

Explore the Bible: Two paths, one choice

January 6, 2016

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Jan. 24 focuses on Matthew 7:13-27.*

A few years ago, I completed a personal parenting journey. I have three sons. I had decided while I was a teenager that, if I had sons, I would take each one on a “13-year-old sojourn” to talk about manhood. Each time I’ve taken a son to Colorado to hike, fish, live off the land and talk about biblical manhood. It’s been a wonderful experience.

Two years ago, my youngest son went on his sojourn. We took along a good friend and his 13-year-old son, as well. While hiking, we came across two women who told us to be careful, because they had just seen two moose. Honestly, I didn’t realize there were moose in Colorado. I thought that was just an Alaska thing. When returning, my son looked down the trail and said, “Hey dad, look, a donkey.” To be fair, the “donkey” was pretty far away. When I looked I quickly realized that it was not a donkey, but a gigantic moose. Soon after, we saw a male moose, known as a bull. It was huge! They can be rather aggressive. We quickly switched to a different trail.

All I could think of was a revised version on Robert Frost’s famous poem *The Road Not Taken*: *Two roads diverged in a yellow wood / And sorry I could not travel both / And be one traveler, long I stood / And looked down one as far as I could / And saw a scary moose.* (The last line is my addition).

Two paths

Jesus walked a lot. Obviously, this was common in his day. I remember something I read once that estimated, based on the Gospels, Jesus may

have walked up to 35,000 miles. That's almost one time around the earth! He knew something about paths and pathways, so this teaching shouldn't surprise us.

In verse 13 of our lesson, Jesus described a wide gate and road that led to destruction. He indicated many people walk on this path. In contrast, he taught, "But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:14). The idea of two "life paths" was familiar in Judaism. Ezra even spoke of a right eternal path. But Jesus took this idea to a new level, which is not surprising. The idea of a narrow road in Matthew 7:14 is interesting. When hiking, there almost always is a clear path that is marked. The path Jesus taught about, however, is a different image. It's more like a man with a machete forging his own path. That's how few people are on this narrow path, hence "only a few find it."

Good vs. bad?

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (Matthew 7:15). There was a huge distinction here. The contrast between vicious wolves and harmless lambs or sheep was proverbial. Outwardly, these false prophets looked harmless, perhaps even inviting. After all, Jesus was described as the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. But, inwardly, as Matthew points out, they were ferocious killers. Their work not only is violent, but also is deceptive. Later, in Matthew 24, Jesus warned his disciples to be "on their guard" against such prophets.

Carefully read Matthew 7:21-22. Miraculous powers do not give proof of authentic faith. Many in the first century—even the Roman emperors—claimed to have miraculous powers. The claim here is focused on the phrase "in your name." Evidently, some tried to perform miracles simply by using the name of Jesus. This verse seems to be linked to false prophets who, planning deception, even try to fool God on the day of

judgment.

Rock vs. sand?

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy, Psalms, Proverbs and Isaiah more than any other Old Testament books. The teaching about the wise and foolish builders is similar to Proverbs 24:3: "By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established." Jesus stresses hearing and doing nothing to hearing and actually obeying. Hearing and doing nothing seems to lean toward the way of the Pharisees and their teaching. But Jesus stresses adherence to his teaching is what places a life on the proper foundation.

The Bible is amazingly connected. James teaches something very similar: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says (James 1:22). Proverbs, Matthew and James all are saying the same thing: Eternal life isn't found simply in hearing the gospel, but it is found in responding to it by faith in Jesus Christ.

The Christian can also trust that salvation belongs to our God, and so does the Christian. Think about the images in our lesson. God places the Christian on the proper path. He produces fruit in the life of the Christian. He places the life of the Christian on a solid foundation, Christ. All of these images should lead us to conclude that God can be trusted with our lives, that he is guiding our lives, and that his salvation in our lives is complete. These images point us to the sufficiency of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He secured salvation on our behalf, and he will hold us until his glorious return.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both.

In the Christian life, only one road can be traveled, the way of suffering, the cross and Jesus. You will never be sorry for traveling the narrow path that

is the gospel.