

The Sermon on the Mount

"Choosing Between Two Paths" (Matthew 7:13-14)

INTRODUCTION:

- I. This past Summer, in June (June, 2008), a publication called Pew Forum On Religion & Public Life released a religious survey taken in the United States based on interviews with more than 35,000 American adults
 - A. One of the issues covered in that survey was this one: Is there more than one path to salvation?
 1. This question was asked of people who represent a wide range of religious beliefs – from Hindus to Jehovah's Witnesses, and everything in between.
 2. One of the possible answers in this survey is: "Many religions CAN lead to eternal life." Here are the percentages of those surveyed to believe that eternal life is possible through religions OTHER THAN their own.
 - a. Hindus – 89% believe eternal life is possible through OTHER religions.
 - b. Buddhists – 86%

- c. Mainline churches (which include virtually every major Protestant religious denomination that are classified as NON-Evangelical, such as Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Episcopal, and others) – 83% believe eternal life is possible through OTHER religions.
- d. Jewish – 82%
- e. Catholic – 79% believe eternal life is possible through religions OTHER THAN Catholic.
- f. Orthodox (which would include Russian and Greek Orthodox churches) – 72% believe eternal life is possible through OTHER religions.
- g. Evangelical churches (which would include churches such as Baptist, Churches of Christ, and virtually every Charismatic religious group) – 57% believe eternal life is possible through OTHER religions.
- i. Islam – 56% - just over HALF of all Islamic people in the United States believe eternal life is possible through OTHER religions.
- j. Mormon (which is considered by most Evangelicals as being a cult) – 39% of Mormons in the U.S. believe eternal life is possible through OTHER religions.

- k. Jehovah's Witnesses (which is perhaps one of the most prominent religious cults today in America) – only 18% believe eternal life is possible through OTHER religions.
- B. These responses are all very interesting, because the survey showed that MOST people affiliated with a particular religious belief in America believe people of OTHER faiths can be saved without being a member of THEIR particular denomination or church.
- 1. Among Catholics and mainline Protestant religious (such as Methodist, Presbyterian and Lutheran), the view that people of OTHER beliefs can be saved is OVERWHELMING
 - 2. Even the majority of those who view themselves as "EVANGELICAL" agree – and these are religious beliefs that say you must believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He was resurrected from the dead, and you must accept the Bible as the divinely inspired Word of God.
 - 3. So, it's clear that MOST people believe there are many paths to salvation.
 - a. This is a VERY popular view.
 - b. And I think one reason for this is simply because MOST religious people don't want to be seen as narrow-minded or

cult-like, in saying there is only ONE way to heaven, and it happens to be THEIR WAY.

- C. But the question we want to consider this morning as we look at some of the final things Jesus taught in The Sermon on the Mount is this:
1. Is it TRUE that there are many paths to salvation?
 - a. In other words, is eternal life in heaven possible through OTHER religions?
 - b. Is it possible to go to heaven and live eternally with God and Jesus Christ REGARDLESS of what you BELIEVE OR PRACTICE IN RELIGION?
- D. To answer that question, let's FIRST go back to The Sermon on the Mount and see what Jesus had to say on the subject, and THEN take a look at some of the things His apostles had to say about the path to salvation and the way to eternal life.
1. And as we investigate the teachings of Jesus and His apostles let's keep one thing in mind.
 - a. What you or I may personally believe doesn't matter here.
 - b. Personal beliefs or opinions about the way to heaven – whether there are MANY WAYS or just ONE WAY – doesn't matter.

- c. Neither you nor I are judges over another person's salvation. It's not MY DUTY or RIGHT to take the Lord's place in saying WHO WILL and who WILL NOT be able to enter heaven.
 - d. Therefore, we're simply going to let the Lord Himself tell us through Scripture whether there are MANY PATHS to heaven or just ONE PATH.
 - e. And... we're simply going to let the Lord Himself, and His apostles, tell us what a person must BELIEVE and DO to be able to go to heaven.
 - f. THEN it will be up to ME AND YOU to determine for OURSELVES if we have BELIEVED and DONE what we need to believe and do to go to heaven.
2. So let's begin by asking the question: Are there many different paths to salvation – different paths to heaven?

BODY:

- I. Let's start by seeing what Jesus had to say regarding this question.
 - A. In The Sermon on the Mount, recorded in the gospel according to Matthew, Jesus addressed this idea of there being many different ways that leads to LIFE.

1. He said, **Matthew 7:13-14** – *"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."*
2. Albert Barnes, in his commentary about the teaching of Jesus here, says this: *The Savior here probably referred to ancient cities. They were surrounded with walls and entered through gates. Some of those, connected with the great avenues to the city, were broad and admitted a throng; others, for more private purposes, were narrow, and few would be seen entering them. So, says Christ, is the path to heaven. It is narrow. It is not "the great highway" that people tread. Few go there. Here and there one may be seen-traveling in solitude and singularity. The way to death, on the other hand, is broad. Multitudes are in it. It is the great highway in which people go. They fall into it easily and without effort, and go without thought. If they wish to leave that and go by a narrow gate to the city, it would require effort and thought. So, says Christ, "diligence" is needed to enter life.*
3. So just what is Jesus saying here in The Sermon on the Mount about choosing between two paths? Simply this:

- a. First, there are ONLY TWO DESTINATIONS – LIFE which is symbolic of eternal life in heaven, and DESTRUCTION which stands for eternal destruction and condemnation in hell, separated forever from God.
 - b. Second, there are ONLY TWO PATHS or WAYS – the way that ultimately leads to LIFE, and the way that ultimately leads to DESTRUCTION.
 - c. Third, there are TWO DISTINCT GROUPS walking along these two paths that lead to two destinations – THE FEW which are headed down the path that leads to LIFE, and THE MANY which are headed down the path that leads to DESTRUCTION.
 - d. And finally, there are TWO GATES – a NARROW GATE that is entered with DIFFICULTY, and a WIDE GATE that is easy to enter.
4. Jesus said those who expect to inherit eternal life in heaven will be the FEW who take the path that leads to LIFE and will enter through a NARROW GATE that requires effort to get through.
 5. On the other hand, those who will inherit eternal condemnation will be the MANY who take the path that leads to DESTRUCTION and will enter through a WIDE GATE that requires no effort at all.

6. So, to answer the question, there is ONLY ONE WAY that leads to LIFE – not MANY – and the ENTRANCE will take some effort because there are obstacles we must overcome to get through that gate.
- B. In fact, Jesus had already told His disciples a few things He would require of those who would enter into the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.
1. Those who would be His disciples would need to be OBEDIENT and DENY SELF.
 - a. There is no room for those who are filled with pride, have a haughty spirit, or who are self-righteous: **Matthew 6:1, 5, 16** – *"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. 5 And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. 16 Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting."*
 - b. There is also no room for those who have an unforgiving spirit: **Matthew 6:14-15** – *"For if you forgive men their*

trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15

But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

- c. And there is no room for those who have a consuming desire for earthly goods: **Matthew 6:19-21** – *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*
2. Entering the kingdom of heaven will require WORK and SACRIFICE – not that we somehow EARN our way into heaven, but we enter heaven ONLY by putting forth a concerted effort, making it our goal and doing whatever the Lord commands us to do.
3. NO ONE is simply going to STUMBLE accidentally into heaven – we will get there because we made it a LIFETIME GOAL to be in heaven when we die, and we've WORKED at it all along the way.
4. Far too many people have the concept that getting into heaven will require NO PERSONAL SACRIFICE and NO OBEDIENCE to the commands of the Lord.

- a. They are DEAD WRONG!
 - b. No wonder Jesus said: **Matthew 7:13** – *...wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.*
 - c. This is the WAY MOST PEOPLE CHOOSE – coasting along, thinking heaven will be their home because they don't do anything really bad, and are generally good people.
- C. Jesus clearly said the "WAY" to life is "DIFFICULT."
1. Why? Perhaps the MOST OBVIOUS reason for the way being difficult is because it requires us to DO something to get there.
 - a. It requires a righteousness that exceeds that of many religious people: **Matthew 5:20** – *"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."*
 - b. And, as we will see in an upcoming lesson, the "WAY" to life is "DIFFICULT" because requires OBEDIENCE: **Matthew 7:21-27** – *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who DOES THE WILL OF MY FATHER IN HEAVEN. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast*

out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' 24 Therefore whoever HEARS these sayings of Mine, and DOES THEM, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. 26 But everyone who HEARS these sayings of Mine, and DOES NOT DO THEM, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

2. Those are JESUS' WORDS, not mine... not some other preacher... but the words of JESUS!
 - a. HE said there is only ONE WAY.
 - b. HE said only FEW will find it.
 - c. HE said it requires DOING THE WILL OF HIS FATHER IN HEAVEN, and not merely HEARING about God's will – but DOING God's will.
3. Jesus tells us like it is – no illusions, no false promises.

- a. There are only TWO CHOICES, and Jesus exhorts us to take the ONE that leads to life!
- II. But as we have already suggested, the way to life is difficult, and there are dangers along the way. Jesus now warns of one of those dangers...
- A. According to JESUS, there is only ONE PATH to salvation.
1. This is a claim that MANY simply deny.
 2. But look at what Jesus taught:
 - a. He said unless we BELIEVE in HIM, we will die in our sins:
John 8:24 – *"Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."*
 - b. He said He is THE ONLY WAY to the Father: **John 14:6** – *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*
 3. The ONLY PATH to salvation is through Jesus Christ. That's what HE said.
 4. Therefore, the ONLY CONCLUSION I can come to is this – and I say this with all sadness – the hope of heaven will be denied to ALL who do NOT believe Jesus is the only way to the Father in Heaven – which, from what I read here, includes all religions of the

world that do not recognize Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

B. But let's look a little further and see what the APOSTLES of Jesus taught.

1. Peter said salvation is found ONLY in Jesus' name: **Acts 4:12** –

"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

2. The apostle John said whoever DENIES the Son does not have the Father: **1 John 2:22-23** – *Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. 23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.*

a. How many religions of the world do you know that will say Jesus was a great teacher, or even a prophet of God, but NOT the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God?

3. The apostle Paul put it even more plain and straightforward. He said those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ will experience the wrath of God when Jesus comes again:

2 Thessalonians 1:3-10 – *We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly,*

and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, 4 so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, 5 which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; 6 since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, 7 and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 10 when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.

- C. Both Jesus and His apostles were very clear – there is ONLY ONE PATH to salvation and IT ALONE is through Jesus Christ!
 - 1. If what I've just said is NOT true, then consider the alternative.
 - 2. If there is MORE THAN ONE PATH to eternal life, then:

- a. Jesus lied when He said the ONLY WAY to the Father was through Him.
- b. The apostles lied when they said there is NO salvation through any other name other than Jesus Christ.
- c. Jesus died in vain, and the apostles and Christians of the first and second centuries suffered martyrdom in vain.

III. But perhaps the greatest obstacle facing most in choosing the ONE PATH that leads to salvation is they want to choose MAN'S path and not the LORD'S.

A. What's the difference?

1. MAN'S PATH is a method of salvation that is NOT taught in the Bible.
2. The LORD'S PATH to salvation was taught by Jesus and by the apostles.
3. Man's path is WIDE and encompasses a very popular method of salvation, plus the gate is EASY to get through.
4. The Lord's path is NARROW and is traveled by few because it's not popular, and the gate is DIFFICULT to get through because it requires genuine repentance and a willingness to be totally obedient to the Lord.

B. So what is the LORD'S PATH to salvation?

1. First, we must TRULY BELIEVE (TRUST) IN JESUS.

- a. Jesus said we must believe that He is the Son of God whom the Father sent because He loved us: **John 3:16** – *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*

2. Second, we must TRULY REPENT OF OUR SINS.

- a. Jesus said: **Luke 13:3** – *"I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."*
- b. The apostle Paul said: **Acts 17:30-31** – *"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."*

3. We must CONFESS OUR FAITH in Jesus Christ.

- a. Jesus said: **Matthew 10:32** – *"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven."*

- b. The apostle Paul wrote the following: **Romans 10:8-10** – *But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*
 - c. When the believing Ethiopian eunuch wanted to be baptized, the evangelist Philip told him: **Acts 8:37-38** – *"If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." 38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.*
4. We must BE BAPTIZED (IMMERSED IN WATER) in the name of Jesus Christ for the REMISSION OF SINS.
- a. Jesus told His apostles: **Mark 16:15-16** – *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."*

- b. The apostle Peter told believing Jews on Pentecost: **Acts 2:38** – ...*"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*
 - c. Ananias told Saul of Tarsus (who later became the apostle Paul): **Acts 22:16** – *"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."*
- C. When I present this ONE AND ONLY PATH TO SALVATION to people, invariably someone will say, "I have friends or family members who are good people, some who have already died, and they haven't done what you've just said. Are you telling me they going to be lost?"
- 1. If you remember, at the beginning of the lesson I said neither you nor I are judges over another person's salvation.
 - a. It's not MY DUTY or RIGHT to take the Lord's place in saying WHO WILL and who WILL NOT be able to enter heaven.
 - 2. How the Lord judges those people who may not have heard the gospel or who may have been misled by the teachings of men, is not for me to judge.
 - a. Please don't misunderstand what I'm saying here – I DON'T want to suggest that IGNORANCE is an excuse.

- b. If IGNORANCE of the truth IS and excuse, then we do people in the world a GREAT DISSERVICE preaching and teaching the gospel of Christ to them.
3. But, what I'm saying is that I'm quite content to leave the matter of judgment up to God and to Jesus Christ – before Whom we will ALL stand in judgment.
4. However, YOU no longer have the excuse of saying YOU didn't know!
 - a. You can't walk out the door today and stand before the Lord in judgment someday in the future and say you didn't know what THE ONE AND ONLY WAY to heaven was.
 - b. YOU KNOW!
 - c. You can REJECT it, or REFUSE to BELIEVE it, but you CAN'T say no one ever TOLD you.
5. Some will then ask, "Are you telling me I have to be baptized into your church to be saved?"
 - a. First, you're not being baptized into the CHURCH – you're being baptized into JESUS CHRIST for the remission of sins.
 - b. That's what the church is – people who have been baptized into Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins.

6. Still others will ask, "Why do I need to do all that to go to heaven. I'm a good person. Why can't I go to heaven just being a good person without being baptized into Christ?"
 - a. I answer the question this way: We just had the privilege of watching the Olympic Games this summer being broadcast from China.
 - b. But did you know that those athletes are not the world's best? There are athletes in countries all around the world who are much better.
 - c. However, none of those athletes – regardless of how good they are – won any Olympic medals.
 - d. The reason is simple. They may have been better athletes than those in the Olympic games, but the fact remains that they didn't win Olympic medals because they weren't in the competition for the prize.
 - e. To win a gold, silver or bronze medal you needed to be on the team.
 - f. The same is true for you and me. To receive the prize of heaven, we need to be on the Lord's team – we need to enter the competition and have a desire to win at all costs.

CONCLUSION:

- I. Are you on the RIGHT PATH – the ONLY PATH – to heaven?
 - A. Don't come to the end of your life only to suddenly discover you've been trying to get to heaven YOUR WAY rather than the LORD'S WAY.
 1. No matter how GOOD, RIGHT and WHOLESOME your way may be, it's still not the LORD'S WAY.
 2. And in the end, YOUR WAY or MY WAY won't matter.
 3. The ONLY WAY to heaven is the LORD'S WAY.
 - B. In the next few minutes, you're going to be given a choice regarding the LORD'S WAY.
 1. The choice is really simple – you can either reject it, or accept it.
 - a. Saying, "not right now," or "I'm not ready to make a commitment," is actually REJECTION.
 - b. You will be deciding to turn down the Lord's invitation – that's rejection.
 2. But if you're ready to ACCEPT the Lord's way, then here's what you need to do.
 - a. If you've never been baptized into Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, then...

- b. If you HAVE been baptized into Jesus Christ for the remission of your past sins, but haven't lived your life as a Christian the way you know you should, then...