

Matthew 7:13-14

The Road Less Traveled

What do people hate most about Christianity? No doubt one could do a historical survey and find countless issues. During the Enlightenment, for example, miraculous claims came under assault. During Modernism, doctrines like creation and the veracity of Scripture were attacked. In our postmodern society, truth claims and moral statements on life, sexuality, and what it means to be human are challenged. But the single issue that people hate most about Christianity is its claim of exclusivity. We believe that Jesus is the only hope of salvation.

This is clear throughout history. The most significant threat against Israel as they conquered the Promised Land was syncretism. Their constant compromising with the Canaanites led them away from the Lord. When Alexander the Great conquered much of the West, he brought with him Hellenism. Greek culture shaped language, societal norms, and religion. The Romans adopted a similar policy but instead of spreading Hellenism, they spread syncretism. When they'd conquered, they would adopt their gods assuming they would adopt Roman gods. The Jews refused to the point the Romans burned Jerusalem to the ground.

Christians had the same problem. By refusing to worship their pantheon of gods, they were considered outcasts. Prior to their executions, they were asked to recant and to sacrifice to the gods. The Romans didn't mind their faith in a resurrected Messiah, what they didn't like was their refusal to Romanize their faith.

This is still the case today. Would Christianity be constantly mocked and threatened in the West if it just went along? Its claim of exclusivity makes it an enemy.

Jesus begins exploring **Two Directions**. The first metaphor Jesus gives regards two gates described as *narrow* on the one hand and *wide* on the other. Without a doubt, there is an abundance of literature to connect the easy road with immoral living and the narrow road with piety. To be fair, such applications are legitimate. This is a reasonable and tempting conclusion. We are more tempted to look like the world and to go along with its morals than we are to choose godliness. For example, I am unaware of many young men tempted away from pornography or vain glory or pride and toward generosity, prayer, and unconditional love.

But this passage fits within the broader argument of the Sermon on the Mount. Throughout this sermon, Jesus has been contrasting two Kingdoms: the Kingdom of Man on the one hand and the Kingdom of God on the other. Consider what he has said about each. The Kingdom of Man is characterized by hypocrisy (5:17-48), validation seeking (6:1-18), and anxiety (6:25-34). This is not the blessed life. The Kingdom of God, however, is characterized by inner righteousness (5:17-28), deep intimacy with the Lord (6:1-18), spiritual health, (6:19-34), and love. This is the blessed life.

He brings it all together by contrasting the two roads. First, he contrasts the easy and difficult road. The way of Man's Kingdom is described as easy while the way of God's Kingdom is described as hard. The former road masks unrighteousness, for example, rather than addressing the evil in our own heart. Likewise, not committing adultery is significantly easier than warring against lust. On the surface, living for the validation of others is easier than the validation of the Lord.

Ultimately, the road is easy because we are welcome to carry as much luggage as we want – sin, pride, jealousy, discontentment, and resentment. On the surface, that is our preferred road. In contrast, the way of God's Kingdom is hard. It requires us to address our broken & wicked hearts. We must confront our proclivity toward lust, greed, bitterness, and anger. This is difficult work.

Jesus also draws a contrast between the Broad and the Narrow roads. With the advent of mapping technology, we choose the route that is the easiest and quickest to drive. We do the same thing with life. We all want an easy life. We tell ourselves that the easy life requires us to go along. Why take the gravel, country road when a 5-lane interstate is available? Few want to travel down the difficult road. Few are on the road and the way can be rather bumpy. The Way of the Kingdom requires real work.

Finally, Jesus draws our attention to **Two Destinations**. In the 1990's classic sitcom, "Family Matters," Eddie and his friend, Waldo, are traveling to Disney Land to meet with their family. Hours into the drive, Eddie is losing patience. Why isn't he seeing signs for Florida? Waldo looks at the map and says they should soon be passing "Kanadah." "Kanadah?" asks Eddie. "Waldo, that's Canada! We've been traveling the wrong distance for hours." Just like traveling north won't lead to Florida, so too, we cannot reach the blessed life via the broad road of destruction.

Once again, Jesus uses contrast. To begin, Jesus shows the way of man's kingdom leads to destruction. Although the broad road *appears* to be easy allowing us to ignore our heart while condemning the actions of others, it will not lead to the Blessed Life (see Proverbs 14:12). Wickedness, idolatry, hypocrisy, cultural acceptance, and neighborly validation never lead to the blessed life.

Contrast that to how God's Kingdom leads to blessing. This difficult, narrow road leads to blessing by shredding our hypocrisy, pride, anger, bitterness, and anxiety. In its place lay assurance, peace, righteousness, and love. That is the Blessed Life.

In summary, the Road of Destruction leads us to the self and there is no blessing to be found there. The Road of Blessing leads us to Christ and in him is all we long for. CS Lewis wrote, "Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ, and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in."

My wife and I, one day, will take a particular vacation. We will set out without knowing where we are going. West? East? North? South? We'll stop where we want, go where we want, and do what we want. That works for vacation. It's a terrible strategy for living one's life. Where are you going? What road are you on? Does it lead to Christ? If not, it won't lead to blessing.

As your state minister, I, unashamedly, serve the Lord Jesus Christ through the organization of Capitol Commission. Capitol Commission brings gospel hope and spiritual strength to government leaders through prayer presence and proclamation in capitols across the USA and national ministries beyond America.