

The Road Less Traveled

Matthew 7:13-23

I. There are only two paths.

- A. The destinations are "life" or destruction.
- Life is "zoe," the word for spiritual life or eternal life.
 - So, Jesus is speaking of salvation, of ultimate destinies.
 - The minority enter the gate and follow the path to life.
 - Why only a minority?
 - The pathway to life is counterintuitive.
 - People say Apple computers are more intuitive.
 - The pathways you follow are clearer.
 - They make sense even to nontechnical people.
 - So, it is easier to find your way.
 - You can make choices and get to where you want to.
 - Something that is counterintuitive goes against expectations.
 - The pathway to life is not the one naturally expected.
 - So, what is the pathway most people expect will lead to life?
 - The pathway of achievement and reward.
 - People expect salvation to be based on merit.
 - What is unique about the Gospel compared to all other beliefs.
 - Grace is the difference.
 - Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, even humanism, are all based on merit.
 - What is grace?
 - When I was a kid it was the prayer you said before meals.
 - The word actually means, "unmerited favor."
 - Favor is God's acceptance and forgiveness.
 - To merit something is to earn it or deserve it.
 - So, grace is receiving acceptance by God without merit, without earning it or deserving it.
 - The counterintuitive path to life is the path of grace.
 - Why does it go against expectations?
 - Because life continually reinforces the idea of being good, doing well, and working hard, all leading to reward.
 - That is what capitalism is all about.
 - We learn that in school, in sports, and yes, in religion.
- B. We misunderstand the problem of sin.
- We confuse the problem of sin with our particular sins.
 - Our sins are the outward expression of the real problem, our hearts.
 - It all goes back to Genesis.
 - Adam was a royal figure, a ruler, our representative.
 - God established a representative system. Adam's choice was ours.
 - That seems unfair but it was actually grace.
 - So, Adam sinned, and he and his posterity (us) fell.
 - The change was radical. Our very nature changed, not just our behavior.

- Adam had been holy. Now Adam and posterity became unholy.
 - This was Jesus' theology (Matthew 7:9-11).
4. This is critical to our understanding of redemption.
- If our behavior (sins) is the problem, we can reform ourselves.
 - Then the pathway of merit and reward is the right path.
 - But if our nature is the issue (evil), we have no solution.
 - We are helpless and hopeless unless there is grace.
- II. Jesus says there is a gate and a pathway to life.
- A. A gate is an entry point.
- Jesus used this metaphor more than once (John 10:9).
 - Jesus is the gate. We enter the path of life through him.
 - This refers to Jesus' role as Savior Redeemer.
 - Remember, we said that God established a representative system of redemption.
 - God is just. "The wages of sin is death."
 - Justice demands that wrongs be made right.
 - A redeemer could buy our freedom and forgiveness.
 - Qualifications of a Redeemer
 - Must be another human being.
 - Must have no sin of his own.
 - To exchange himself for more than one life, must be God.
 - Jesus is the only one qualified.
 - He exchanged his life for ours. He represented us.
 - From the perspective of a holy and just God, we deserve judgment.
 - But instead, Jesus took the judgment we were due.
 - Rom 8: he fulfilled "the righteous requirements of the law."
 - In other words, the law said the penalty was death.
 - But Jesus fulfilled the law for us, so we could be free.
 - But look at the end of our passage (Matthew 7:22-23).
 - Jesus says many will think they were following him.
 - But he will say, "I never knew you" (no relationship).
 - How can this be?
- B. Jesus repeatedly said that belief is the key (John 5:24).
- But our culture misunderstands the Biblical meaning of belief.
 - To believe in our culture is an intellectual thing.
 - In the Bible, it means "to trust in or rely upon."
 - Secondly, it is a trust that leads to commitment/action.
 - Back to the question of merit vs. grace.
 - What am I trusting in (believing) to gain forgiveness and life?
 - Am I trusting in my merit, my goodness, what I deserve?
 - Or am I trusting in what the Redeemer did for me?
 - Am I trusting that he took my place? Therefore, God promises me forgiveness by grace.
 - We all need a conversion, a change in nature, not just behavior.
 - It requires a transfer of trust. What are you trusting in?
- C. Beware of false prophets! They are more common than you think.