

Is Salvation Easy?

Matthew 7

BQ051612

The following is an excerpt from
The MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Matthew 7.

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it. (7:13–14)

Here is the appeal to which Jesus has been moving through the whole sermon. He gives the call to decide now about becoming a citizen of God's kingdom and inheriting eternal life, or remaining a citizen of this fallen world and receiving damnation. The way to life is on God's terms alone; the way to damnation is on any terms a person wants, because every way but God's leads to the same fate.

Jesus has been giving God's standards throughout the sermon, standards that are holy and perfect and that are diametrically opposed to the self-righteous, self-sufficient, and hypocritical standards of man-typified by those of the scribes and Pharisees. He has shown what His kingdom is like and what its people are like-and are not like. Now He presents the choice of entering the kingdom or not. Here the Lord focuses on the inevitable decision that every person must make, the crossroads where he must decide on the gate he will enter and the way he will go.

Our lives are filled with decisions-what to wear, what to eat, where to go, what to do, what to say, what to buy, whom to marry, what career to follow, and on and on. Many decisions are trivial and insignificant, and some are essential and life-changing. The most critical of all is our decision about Jesus Christ and His kingdom. That is the ultimate choice that determines our eternal destiny. It is that decision that Jesus here calls men to make.

In perfect harmony with His absolute sovereignty, God has always allowed men to choose Him or not, and He has always pleaded with them to decide for Him or face the consequences of a choice against Him. Since mankind turned their backs on Him in the Fall, God has bent every effort and spared no cost in wooing His creatures back to Himself. He has provided and shown the way, leaving nothing to man but the choice. God made His choice by providing the way of redemption. The choice is now man's.

While Israel was in the wilderness the Lord instructed Moses to tell the people, "I call heaven and

earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him” (Deut. 30:19–20).

After Israel came into the Promised Land, Joshua confronted the people again with a choice: of continuing to serve the Egyptian and Canaanite gods they had adopted or of turning to the Lord who had delivered them from Egypt and given them the land promised to Abraham. “Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve,” Joshua pleaded (Josh. 24:13–15).

On Mount Carmel the prophet Elijah asked the people of Israel, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21). The Lord commanded Jeremiah to set the choice again before His people: “Thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death’ ” (Jer. 21:8).

In John 6:66–69, Jesus called for a choice: “As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore. Jesus said therefore to the twelve, ‘You do not want to go away also, do you?’ Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.’ ”

That is the call that God has been making to men since they turned away from Him, and it is the supreme appeal of His Word.

In his poem *The Ways*, The British poet John Oxenham wrote,

To every man there openeth
A Way, and Ways, and a Way,
And the High Soul climbs the High Way,
And the Low Soul gropes the Low,
And in between, on the misty fiats,
The rest drift to and fro.
But to every man there openeth
A High Way and a Low,
And every man decideth
The Way his soul shall go.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus presents still again that great choice of choices. This sermon therefore cannot be simply admired and praised for its ethics. Its truths will bless those who accept the King but will stand in judgment over those who refuse Him. The one who admires God’s way but does not accept it is under greater judgment, because he acknowledges that he knows the truth.

Nor does this sermon apply only to the future age of the millennial kingdom. The truths Jesus teaches here are truths whose essence God teaches in the Old Testament and throughout the New

Testament. They are truths for God's people of every age, and the decision about the gate and the way has always been a now decision.

The choice is between the one and the many—the one right and the many wrongs, the one true way and the many false ways. As John Stott points out, in Matthew 7:13–14 “Jesus cuts across our easy-going syncretism” (Christian Counter-Culture [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1978], p. 193). There are not many roads to heaven, but one. There are not many good religions, but only one. Man cannot come to God in any of the ways that man himself devises, but only in the one way that God Himself has provided.

The contrast Jesus makes is not between religion and irreligion, or between the higher religions and the lower ones. Nor is it a contrast between nice and upright people and vile and degraded ones. It is a contrast between divine righteousness and human righteousness, all of which is unrighteousness. It is a contrast between divine revelation and human religion, between divine truth and human falsehood, between trusting in God and trusting in self. It is the contrast between God's grace and man's works.

There have always been but two systems of religion in the world. One is God's system of divine accomplishment, and the other is man's system of human achievement. One is the religion of God's grace, the other the religion of men's works. One is the religion of faith, the other the religion of the flesh. One is the religion of the sincere heart and the internal, the other the religion of hypocrisy and the external. Within man's system are thousands of religious forms and names, but they are all built on the achievements of man and the inspiration of Satan. Christianity, on the other hand, is the religion of divine accomplishment, and it stands alone.

Even the law given through Moses, though divine, was not a means of salvation but rather a means of showing man's need for salvation. “By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight,” Paul explains; “for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). The law came to show us our sinfulness and guilt before God, and to show us that we are incapable in ourselves of keeping God's perfect law.

But when self-righteous, ego-centered man saw that he was sinful by the law's standard, he simply set the law aside and devised standards of his own. He invented new religions that accommodated his shortcomings and that were humanly achievable. By meeting his own attainable standards, man therefore considered himself righteous. That is what the rabbis and scribes had done in regard to their traditions. They lowered God's standards, raised their own estimates of themselves, and felt they had achieved a righteous standing with God (Rom. 10:3). And that is exactly the type of self-ascribed righteousness that Jesus declares will never bring a person into the kingdom of God (Matt. 5:20).

From here through the rest of the sermon (vv. 13–27) Jesus repeatedly points out two things: the necessity of choosing whether to follow God or not, and the fact that the choices are two and only

two. There are two gates, the narrow and the wide; two ways, the narrow and the broad; two destinations, life and destruction; two groups, the few and the many; two kinds of trees, the good and the bad, which produce two kinds of fruit, the good and the bad; two kinds of people who profess faith in Jesus Christ, the sincere and the false; two kinds of builders, the wise and the foolish; two foundations, the rock and the sand; and two houses, the secure and the insecure. In all preaching there must be the demand for a verdict. Jesus makes the choice crystal clear.

In verses 13–14 Jesus deals with the first four of those contrasts: the two gates, the two ways, the two destinations, and the two groups.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2017 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).