

The Way of Life

In his parable recounted in Matthew chapter 7, Messiah likened a believer's walk in life to a traveller who has two pathways to choose from: one broad, and the other narrow.

“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Mat. 7:13-14).

Naturally speaking, a person on a journey would choose the wide open path which most people use – to intentionally decide to use a narrow and difficult route instead would not be normal. But the call of Messiah is not normal so far as fleshly things go: it is a call to exclusivity, and separation. It is a call to choose the only way that leads to the desired destination, away from the multitudes. The journey may well be a lonely one, as there are few travelling companions by comparison, but when the destination is reached, it will all be seen to be worth while.

There is then, a specified Way that leads to life. It is a Way ordained by God from the beginning, and it is the only route to obtaining life. From the beginning it was so, for in expelling the first sinful pair from the Edenic Paradise, it is recorded that: “he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the Garden of Eden, Cherubim and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” (Gen. 3:24).

From these words we learn that although man was expelled from the Garden, and all the privileges thereof, he would not be without hope. There was a Way: “the way of the tree of life”, and that Way was preserved by the Cherubic flaming sword. The sword had two functions: 1. To keep man out of the Garden, and 2. To preserve, or “keep” the Way to the Tree of Life. This Tree was in the midst of the garden, which means that it was not only the gate that was preserved, but the entire pathway that led to the Tree. The Tree of Life was evidently there to provide everlasting life after a period of probation in the garden, and through their failure, both Adam and Eve were excluded from it. But the keeping of the Way provided them with hope – the hope that at some time they would be able to access it, upon Yahweh's terms and conditions. The partaking of the Tree was not removed from their grasp altogether: it was merely deferred, so that upon the principle of acceptable sacrifice they would eventually be granted access to what it represents. Hence it is written in the Proverbs: “Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life” (Prov. 13:12). Adam and Eve would have experienced sickness of heart that they were excluded from the fellowship of their Maker, and barred from the Tree of Life. Yet the hope was still there - and that hope extends to us:

“... to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7)

By the time we reach Genesis chapter 6, we find that the Way of Life and all the principles that it involved had become corrupted: “... God looked upon the earth, and, behold it was corrupt; for all flesh **had corrupted His Way** upon the earth” (Gen. 6:12). The natural bent of man is to the doing of evil, and the perversion of the right Ways of the Deity. Hence the Apostle echoes this language, saying that:

“there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all **gone out of the Way**, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, not one ... Destruction and misery are in their ways: and **the way of peace have they not known**: There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom. 3:11-18).

PROVERBS AND THE TWO WAYS

In the book of Proverbs, this theme of the Two Ways is a prominent feature. Hence chapter 9 gives the cry of Wisdom: "Forsake the Foolish and live; and go *in the way* of understanding" (Prov. 9:6). And for those who would leave the Way, it is written that "The man that wandereth out of *the way* of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead" (Prov. 21:16). From these words, we learn that the Way involves "understanding" - and that those who lack this understanding and forsake that Way, will remain in the grave with the multitudes of others that have done likewise.

Proverbs chapter 6 also speaks of this Way: "... the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are *The Way of Life*" (Prov 6:23). And again in chapter 10: "he is in *the Way of Life* that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth" (Prov. 10:17). And again in chapter 12: "in *the Way of Righteousness* is life; and in *the pathway* thereof there is no death" (Prov. 12:28). These combined testimonies leave us in no doubt that instruction, reproof, and righteousness form part of the walk in life of those who would hearken to the voice of Wisdom.

By contrast, the "broad" way leads only to death and destruction: righteousness forms no part of the walk of unrepentant sinners. Of the Harlot woman it is written: "Her house is *the Way to hell*, going down to the chambers of death" (Prov. 7:27). Here are the Two Ways plainly exhibited, one of life, the other of death.

SEEKING HEAVENLY THINGS

Associated with the Way of Life as described above, is the acceptance of "reproof". The wise man will hearken to the voice of reproof, whereas the pride of the foolish will not permit him to receive instruction. The Prophet Isaiah provides an exhortation:

"Let the wicked *forsake his way*, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto Yahweh, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon ..." (Isa. 55:7).

For those who walk along the broad way, there is always the possibility of repentance, if the traveller has the humility to be corrected. "Let the wicked forsake his way" is the call to depart from the path of ungodliness, and seek after the Way to the tree of life. Interestingly, Isaiah continues to speak of the Divine Ways thus:

"... for my thoughts are not your thoughts, *neither are your ways my ways*, saith Yahweh. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, *so are my ways higher than your ways*, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8-9).

Sometimes this passage is cited to demonstrate how the ways of Yahweh are unfathomable to man, being beyond his capacity to understand. But whilst it is true that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:14), it is also true that men and women of the spirit should seek to understand those things. So we read in Colossians chapter 3:

"If ye then be risen with Christ, *seek those things which are above*, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:1-2)

The point is that although the ways of the Living God are far above the ways of the natural man, those who heed the reproof of wisdom should make His Ways theirs. Rather than being unfathomable, the ways of Yahweh are revealed in the Spirit Word that He has caused to be written for our learning. We must therefore aspire to, and seek heavenly things: i.e. "things above," and it is by so doing that we

shall ultimately depart from the grave at the appointed time. As another Proverb states: ***“The Way of Life*** is above to the wise, that he might depart from hell beneath” (Prov. 15:24).

THE OLD PATHS

The world in which we live is obsessed with progression, development, and moving forward. To look back upon former ways is regarded as being “old fashioned”, and not keeping up with the times. Indeed, even amongst the congregation of those who should know better, there are movements for change. Changes regarding the roles of Sisters in the family of God, the acceptance of those of other denominations, the embracing of Evolution theory, the acceptance of those who engage in the sins of Sodom, changes on how we view Bible Prophecy to name but a few. But Scripture is different: “meddle not with them that are given to change” (Prov. 24:21) is the Divine maxim. Rather than constantly seeking after new ways, the exhortation of the prophets is to go back to previous standards, and the ways in which the Patriarchs walked:

“Thus saith Yahweh, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ***ask for the old paths***, where is ***the good way***, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls” (Jer. 6:16).

These “old paths” collectively form “the good way”, styled by our Lord, the “narrow way” (Mat 7:14) which leads to life, - the “highway” to the Kingdom, traversed only by the faithful few who find it.

But this Way was to be clearly defined and preserved by the setting up of “waymarks”, and the raising up of “high heaps”: “Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart towards the highway, even the way which thou wentest” (Jer 31:21). These are words which find their ultimate fulfilment in the future, when the returning exiles shall travel down “the way of holiness” (Is 35:8) to the restored land - yet they are also formed part of Jeremiah’s exhortation to his generation, and ours. The allusion here, is to the practice of travelling companies of merchants, who would raise up waymarks, “pillars, or pointed heaps of stones, to mark the way through the desert against their return”, (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown), referred to by a number of commentators. After this example, the people were exhorted to set up markers, to make “The Way” plain for the benefit of those who desired to turn away from the vanities of the world back to the “old paths” of the faithful, that they might ultimately partake of the glories of the restored Kingdom.

In Jeremiah’s day, this work of raising up “waymarks”, was the work of the prophets, as they cried aloud and spared not (Is 58:1, cp Jer 6:17) to show the Lord’s people the folly of their sins. Even immediately prior to their judgement for the abundance of their iniquities, “Yahweh God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of Yahweh arose against his people, till there was no remedy” (2Chron 36:16). All of the prophets, like Jeremiah, diligently sought to make all classes of Israelitish society hear the call to repent so that none were without excuse - “The Way” was clearly defined in their expostulations for all to enter it, if they so chose. “But they said, We will not walk therein” (Jer 6:16), and instead clung on to the vanities of the heathen, drawing their sins behind them (Is 5:18) as they wandered blindly towards the Day of Recompense - the end result being, as Hosea lamented, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos 4:6). They rejected the cry of the prophets, they spurned the knowledge of the True Way, and preferring instead to follow the dictates of their own evil desires, they reaped the inevitable result - destruction through Divine Judgement.

Continuing this theme of seeking “the old paths” traversed by the Patriarchs, the Apostle Paul spoke of how we should follow their steps. Abraham is: “... the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also ***walk in the steps of that faith*** of our father Abraham, which he

had being yet uncircumcised” (Rom. 4:12). The only way that we can “walk in the steps” of Abraham’s faith, is by walking along the same spiritual path that he walked along: the old paths of faith.

We saw earlier how that Messiah exhorts us to enter the narrow gate, and walk along the narrow way, and that there are “few” that find it. Luke chapter 13 provides a further detail:

“strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, **and shall not be able**” (Luke 13:24).

There are those therefore, who lack the capacity to enter into the narrow gate. They seek to enter it on their terms, and cannot therefore recognise the entrance even when it is pointed out to them. These are those who, though they seek ever so diligently, just cannot find the gate. They are blinded to the things of the Spirit: having eyes that cannot see and ears that cannot hear, they close their eyes and stop their ears from receiving the necessary instruction to find the strait gate. As the Master spoke of his generation: “in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: for this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them” (Mat. 13:14-15).

As the Parable of the sower proves, there are varying states of men’s hearts, and the seed that falls upon the stony ground will not grow and bear fruit. The seed is the same, but men’s hearts differ, and there are certain types of hearts which are naturally inhospitable to the growing seed. They just cannot receive the Word into their hearts: they are blind to spiritual things and deaf to the words of Messiah, and nothing can change that. The situation is aptly summarised in the Proverbs, and the voice of Wisdom:

“Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall **seek me** early, but they shall **not find** me. For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of Yahweh: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof” (Prov. 1:28-30).

THE WAY = THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

What is the Way of Life? John chapter 14 records the words of Thomas to the Master: “Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and **how can we know the way?**” Then “Jesus saith unto him, **I am the Way**, the Truth and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Jno. 14:6). Messiah, therefore, is “The Way”. But being the Word Made Flesh, he is also “the Truth” and “the life”. Often the first and third of these aspects are referred to: the Way and the Life. But he is also “The Truth”. Christ is the epitome of truth and holiness, and is the Way of reconciliation to the Father. Whereas in the Edenic paradise the Truth of God was denied, and the serpent’s lie embraced, in Messiah we have absolute Truth epitomised. We must therefore seek to forsake the deceitful ways of the flesh, and embrace the Truth as it is in him. Then we will overcome, being participants of his victory over the flesh – walking back along the way to the Tree of Life, we will be granted the privilege of partaking of it’s life-giving fruit, and live eternally with our Redeemer.

Christopher Maddocks