... because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

The life that is being described here is undoubtedly “eternal” life. So what he is saying is that the path He is describing is the way to heaven.

Some people don’t think that it makes any difference what you believe. If you are a Muslim you can follow the teaching of the Koran, or follow the teachings of Buddha, or Eastern Mysticism, the New Age Movement or get mixed up with Palm Readers and Psychics – all roads lead to heaven. However, Jesus never taught that. He is not one of those “all paths lead to heaven” kind of teachers. He was not into pluralism or inclusivism at all. As a matter of fact, He said very plainly, *“if eternal life is what you want, there is only one way to get there.”*

The concept of the two ways is first set out in the Old Testament. In Psalm 1, “the way of the righteous;” those who delight in God’s law, bear fruit and prosper, and is contrast with “the way of the wicked;” who are driven like chaff before the wind and perish.

Moses presented such a choice to the children of Israel in the Old Testament: *“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, ... (19) therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live”*

What is the way that leads to life? That way is Jesus. Jesus said in John 10:9 *“I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved.”* And later in John 14:6 he said, *“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”* These verses throw the proper light upon our text.

Jesus says, one must *“enter in at the narrow gate”* Clearly it is not just a matter of listening to the truth about the gate or admiring the architecture of the gate. It is not enough to praise it. It is not enough to stand around it. One must *enter* it.

I think the picture of a turnstile probably gives us an accurate picture of “the narrow gate.” People enter into a kingdom of heaven one at a time, because each is saved by a personal act of faith.

Jesus says that only one road leads to life and its not the wide, well-traveled road. But we choose it – not for its comfort and convenience but because of its destination.

There Is A Way of Destruction.

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

We are to enter the narrow gate and travel the narrow road. The broad gate and the wide road may seem the easiest way to travel, but they lead to destruction. The writer of

Proverbs states it well (16:25) *“There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.”*

Destruction spoken of in verse fourteen of our text does not mean annihilation. To be destroyed in this sense does not mean that God causes one to cease to exist. Rather it refers to loss, to total ruin. It refers to the utter and complete loss of well being.

The broad way has more than enough room for all who choose to travel this way. Too travel this road, demands nothing and that is what is so favored. Any lifestyle and any belief system is acceptable. After all, those on the broad way think all paths lead to heaven. Some people just will not accept that there is only one way to heaven. But it is true.

You will not be able to sneak into heaven, or get in by pretending to be someone else. The story is told of Ivan the IV who was the first Czar of all Russia. He was such a cruel man that through history he has been called “Ivan the Terrible.” He married seven wives and he abused them all. He was both an immoral and a violent man. It was said that He use to throw animals off the Kremlin walls just to watch them die. But when he died in 1584, historians record that they shaved his head and dressed for burial in the robes of a monk, hoping that God would think Ivan was a monk and thus allow him into heaven. It doesn't sound very smart but it not any worse than how some disguise who they really are, hoping that God will think that they are someone else.

There are a many misconceptions about the broad way and the destruction that awaits.

First, Some are on the broad way to hell because they have chosen the road of open rebellion. Some even scoff and say, *“the Devil better move over because when I get there I am taking over!* Others boast that they and their rowdy friends are going to have a high old time in hell. But the truth is that hell is real and it not fun.

Secondly, some who are on the broad way to destruction don't believe they will end up there because they believe they can always choose later. People on this path to hell don't see it a path to hell at all because they fully intend to become a Christian, but just not yet.

Third, some who are on the broad way say, *“I may not be a Christian but I believe in God, I even pray occasionally.”*

Charles Colson in the testimony of his salvation says, there came a time when *“I could no longer sidestep the central question God had placed squarely before me. Was I to accept without reservations Jesus Christ as the Lord of my life? It was like a gate before me. There was not way to walk around it. I could step through it or I could remain outside.”* [As quoted by Haddon W. Robinson. The Solid Rock Construction Company. (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1989) p. 128]

Truth of a necessity imposes limitations on what Christians may believe and how Christian's may behave.

Conclusion

According to Jesus there are only two ways; the hard and the easy (there is no middle road); entered by two gates; the broad and the narrow, (there are no other gates). They are traveled by two groups; the large and the small, (there is no neutral group), and it ends with only two possible destinations; destruction or life.