

The Right Way, The Wrong Way, The Cross Way

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There's a wrong way, a right or just way, and then there is the way of the cross. We want to look a little at these ways this morning. I don't think we need to spend a lot of time talking about the wrong way; almost everyone knows the wrong way. It is very simple: people living in sin and ungodliness are on the wrong way and they know it. But the majority of people among professing fundamental Christians are living in what they would call a just way or a right way, and this clouds things quite a bit, but according to the scriptures we can still see that there is a different way besides that. Many times this just way and the Cross way run very parallel; they run down the same road on many issues. But yet the cross way and the right/just way are still two very distinct, very different ways, and that is why we avoid becoming involved in many groups or many things that may be right. For example, the anti-abortion cause. We would all agree with people on the right way that this is wrong. But we cannot become entangled because there are a few places that we can agree, however the problem is whenever we become involved with the just way it darkens the way of the cross. I know it may sound just a little confusing, pray for me. I see this clearly in my mind but getting it put into words is a completely different thing, so bear with me this morning as we try to look at this and sort this out. There is much confusing in the world and I just want to distinguish a few things about the just way and the cross way this morning.

Matthew 7:13 Enter ye in 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: 14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

The last phrase there says, "And few there be that find it." This is talking about the way of the cross; the way that leads to life. Whenever Jesus is speaking here, he tells us to enter in at the strait gate. He says, "*Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:*" He's not necessarily calling this a sinful way, he's just calling it a way. It's broad and it's wide. Today people in different groups are talking about how there are many ways to heaven; you can just choose one and it will lead you there. Well that is a very nice sounding thing, but it is very contrary to the word of God. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life," and many others would say that and still miss the way of the cross. The way is strait and narrow and few find it.

The broad way, like we mentioned, is not necessarily an evil way. It many times is the just way, the fair way, the right way. It is the way that seemeth right to a man but the bible says that way ends in death. The way that 'seemeth right' is often a very just and fair way; doing what is just and right. We can take the bible and use it to discern what is right and wrong and still miss the cross because the cross is far different than even right and wrong, yet at times those two ways (right and cross) run parallel one with another. Sometimes they run right down the very same road together, just like between here and Springfield there are times that other highways intersect onto highway 60. For example near Marionville there's a place where HWY 13 meets HWY 60 and they run together on the same road for a while. It's both HWY 60 and HWY 13. But eventually there is a little sign that says HWY 13 goes to the left and HWY 60 continues on straight, so you have to be alert if you want to stay on the way that you are going.

This is just the way it is about the strait and narrow way and the broad, wide way. Sometimes the broad, wide way or the right, just way runs parallel or on the same street that the cross way or strait way does. But then the cross takes a very distinct difference also. Jesus makes it plain on the Sermon on the Mount when he said, "You've heard by them of old time an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." That's the right or just way, but yet Jesus said, "I say unto you if someone smites you on one side of the face, you are to turn the other." There is the cross way; it's very different and very distinct from the right or just way. The just way keeps our life. The just way defends what is ours and defends our rights. The just way causes us to rise up against others to defend someone else's rights, and that seems right at times. But the cross way is a completely different way. It is the way Jesus took and he said it is the way that leads to heaven; leads to life.

The just way is trying to make the world a better place. The just way is trying to eliminate evil. All of that sounds real good, but it is not the cross way. It is the right way to men, but it is not the cross way. The just way talks about wars; they call them, "just wars" where they have several categories of things and if all of these things or conditions are met, it would be called a "just war". Yet that is not Jesus' way. The just way protects my plans, my dreams, my hopes. The cross way forsakes them. The just way has a deep concern for my future and what is going to happen in this life. The cross way is completely different from that.

Today there is a movement among evangelicals that talks about the 10 commandment and using them as a method of spreading the gospel. I am not in complete disagreement with it except for the fact that it only brings us to a higher moral plane, but it does not necessarily bring us to the cross. The method goes something like this: you begin talking to someone and ask them if they are a good person. Most would say that yes, they are a good person. Then you say, "Well, can I ask you a few questions?" If they respond properly they'll say yes. You ask them, "Have you ever told a lie?" Almost every one will say yes, they have told a lie. "Well, according to that statement, if you have told a lie, what does that make you? It makes you a liar." Then you ask them, "Have you ever stolen anything? Even a very small thing? What does that make you? It makes you a thief. Have you ever disobeyed your parents?" Almost everyone would say, "Yes." "Well that makes you rebellious." They go on and add a few things that Jesus talks about. "Jesus said that if you look at a woman to lust after her you have committed adultery in your heart. Have you ever lusted after someone else? What does that make you? An adulterer. Jesus also said that if you have anger in your heart towards someone and you would like to do them harm, in your heart you are a murderer." It goes on this way for a while and then, "Well, all right let's look at this now. By your own confession, you are a lying, thieving, rebellious, adulterous murderer. Do liars go to heaven or hell? Do thieves go to heaven or hell? Do rebellious people go to heaven or hell? Do adulterers and murderers go to heaven or do they go to hell?" "Where do you belong?" This is meant to bring people to the realization that they do not belong to go to heaven. Then they proceed to show that what they need to do is ask for forgiveness and basically go through the very same method of salvation that nearly everyone else uses: that you need to ask for forgiveness and receive Jesus into your heart. He forgives you because he has taken all the penalty for our sins. And people go right on from there living a very just life, often times a very moral life or are on a higher moral plain than what they are used to, but it is still just another form of the broad way because the cross that Jesus has asked us to take up has not really entered the picture. It brings people to an awakening that they are not as good as what they thought they were, but yet it basically only keeps them on this just way. God has not just called us to give his 10 commandments. God has called us to be followers and disciples of Jesus Christ. We'll see what Jesus said about that in just a minute. We can live very high, moral lives – very good lives – and miss the way of the cross.

I talked with a man this last week who is really struggling with the world. I was talking with another brother on the way down to visit with this man and this brother wanted to know more about the way of the cross, about the true salvation that comes through the way of the cross. He said he just can't hear enough about it. We arrived where we were talking with this man and he was very troubled. You could see it written all over his face that he was bothered or burdened. He felt like he was being torn in two. He said there was a fight or battle raging within him; the world was pulling on one hand and God was pulling on the other, and he said he did not know how to battle it. The music where he was living plays all the time and it was very enticing and alluring to him. All of his friends there, there were very few people that were Christians there and the others were constantly pulling at him and they have a hold of some sort in his heart or in his life. As we talked to him, he just kept explaining this battle that was raging and how he was almost powerless to fight this battle. He said a few years ago he was a drunkard, a very angry and bitter man and God has healed him from all of those things and he does not want to go back. He has no intention of it, but yet he does not really have the victory over the world that he would like to have. There is still a great enticement to him from the world. I think there are many people that are on the just way that are in the same place; they see what is right and wrong and might have been delivered from some very bad things, yet the world still has a hold on them. The world has a few handles in there that it can reach on and get a pretty good hold and pull them back towards it, and yet they don't really want to go that way. They want to follow the Lord, but there is this battle raging inside. As we talked to him it came up that it was like he needed to make a once and for all decision to renounce the world. As we continued talking to him it became very clear that that was the very problem. He needed a willingness to renounce the world once and for all. We pressed it upon him that, "It's not only renouncing the world once and for all but the decision you are making right now needs to be just as clear. You are either going to renounce the world or you are going to renounce Christ. If you do not make a decision, you are on the broad way. You are renouncing Christ."

You could see the turmoil and struggle written all over his face. I turned to the other brother and I said, "You wanted to see more of true salvation? Right here it is. Right here it is – a man facing the cross. Facing the crossroads of which path he is going to take once and for all." I told him we could not make that decision for him; we told him the cross was laying right there in front of him. He could step over and continue to live a very moral life, but he was rejecting Jesus if he did that. Or he could reject the world, take up the cross, and follow Jesus. There are few that find it because to a very few do the two ways ever become that plain. Which one of them will you take?

Most look at this, what they would consider the narrow way, to be just doing what is right. Doing the up-right, moral thing. Standing up for what is right. But that is not the cross. It looks like a very courageous road, but it misses the cross. The cross road is strait and narrow, and few there be that find it. It's like two roads that you come to; you look and see two roads that are seemingly going the same direction but one of them looks very difficult; it's full of clouds and there are storms in it. Sometimes you can't even see if you are on the right road or not. But when you are on the just or right road, the way looks very clear, it's black and white all the way, the sun is shining most of the time and it's very easy to see that, "Yes, this is the right road." Many religions fall into that trap. Many churches fall into that trap. They have their doctrines very correct and very straight and they just walk right in it [this right or just way]. But Jesus calls us to a cross.

Luke 9:23 And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

The just man sees the cross or capital punishment as just and right. There have been wrongs that are done and it has to be straightened up or fixed. The cross to the just man is where justice is served and someone who is guilty and worthy of punishment gets their just reward. But to the Christian, the cross is not something that is forced upon them because they deserve a just punishment. The cross is something they willingly choose to take up. The cross to the world is an instrument of death that is reserved only to the worst of criminals. But the cross to a Christian is the way to life. It is the path that Jesus has given that we choose to take up ourselves. This is why it begins to look very cloudy to the world. Why would you choose a path like that? You could be on the broad, wide way that is just and right. Why would you choose a path that is so obscure and so difficult? The reason is because that is the path Jesus took and Jesus said, "Follow me." It's a choice that we make. It's coming to the place where we see the world and we can see the world in justness and rightness, yet there is a little hint of a path just over to the right that is strait and narrow that leads to death, suffering, shame, and a cross to carry along the way ... and some people choose to take it.

Jesus said, "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*" What we did not tell the brother we were counseling or talking with the other day about a once and for all decision to forsake the world is that that once and for all decision to forsake the world has to happen every day. We didn't want to burden him with tomorrow; he needed to face today. But the once and for all decision to forsake the world and follow Jesus doesn't sound quite right – it's a once and for all decision we have to make tomorrow too. We will either renounce the world and follow Jesus or renounce Jesus and follow the world, and we need to keep it just that clear. Absolutely that clear, because that is exactly what Jesus sees and it is exactly what is happening. Just choosing the right way and leaving the cross is renouncing Jesus. The world does not like to look at it that way and we don't either, but that's the way it is.

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." Let him deny himself. I don't know how many people I've talked to that say, "All I want to be is who God made me. I just want to be me." But this statement here just stamps that idea completely out. Jesus said you have to deny yourself first. You cannot be you. You have to lose yourself to be a disciple of Christ. That is a big hurdle to overcome. We like being who we are sometimes. Sometimes we don't, but for the most part people want to be who they are. We have to lose our own life before we can find it. We have to lose our own ambitions, or own dreams, our hopes, our plans before we can find life.

Verse 24 goes on to say: "*For whosoever will save his life shall lose it:...*" Do you want to be you? You be you – you follow your dreams, you follow your ambitions, you follow your goals. Be you ... but you will lose your life. There is a price tag that comes with continuing to be you. "*...But whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.*" I believe this is just exactly what it is talking about. I do not believe it is offer ourselves as a martyr; actually losing our physical life. It could involve that, but what he is talking about is losing who we are to become who he wants us to be. Denying ourselves so that we can take up our cross and follow him. This way cannot be seen with earthly eyes.

The bible talks about faith as being the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. It also talks in Corinthians that the preaching of the cross is foolishness to them that perish. "Well we are doing the right thing! We are standing up for what is right! We are choosing the right path! We've analyzed the situation and we see that there is a right way and a wrong way and we are choosing the right way. But this little narrow you are talking about is complete foolishness!" That is what the bible says will happen. The cross brings a reality of the nearness of His coming. The cross brings us to the reality of the nearness of his coming. Our looking forward to his return. A losing of our life in this world.

Wednesday evening we talked a little about a question, "Are we preparing our lives to live them? Or are we preparing to die?" I think that is something we need to analyze very clearly in our minds and hearts: "Am I living and am I preparing my life to live my life on this earth, or am I living and preparing and making plans to die; to leave this earth?" You know when we make plans to go on a trip we get our tickets bought, we pack our suitcases, we make arrangements so we can leave. We are leaving where we are at. But if we are planning on staying here, we are making preparations to stay here. I realize that there are some things we have to take care of daily, but in those very things that we daily have to take care of, there is a great snare that chokes out the way of the cross. It causes us in a very subtle way to change the way we are thinking and shift things from preparing to die to preparing to live.

Paul said, "It is better that I depart that I can go and be with the Lord. Nevertheless, if he has work for me to do for a little while, I'll stay here and do it." Paraphrasing that, but when a man becomes a Christian and takes up his cross, he is looking forward to the day that he dies and crosses over into eternity instead of dreading it. That is the mark of someone who has a cross. Someone who is following Jesus. They are looking forward to the time they cross over because we believe or say we believe that heaven is a beautiful and wonderful place and we want to go there to be with our Lord. But yet, when we think about death, we dread it. We don't want to go there. So it is very seldom that we really want to take up our cross because we really don't have any big plans to go anywhere. We do not want to pack our suitcases to leave because we really are not in a big hurry to leave. We kind of like it right here.

I've noticed that when a tragedy or calamity happens among church people, plain people who claim to be following the bible, and they start hurting over this loss or calamity and really start seeking the Lord again, they start wishing He would come back. They start wishing the Lord would come back, and begin getting anxious – "what does this life really hold for me?" And there is a sense of reality and hope, "Lord, deliver me from this!" And that is what the cross is doing. Can you imagine hanging on a cross? If you think about it, Jesus hung on there for 3 or 6 hours or something like that. I don't know about you, but I'd just rather somebody would put a gun to my head and shoot me. I wouldn't want to go through that. Yet, there is a sure sign of whether we have a cross or not. We are just pretty comfortable hanging here, but if we have a cross we want to get on through it. We want to get our time put in through this vale of tears and go on to a better place. It talks about in Hebrews, "They had hope of a better kingdom." Is our hope of that better kingdom, or are we just happy to get on pretty fine right here?

There is a wrong way and there is a right way and we are all glad to be on that right way; everyone wants to be considered as doing what is right. But then there is a cross way. "*And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.*" Jesus teaches that without a cross, there is no heaven. The right way teaches that if you just walk the right way you will go to heaven. Many people on the right way are walking the right way, and if we have a cross we will be walking the right way too, but yet it will be entirely different than the right way.

The preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who perish. We have a hope of the resurrection, but do we want it? Or are we just perfectly content to stay on this side as long as we possibly can? We are not hanging on much of a cross if we want to stay on this side as long as we possibly can. Set your affection on things above, not on the things of this earth. God has told us of a place that is more wonderful than we can describe. Just because we cannot describe it doesn't mean we need to just forget about it. The purpose of the cross is the drive us closer to the Lord; to bring us closer to him so it can take us to him.

1 Corinthians 2:9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

That's usually the only part of the verse or the only part of that statement that is read. When referring to heaven, people stop at that part of the verse and say we cannot even understand it. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard. But verse 10 says:

2:10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

Those who are tasting the cross have got an eye to see those things and an ear to hear those things.

2:13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.

God has given us his Spirit and has revealed these things to us and we are not going to be understood by the just man. There is no way we can be until he sees what we see. May the Lord help us to take up our crosses; surrender once and for all the world and our rights, and take up our crosses and follow him. And as we do that, we get to do it every day. The problem is, when we forget a few days, we get pretty comfortable again right back here where we are at.

May the Lord add his blessings.