

Navigating the Way to Heaven

Have you ever driven on a narrow, winding road? If so, you probably took great care to be sure that you kept the wheels on the pavement. Travelling this type of road is challenging enough, but now suppose that the road is unfamiliar to you. Would you be even more attentive to your driving? Now let's add darkness, wind and ice to this scenario. How do you envision yourself behind the wheel in those conditions? Doubtless you do not see yourself zooming along at seventy miles per hour. More likely you see yourself straining your eyes to see what's ahead, concentrating on your surroundings and calling upon the skills you learned in your driver's education course.

Spiritually speaking, the way to heaven is very much like the picture painted in the previous paragraph. Jesus said, "Enter ye it at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." (Matthew 7:13-14). The word "strait" is not at all like its homophone that we use to describe something that is not curved. Instead it portrays something that is narrow. The word "narrow" in verse fourteen means "to press (as grapes), press hard upon." That word is also translated "trouble(d)" (II Corinthians 4:8; 7:5; II Thessalonians 1:6,7), "afflicted" (II Corinthians 1:6; I Timothy 5:10; Hebrews 11:37), "throng" (Mark 3:9) and "suffer tribulation" (I Thessalonians 3:4). The New King James Version renders verse fourteen, "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

In essence, the way to heaven is not a path that is to be travelled frivolously. Unfortunately, that is often the attitude people have regarding the road to eternity. The contrasting way in Jesus' statement is one that is wide and easy. Going back to our driving illustration in the first paragraph, we could compare this broad way to an interstate highway in some of the flatter areas of our country. Those highways leave plenty of margin for error and the driver can see for miles ahead. It's not difficult at all for a driver on that type of road to be lulled into a sense of complacency that leads to inattention to the path being travelled. In an earthly sense, we take the interstate highways because they offer a quick and easy way to arrive at our destination. Spiritually speaking, many take the wide and easy way toward eternity because of the few challenges it presents.

Getting back to the narrow way to heaven, the glory that offsets the road's difficulty is the fact that we have a divine guide to lead us on that way. Just like the warning signs and directional signs on the earthly road, the Bible is filled with warnings (i.e., I Corinthians 10:12; Hebrews 3:12) and direction (i.e., Acts 2:38; I Corinthians 11:1). It is up to us to "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (II Timothy 2:15). Another comfort to aid us as we travel the narrow road is the fact that the author of that divine guide is aware of the twists and turns and stormy elements that can confront us as we journey toward eternity. He has made provision for us in prayer (I Peter 5:7), fellowship with like-minded travelers (Hebrews 12:12) and daily care of our earthly needs (Matthew 6:33-34).

One final point that needs to be made regarding Jesus' words about the narrow way is that each accountable man and woman must make a conscious decision to enter and then continue on that road. Jesus' exhortation is to "ENTER ye in at the strait gate..." He closes by referring to the few who actually "find" it, the idea being that one is actually looking for that road. Some harbor the belief that everyone is going to heaven, regardless of whether or not they obey God through His Word. Such is a fanciful notion proven false by the judgment scene of Matthew 25:31-46 and many other passages that show the disobedient being cast into eternal punishment (cf. II Thessalonians 1:7-9). Others insist on some obedience but not all, wanting to call on God's grace to cover their spiritual carelessness. They want to drive at highway speed down that narrow and winding road. This view is no less dangerous than the first.

Let us take heed to the path we are travelling. Moving along on heaven's way requires our constant attention to the condition of our souls and a lifelong focus on things above (Colossians 3:1ff).