

AUGUST 12, 1990

CHOOSING THE WAY OF LIFE.

We are a nation of people to whom Freedom is very important. One of the benefits (or responsibilities) that comes with freedom is the ability (or necessity) of making choices. In fact, the fact that we can make choice is probably the most evident expression of freedom. We can choose the color of our car: usually the choice we make does not have any lasting significance. We can choose what breakfast food we will (or will not) eat. We can choose the grocery store with whom we do business, the church we attend, the friends we want to cultivate, and the list goes on and on. Some decisions we make are inconsequential. They have no lasting significance in the big picture of life and eternity. In the study of Ecclesiastes, we saw that most of our decisions regarding our physical life do not have a lot of meaning in eternity. Decisions regarding our relationship to God have eternal significance and the choices we make have significant consequences.

MATTHEW 7:13-14 There are many possible interpretations as to what the "strait" or narrow gate might be. One obvious consideration is that there is only one way of salvation. Later on, toward the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus told His disciples, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father but by Me." We say that we believe that Jesus is God Incarnate and we know that God cannot lie; therefore, we must believe that there is only one entry way to the path of salvation. The wide gate represents the wishful thinking of most people in the world -- that anything goes and one religion is as good as the next. All these other possibilities, Hinduism, Buddhism, Muslim, Masonry, Zoroasterism, and all the rest can lead only to destruction and not to life.

Man is basically a rebellious being. We don't want anyone telling us what to do. We resent authority and any form of restriction. The fact that there is only one choice bothers many people and the fact that the only choice is narrow and restrictive also bothers many people. The Christian life is a life of discipline and there are many things that are off limits to us. Limits are set for our benefit and protection. The fact that the gate is narrow and small means that we cannot walk through it with a lot of excess baggage. The biggest thing in most people's lives is SELF. Self is expressed in an unforgiving spirit, selfishness, self-centeredness, self-righteousness, and pride. Many people who are looking for the pathway for their life will come to the "strait" gate and decide that they don't want to go through it because they value all their excess baggage too much.

MATTHEW 7:15-20 The warning about false prophets follows immediately after Jesus' description of the two ways of life -- one that leads to death and the other that leads to life. There are people who claim to have found the way and want to lure unsuspecting seekers in at their gate. Jesus describes these as wolves in sheep's clothing. Their purpose is destruction. The immediate question is "How can we tell the difference between the 'true' and the 'false' leaders? The answer is in their lives and the fruit they bear. Are they unselfish, do they show love, joy, peace, patience, meekness, temperance, faithfulness, gentleness, goodness? If they are exhibiting greed, pride, hardheartedness, arrogance and selfishness, then you can pretty much know the difference. The point is that we can tell the difference and are expected to check it out before setting out to follow any human leadership.

MATTHEW 7:21-23 Even though our profession of faith is important, it must be backed up with action that is consistent with that profession. We can claim to be Christians and say that Jesus is Lord; however, if we do not live under the Lordship of Christ by following His commands, then it becomes obvious that the words we expressed did not have any meaning. The other point that

Jesus makes here is that doing even good things such as preaching the gospel, healing the sick, and other miracles is not going to mean anything on Judgment Day if our basic character has not changed. So many people tend to think that Christianity is just a matter of doing certain things--go to church, get involved, don't smoke, drink, or run around with wild women, help the poor, sing in the choir--unless you have been born again all these things can be of no value. You see, it is possible to do all these good things and do them for the wrong reasons. If this is the case, then our good works are deemed to be iniquity. The judgment that is rendered against such false piety is the same as those that live openly sinful lives -- separation from God for all eternity.

MATTHEW 7:24-27 This word picture that Jesus painted points out the importance of a proper foundation in ones life. You may have the best of building materials--good works, religious things, miracles; however, if they are put together on the wrong foundation, then such a life will not stand in the Judgment. In the case of the two houses, the only difference was the foundation. The same wind, rain, and flood

beat upon both houses. The wise person will build on a rock and only a foolish person would build on a shifting and changing foundation. The mark of wisdom for man to day is found in the choice of following Jesus. Jesus is our rock. He is the Eternal One from the foundation of the world. James tells us that God is the Father of Light in whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning. You can count on changes in manmade religions--it changes to fit the situation and the times in which people live.

MATTHEW 7:28-29 Wouldn't it be good once in a while for the average preacher to take a stand on some issue and declare "this is what we ought to do" or "it is wrong to do that." We are so hesitant in taking a stand because we are so fearful of offending someone. I think some preachers are afraid that contributions will decrease if someone's toes get stepped on. One of the things that made a difference in the way that Jesus taught and the way the scribes taught was the fact that He knew what the Scriptures said and meant. We need to also be informed of what the word of God tells us so that we can act with authority in the various areas of our lives. We put up with a lot of abuse from the devil simply because we do not realize that he has been defeated and that we have the authority to send him away.

We have been given the freedom of choosing the way we will live in this world. The choices we make can have significant impact on our lives and can influence how we will spend eternity.