

Sunday, November 1, 2009

**Matthew 7.13-14
You CAN Get There from Here!
SWCOB 11.01.09**

In June, following my high-school graduation,
A friend and I made plans to hop a freight train,
From Chicago, Illinois,
To Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Not too far from my home in Elgin, IL,
There were a set of railroad tracks,
And every evening around 9:00 pm,
A train went through going west.

It was an a uphill grade,
And so most of the trains went slow enough,
One could run alongside and hop on.

That evening, my friend and I hid in the bushes,
“Waiting for the train” (Jimmie Rogers).

We heard the train and so we hunkered down in the grass.

We saw the light of the train as it came around the curve,
And we got ready.

And then just as we were ready to jump out,
The train roared by us at 60 mph.

We stayed there throughout the rest of the night,
And every train that went by,
Went too fast to get on it.

So the next day we took a commuter train into Cicero,
Where there was a huge railroad yard,
Adjacent to the commuter station.

We stood there on the commuter platform,
Looking at all the freight trains heading out,
And wondered how we could get on one,

When a man came up to us and asked,
If we had planned on jumping on one of those trains.

“Oh, no way, sir!” we both exclaimed.

“Well,” he continued, “If you were,
I would hop on that one train there.

In fact I would take that open box car right there,”
He said pointing to a particular car.

“Because on either side of it,
The cars are loaded and it would give you a smoother ride.”

We asked, “And how do you know all this?”

“Because I’m the engineer!” he declared.

And so we did.

We rode through the Illinois prairie,
Up along the mighty Mississippi River,
Through La Crosse, Wisconsin,
And on into the yards in Minneapolis.

After a night in town,
We returned to the yards,
And asked a railroad worker there,
If he knew any trains headed for Chicago.

“Yea,” he said, “The one heading out right now!”

And so we ran across the different tracks
And up alongside of the train and hopped on,
And found ourselves riding across,
The Wisconsin farm land without a care in the world.

Bound for Chicago!!

Little did we know that the yard worker was mistaken.

We weren’t bound for Chicago after all,
The train was going to Milwaukee!

Riding the rails through beautiful Wisconsin,
On a bright sunny day,
Was tremendously exhilarating!

We sped off to our supposed destination,
Unaware of the wrong choice we had made.

And unable to do anything about it,
Had we known!

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Such is life, isn't it?

Choices are made, paths chosen,

And all of a sudden,
We find ourselves riding on the freight train of life,
Barreling toward the wrong destination!

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**Enter through the narrow gate,
For wide is the gate and broad is the road,
That leads to destruction,
And many will enter it.**

**But small is the gate,
And narrow is the road that leads to life,
And only a few will find it.**

Here lies the beginning of the end of the Sermon on the Mount.
Most commentators recognize that Jesus is wrapping things up;
Finishing his teachings on how to live the kingdom life.

From here on to the close of the sermon,
Jesus addresses the theme of choice.

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The subject of choice runs throughout the Bible.

All the way back to the beginning,
God gave the first humans,
The freedom to choose their own destiny.

God said to Adam and Eve,
**You are free to eat from any tree in the garden
(Gen. 2.16).**

But God further warned them of the consequences,
Of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

In another passage, Deuteronomy 11.26-28,
The Lord, through Moses declares,

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse—

**The blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God,
The curse if you disobey and turn away**

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An early Christian document, the Didache,
Puts it this way:

“There are two ways,

One of life,
And one of death,

And between the two, there is great difference.”

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All of us begin life with the wholesome desire for good things.

We all desire happiness,
Meaning, purpose,
Love and security in life.

The question is:
Have we chosen the right path toward those goals?

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There is a story about a foreigner,
Who had come for a visit to the USA,
And got lost.

He had been told that if he was in trouble,
He should call 911,
And so he did.

When the operator asked him what she could do for him,
He informed her that he was lost.

She asked him if he could identify where he was.
And he replied that he was standing on the corner of,
“WALK, DON’T WALK.”

Choices in life are something like that;
The bright flashing of lights spelling out,
WALK, DON’T WALK!

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The Bible has a story about a son,
Who had asked his father for his share of the inheritance.

After he received it, he went off to spend it.

The story is called the Prodigal Son.
The son did not take his inheritance,
And choose to become a hog farmer.

Rather, in the reckless pursuit of the “good life,”
He ended up destitute,
And did the only thing available: slopping hogs.
He didn’t realize until then the choices he had made,
Led him directly to the hog pen.

By the way, I think hog farming a noble profession.

The story is found in Luke 15.11-32.

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Little did we know on that freight train,
That we weren't headed for Chicago,
Until we arrived in Milwaukee!

And what a sight that was!

"Excuse me, sir, what town is this?"

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**Broad is the way that leads to destruction,
And many enter through it.**

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We are not privileged to know the far-reaching consequences,
Of the choices we have made.

Many follow the path of least resistance,
The easy way, the broad way,

And find themselves, at best,
Following down a path of mediocrity,

And, at worst,
On a path that leading to destruction.

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**Narrow is the way that leads to life,
And only a few find it.**

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Jesus describes his way as the narrow way.

I never did like the term narrow.
Before I became a Christian,
I viewed Christianity as narrow:
 Narrow-minded and opinionated.

I felt that to follow the path of Jesus,
This narrow way,

Took the fun out of life,
That it enslaved and shackled,
Repressed and oppressed you.

To follow this narrow way,
Did exactly the opposite of what it promised.

I probably got this feeling from some Christians,

Who were very narrow-minded and opinionated,
Who had had the very life squeezed out of them.

But I was wrong.

To follow the narrow way,
Is not oppressive in nature.

Life in Christ is liberating!!

Liberating because,
Though the roads in life are many,
And the choices numerous and difficult,

There is one narrow path, less traveled,
But brightly lit!

The Good News is the Way of Jesus is the Way to Life.

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Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life.

Oswald Chambers writes;
“If we are going to live as disciples of Jesus,
We have to remember that all noble things are difficult.

Do we so appreciate the marvelous salvation of Jesus Christ,
That we are utmost for His highest?”

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Everything worthy has a narrow door.

Everything that is worthwhile requires discipline.

Take the medical doctor,
The athlete, the musician, the artist,
Anyone who wants to excel at anything;

The requirement for excellence is discipline,
And discipline is a narrow way.

It comes back around to choice.

Like the poem by Robert Frost;
“Two Roads Diverged in a Yellow Wood.”

The poem is about a hiker who comes upon two paths,
One path is well traveled and broad,
The other is less traveled and narrow.

Choices in life have far-reaching consequences.

One has no way of knowing the long term effects,

No matter how long you've been going in the wrong direction;

Jesus says,
You CAN get there from here,

For I am the way, the truth, and the life (John 14.6).

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Repent is the Biblical word for it;
Turning around.

People look at the word repent as if it is something horrible.

But it really just means, stopping,
And turning around from the direction you were taking.

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The Way of Jesus may seem to be the most difficult way.

But when you are riding the rails,
On the train bound for glory,

You can trust the Engineer knows His way.

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Thomas Merton, a Catholic theologian,
Wrote a book entitled, "Thoughts in Solitude."

In it Thomas wrote fifteen lines that have become known,
As the Merton Prayer.

Let me read them to you:

"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.

I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it ends.

Nor do I really know myself,
And the fact that I think I am following your will,
Does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you,
Pleases you.

And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.

I hope that I will never do anything
Apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
Though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore I will trust in you always,
Though I may seem to be lost,
And in the shadow of death,

I will not fear,
For you are ever with me,
And you will never leave me to face these perils alone.”

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I had a seminary professor who once told us:

“There are two choices in life;

One choice moves you towards God,
The other choice moves you away from God.”

My prayer is that you would choose wisely;
Choose the way of God,
It will make all the difference.