
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

April 6, 2014

The View from the Top (*Location: Mount of Beatitudes*)

“But the gate that leads to life is narrow and the road difficult, so few people find it.”

Matthew 7:14 (a sentence from the Sermon on the Mount, Common English Bible)

Most people travel the broad road. This is the road that is motivated by a desire to please people; the road that seeks approval of others. Values are forged from observing behaviors that seem popular. When questioned about an unwise decision, those who travel this road answer simply, “Everyone else was doing it.” Travel along this road may bustle with energy but misses the life we were appointed by God to live.

The narrow road is a little lonelier. This is the road of true disciples. Those who travel this road may be sensitive to what others think of them. They may desire to be loved and appreciated as those who travel any road. But ultimately, it is God’s approval that shapes the large and little decisions of life. Thomas Tewell once shared a story of a woman in his New York City congregation who meets friends at the end of the day for drinks. When the friends order another round she excuses herself and says she has to be going. “Where are you going?” her friends asked. Without apology she answers that she is attending an evening Bible study at her church. When pressed why she goes to church she simply answers, “It makes a difference in the way I live my life.”

Many who travel to the Holy Land include in their spiritual pilgrimage a climb up the Mount of Beatitudes, the location where Jesus delivers His great Sermon on the Mount. There they find great views over the Sea of Galilee and many of the sites associated with Jesus’ ministry. The serenity of this beautiful place, however, may be slightly unhelpful for travelers seeking an authentic spiritual journey. The splendor of the setting may suggest that Jesus’ words were calm and soothing – conjuring images of a worship service back home with beautiful music, an inspiring sermon and a lovely Sunday brunch following church. In fact, Jesus’ sermon was radical, demanding and countercultural. They were hard words to hear for many who had gathered that day. Jesus was calling people to a new way of life. Those who chose to follow would be few.

The road up the mountain attracts the casual tourist, of course. But for anyone on a spiritual pilgrimage, the road is difficult and few will find it. It is a road that demands that priorities be reordered, habits changed and room made in busy lives for God. It isn’t a road for the faint-hearted or for those who still care more about what others think of them than obedience to God. But for those who make it to the top, the view is out of this world.

With Your wisdom, O God, direct my steps up the mountain of authentic discipleship. Strengthen my resolve by the unmistakable embrace of Your love for me. In Christ’s Name I pray, Amen.

Doug Hood