

The Sermon on the Mount concluded Matt:7:13-24: Choosing grace and truth, the narrow path and the solid foundation.

Why, then, do only some people spiritually grow and evolve beyond the circumstances of their parentage? I believe that grace is available to everyone, that we are all cloaked in the love of God, no one less nobly than another. The only answer I can give, therefore, is that most of us choose not to heed the call of grace and to reject its assistance. Christ's assertion "Many are called, but few are chosen" I would translate to mean "All of us are called by and to grace, but few of us choose to listen to the call."

M. Scott Peck: *The Road Less Traveled*

The two pathways: Matt. 7:13-14

- The narrow path and the small door, and the broad path and the wide door.
 - A familiar but often unheeded warning. _____
 - The parallel in everyday life: its easy to get into trouble but difficult to stay out of it. _____
 - The conclusion is often to quit before one starts, by not doing anything one can avoid mistakes. _____
 - But, the parallel passage in Luke 13:24 adds the words "strive to" enter by the narrow gate. _____

Two types of trees: 7:15-23

- Good trees, bad trees, and their resulting produce.
 - In the agricultural metaphor, the bad trees are cut down and burned. _____
 - We also see this paralleled in everyday life. _____
 - But, unlike the previous picture, no fruit is the same as bad fruit, and non-producers are also culled. _____
 - The stern warning of v.21-23: you can't escape judgment by being inactive. _____

Two foundations: 7:24-27

- Rock or sand, one is stable, one is not.
 - Luke 6:48-49 adds "the one who dug deep and laid his foundation on the rock." _____

- Effort is required to find a stable foundation. _____
- We know of one. _____

The irony of the Christian walk

- Its not as easy as all that
 - "Give me your heavy burden and take my yoke for it is light" (Matt. 11:29), yet the "difficulties" pronounced here. _____
- The irony of expected blessing
 - It was supposed to be easy after I made that humiliating public confession. _____
 - Where are the perks? _____
- The irony of submission
 - We get there by stopping? _____
 - But that which we stop is walking our own path. _____
 - Back to the "yoke." _____

The entire Sermon on the Mount is a study in contradiction and irony. The first teaching of Jesus contradicts all the ways of the world: ambition, self-preservation, self-protection, mistrust, and greed. It is also ironic in that it proposes the path to a blessed and fulfilled life is by way of sacrifice and self-renunciation. On the surface this seems similar to that offered by some other religions. Yet the always unique factor, and that which is missing in other religions, is grace. Not the grace of mythology and "nice" stories, but the grace of an ever-present and infinitely self-sacrificing God, one that has never asked us to do more than he has already done.

The ultimate irony, then, is grace. It is in submission to God that we receive grace, and by grace our yoke is made light. Though there is a requirement of work and effort, grace is given to make that work possible and even easy. Love, by definition, is the willingness to exert effort (contrary to sentimental musing), and it is only by grace, as the result of our submission, that we receive the capacity to love as God loves. _____

Of faith, hope, and love, the greatest is love (I Cor. 13:13). We gain love by grace . . . Abide in grace and love.