

Counter-intuitive Path, part 2
July 16, 2017

In the movie trilogy, The Lord of The Rings, there comes a scene where three of the main characters have come up to the edge of a cliff looking down at the valley of Mordor. Mordor is the valley of the evil Dark Lord Sauron. Here, at the end of the valley is a high wall, with a huge gate. The gateway, when open, is wide. Four soldiers in battle armor march side by side through the gate. The road on both sides is wide, smooth, and flat.

The gate is well guarded by orcs and trolls and such. It seems impossible for our heroes to even get through the gate, much less do so without getting caught and put to death. But this is the way into the valley of Mordor. This is the way everyone enters or leaves.

However, one of the three on the cliff knows another way into the valley. And he steers our heroes there. It is a way seldom used,... unknown by most,... and the road is steep. So this is the way they go. It is the way of victory in the end, though they encounter danger and almost fail in their mission. But the other way, the way of the wide gate and level road was certain to end in their deaths.

Jesus paints a similar picture in His Sermon on the Mount. The goal in his parable is life, eternal life, life in heaven, life with God. He says...

Matthew 7:13-14 (NIV) "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." ⁽¹⁾

Jesus calls us to enter the small gate. The big cities of that day had walls and gates for protection from invading armies. Jesus is picturing a wide gate and a broad avenue beyond, both into and out of the city. Many cities had more than one gate in the walls, some large and others small. The smaller ones were often in out of the way locations, used mainly for repairing the wall and such. They were less often used by most people.

Jesus encourages us to look for that one special gate that leads to life. It is the way that few people find. **Why do so few find the path to life?**

1. Most choose to believe that most people will enter heaven. This is a common belief today. Most people are mostly good and it is believed that good people make it to heaven. But Jesus says that is not so.

Matthew 7:14 (NIV) But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

The majority will not enter life with God, even though they want it. Most everyone wants eternal life. Even the atheists, if you convinced them it were possible, want eternal life.

The problem is that being mostly good isn't good enough. Being mostly good means we are partly bad. We are sinners. A murderer is a murderer even if he only kills one person. He is forever a murderer.

A robber is a robber even if he only robs one person. He is forever a robber.

A sinner is a sinner even if most of the time he is not committing sins. He is forever a sinner. We sin against God and each other. And we do so much more than we think. We not sin the big sins of murder and stealing. But we sin the sins that lead to them, things like hate, resentment, lust, envy, griping and complaining about our lot in life, blaming others for our problems, pride and ingratitude towards God.

Sin disorients us so that we head down the wrong road. I'll illustrate with David's story. David was hiking the Appalachian Trail. This one day he was headed for a place called Peck's Corner, a shelter to stomp and camp in. It is in North Carolina, not far from the Tennessee border. David came upon five men resting on a boulder by the trail. He stopped to chat and they asked him where he was headed. When David answered, "Peck's Corner," the five men did not answer right away. Finally one of the five said, "Peck's Corner is the other way." "That's where we're going."

"No, no, it's this way," insisted David, pointing up the trail ahead of him. In unison, five heads shook in disagreement. Five to one said David was wrong, but he still wasn't convinced, until he consulted his compass. The compass made it clear. David was going in the wrong direction. He had been hiking for hours, moving steadily away from where he wanted to be.

He had fallen earlier that day and got up dazed and disoriented and started walking. Certain that he was still going the right direction, he hadn't bothered to consult his compass. That was a costly mistake.

Direction, not desire, determines your destination. Getting where we want to go depends on going the right direction on the right road. Lots of people want to get to heaven. But many, according to Jesus, are headed in the wrong direction. Sin disorients us. When the focus of our lives is us instead of God, we are living the wrong direction. Even though most people are basically good and want eternal life, their sin has them headed down the wrong road.

2. Most are hoping God just overlooks sin.

No one hopes that our human judges will just overlook the crimes of the murderers, rapists, robbers and such in our country. We want them to get justice. We want them to get what they deserve. We want good, honest, law-abiding judges that will do right.

Why should we believe a good God would be less just than a good judge on earth? If God just overlooked sin, He would not be worthy of our worship. But God IS just and righteous and will do what is right. God cannot and will not overlook sin.

Isaiah 59:2 (NIV) But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you...

If God overlooked sin, whatever eternal life such a god created would not be very good. If God doesn't deal with our sinful hearts before we get there, heaven won't be heavenly. It will be more of the same as what we are living now. I don't want more of sinful earth for eternity.

Fortunately, God wants the best for us. And that is what He is preparing for us. But He has to deal with our sin in order to provide it. Most people don't want to admit their sin before God and are just hoping He will overlook their sin.

3. Most are wanting to get into heaven by merit.

This too is a vain hope. God points out in the Bible how none of us are good enough for eternal life.

Eternal life is "not by works". (Ephesians 2:9a)

Why can't eternal life be earned?

Ephesians 2:9 (NIV) "...not by works, so that no one can boast."

Man wants to be able to tell God that He owes us eternal life for our good behavior and good deeds. We take pride for the good in us. We overlook most of our own sins. We want to feel good about ourselves.

But the only way to life is through the small gate. To get through this requires humility. We have to admit our sin. We have to come before God like a criminal, admitting that we have no right to eternal life, no right to heaven.

But if we have no right to heaven, what is the path that Jesus speaks of? What is the small gate and narrow road that so few find?

The gate is the good news of forgiveness of sin in Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NLT) For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

God sent Jesus to live a perfect life, which He did. Jesus is the only one who ever lived without sin. So when His enemies unjustly put him to death, God accepted Jesus' death as a substitute for our sins. God proved this by raising Jesus from the dead. The right road is a toll road. Jesus paid the price for it with his blood, his life.

If you will believe this and turn from your sins, turn to living for Jesus, God promises to forgive you your sins. The basis for our salvation is Jesus' death.

4. The right gate needs to be found. It needs to be searched for. It is not found by most because it is counter-intuitive. It is not what most people would choose.

How do you find the true way to God? Ask Him. Ask God to show you the truth. I have no doubt that He will... IF you really intend to take it. If you just want to know out of curiosity, He may not tell you of the right road.

So ask yourself, "Do you want to know the truth?" "Do I really want eternal life if the only way is through the small gate?" "Am I willing to push aside my pride and humbly admit my sin to God and put my faith in Jesus for forgiveness?"

Jesus invites us to enter. This means there IS a way to eternal life, even if Jesus is the only way. The opposite of one way is not lots of ways. The opposite of one way is no way. God was not obligated to make any way to eternal life.

But He has made one way through Jesus. We should be thankful there is a way and tell Him so.

Today, right now, won't you respond to God's offer of life? Put yourself into the death of Jesus. Receive Him as your Savior. Turn your life over to Him as your Lord, and you will be saved.

Then declare who you identify with by being baptized in His name.

(1) Some translations read "strait" is the gate to life, not to be confused with "straight". strait = "restricted or constricted; narrow; tight; confined;" as in strait jacket. The meaning is like the English use of "I'm in a strait" meaning a tight place, a narrow way. The same Greek word is translated a bunch of times in the NT for "to suffer affliction" or "to be troubled" (example: 2 Cor. 1:6; 4:8). It is the idea of being pressed by difficulties.