

CHOOSING A ROAD
Matt. 7:13,14

Christ Jesus was drawing His "Sermon on the Mount" to its close. The sermon had explained the nature of the life to which Christ calls men, and the blessedness to which He invites them. It had reached that comprehensive summary of all duty, "therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." Then, He urged all to enter in through the gate thus opened, and He cautioned all against the seducing influences which would disappoint their hopes of a final entrance into the kingdom of God.

This whole passage of scripture implies that there is an inevitable movement of human beings. Our Lord regards the multitudes around Him as all being in motion--none are quiescent or fixed. This transiency and mutability of human life can neither be doubted nor denied. We are not dwellers; we are travellers. We are all on the way. Ahead of us there is the cloud of a vast company travelling; behind us is the clamour of those who follow in our tracks; each one pressing forward. As our bodies are on a pilgrimage, our spirits are also on the way.

In the light of these facts, let us direct our attention to these two verses. In them we shall observe:-----

I. Two Gates

1. The strait gate

"The gate" suggests the idea of a city, a place of safety, fellowship, and plenty. This text is both an invitation and a command. It appeals to the high and heroic within us. But, it also tends to shock and repel. This is true because, the gate being strait or confined, we cannot enter it so easily as ~~the~~ we can the wide gate. To enter the strait gate, much must be left behind. A stripping is necessary. The strait gate is as narrow as the new birth. The strait gate may be taken as expressing the initial acts of repentance and faith, and the commencement of a life dedicated to Christ. Repentance cuts off every sin. We must leave all our sins. We must renounce every wrong attitude. We must renounce our very selves. "For if any man will come after Me, let him deny himself." Faith cuts off all self-righteousness. Self-righteousness is not admitted. Christ makes no secret of the conditions of discipleship. He does not attempt to deck the Christian life out in gay and attractive colors. On the contrary, He underlines and emphasizes its hardships and difficulties. He wants no one to follow Him under the impression that there is to be a pleasant and an easy time of it. And so at the very beginning He confronts His would-be disciples with the "strait gate" of an exacting demand. The life which is in Christ is a life of:---

- a. Safety from sin and wrath
- b. Fellowship with God
- c. Satisfaction in the fulness of God

While it is a strait gate, thank God, it is not shut. It was closed up by sin, and fenced up by the law. Christ opened it through bearing our sins and becoming obedient unto death. "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." Although the gate is open, it is necessary that we be willing to stand alone before we can enter. Also, to enter in at the strait gate requires a resolute purpose and a submissive will.

2. The Wide Gate

The wide gate is easy of access. One may go through the wide gate and hardly know that it is there. No one needs to jostle another in passing through. No one needs to ruffle his garments or to lay anything aside or to leave anything behind in passing through. In order to go through the wide gate, no one needs to part from his companions; all can enter together for the gate is wide. We can enter the wide gate and carry with us all our sins, all our selfishness, all our prejudices, all our hates, and all our lusts.

II. The Two Ways

The world speaks of numerous ways. It especially favors a middle way. But here, our Lord, with more than a touch of austerity in his tone, declares there is no middle way. He puts the antithesis sharply. There is a narrow way, and a broad way. There is no intermediate way. There are just the right and the wrong ways; the good and the evil ways.

1. The narrow way

"Narrow" is an offensive word. We do not like it. It connotes that which repels. It suggests the unpleasant. It smacks of the distasteful. When we hear it we think of the dwarfed mind; we think of the stunted soul; we think of the blurred vision and the contracted view. Why are we to travel in the narrow way? It is surely not because it is easier to travel the narrow way than it is to travel the broad way. Even if such were the case, it is well to remember that Jesus never once appealed to our love of ease in His efforts to win our loyalty. He frankly calls upon us to face the fact that to be a follower of Him involves difficulties. He tells us that to walk with Him is expensive, that it costs to enter in at the straight gate and to follow the narrow way. The narrow way is hard of access.

Still, the narrow way is broad enough to meet all our needs.

- (1) It is wide enough to accommodate all who are willing to travel it. In spite of the narrowness of the gate and of the way, everybody may pass through that gate and travel that way who is willing to pay the price.
- (2) It is wide enough for us to walk arm in arm with Christ. Such a way may be narrow but it is none too narrow.
- (3) It is wide enough to permit all of us to come to our best and to realize our highest possibilities. For the fact that the way is narrow does not mean that those who walk in it must themselves be narrow. The opposite is true. It is as we travel the narrow way that we ourselves become broad. Real Christians are not narrow.

They cannot be. This is true because they share in the nature of Christ. To walk with Christ in the narrow way is to become broad in our sympathies. How boundless was the sympathy of Christ! It bridged all chasms. It broke through all barriers. It went out to good and bad, to wise and foolish, to those who loved Him and to those who hated Him. It took in the whole world. And a kindred breath of sympathy He gives to those who know Him. To walk with Christ in the narrow way is to become broad in our purposes. The purposes of Jesus taken in the whole world. He never will be satisfied with anything less than the complete conquest of the world. And those who walk with him in the narrow way are privileged to work with Him in His great enterprise. To walk with Christ in the narrow way is to become broad in our hopes. Our hopes are so broad that they enable us to face all of life's tragedies with steady eyes and quiet hearts. They enable us to laugh at death and the grave in the full assurance that these can work us no harm, since we are the children of God, and are on our way to be like Him when we shall see Him as He is.

2. The Broad Way

It is easy of access. There is space, and allowance, and freedom in the broad way. All kinds of persons may walk in it. It suits the carnal mind. There is plenty of room in it for all the sinner's likes and pleasures. The world, the flesh, and the devil have full sway there. It is a deceitful way. It is easy to fall into it. It is easy walking on it. It is an unprofitable and disappointing way.

Along one or the other of these ways every living person is travelling now.

III. The Two Classes of Travellers

There is no third class of travellers. As Jesus speaks He sees before Him a vast multitude. In the bosom of the centuries He sees multitudes infinitely more vast. These multitudes are made up of all sorts and conditions of men. They belong to all kindreds and tribes and tongues. He sees the wise, and the foolish, the cultured and the unlearned, the hopeful and the despondent, the young and the old, the rich and the poor. But, as He looks upon this vast and mixed throng He sees them travelling by just two roads.

1. The Few

Jesus says that the narrow way is a way that is little travelled. "Few there be that find it." How few are free from unkindness! How few have hearts clean in sight of God! How few have the courage to be singular and go right! However, the majorities are not always right. If we are to enter by the strait gate and walk the narrow way, we must renounce the privilege of walking with the majority. That is not easy for most of us. We love the crowd. We like to feel that the multitude is on our side. But Jesus very openly declares that those who travel the narrow way walk with the few, not with the many. As we walk the narrow way, we will have few companions but it will

be the safe, right, and best way.

2. The Many

The multitudes travel in the broad way. Jesus said, "And many there be which go in thereat." Men of every age, rank, profession, and employment are in the broad way. It is broad enough for the staggering drunkard, for the dishonest, for the unclean, for the scoffers, for the proud and haughty, and for the religious formalists.

IV. The Two Destinies

1. Life

Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Christ is the only road to salvation and to eternal life. When it is said that the narrow way leads to life it means, that the mind is alive in the truth, the heart is alive with full affection, the conscience is alive in the vision of duty, and the enjoyment of peace, and the soul is alive in joyous communion with God. It implies the activity of our finer faculties, the consciousness of their expansion, the enjoyments of achievement, of progress, of laying ~~in~~ imperishable treasure, a sense of wealth and power in truth and in God, the enjoyment of service with God, the hope of the crown of life, of life in and with God forever.

2. Destruction

The word destruction here means "loss", and is very significant. It is the loss of that which alone can save and satisfy. All who journey upon the broad way come at last to its conclusion. And what do they find? Life? Peace? Happiness? No, they find destruction. Destruction of the higher sentiments, of peace of conscience, of the life of the spirit. Destruction of faith, love, hope, character, and soul. The pains of the final condemnation of God, of banishment from His presence into the darkness unutterable, into the penal fires of self-reproach and remorse. As certainly as the stone sinks in the sea will the individual perish who loves and follows sin. "The wages of sin is death."

Conclusion:

Which way will you take? You have the privilege of choice. No one goes in the wrong way of necessity or by compulsion. You ought to enter the strait gate and travel in the narrow way with the few and receive life eternal. You can do so and should do so now. Remember, you are going to travel one way or the other. The road you travel will determine your goal. One goal is **Life**, the other goal is Death. Let me plead with you, quit now the way that leadeth to destruction and get into the way that leadeth to life. May you have the wisdom and the courage to make the choice of life, a life which is enjoyed even here on earth and which is everlasting and ever-increasing.