

Congregational handout; outline sermon text on following pages

Sermon Notes & References

The Two Ways
Isaiah 26:7-13

January 10, 2010

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A. Introduction

1. the poet, Robert Frost, recalls an event while he was out walking in the woods, probably on an autumn day

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same.

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.—{2}.

2. let me give some examples of facing two divergent paths
 - a. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus spoke these words: ¹³ Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. ¹⁴ For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.' (Matthew 7:13-14). A few fishermen, a tax collector and some others – twelve in all – listened and followed Him, the Way less travelled, and that has made all the difference
 - b. She was born in a Presbyterian family in Northern Ireland, the eldest of 3 sisters and 4 brothers. The family was wealthy, her father the owner of a mill, yet he died when she was only 18. At about that time she started a Sunday morning class for the poor girls working in the mills, who wore shawls instead of hats and so were called 'shawlies.' The class which grew so large they had to get a building that would seat 500; later she did the same thing in Manchester. But at age 20 she heard Hudson Taylor speak, and two years later she came to a fork in the road: she hear God's, 'Go ye ...' Would she continue to lead a useful Christian life at home? No, she chose the road less travelled. Though rejected by China Inland Mission on account of her frail health, within 3 years Amy Carmichael was in India seeking to save, to rescue and to care for abused, helpless and homeless children – and that made all the difference.^{-(3)}}
3. Israel was about to enter the land of promise. They faced a choice. That choice was explained to them. We had a few verses of that explanation on our welcome overhead. Let me read the full passage – the LORD's word through Moses' lips – ¹⁵ See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; ¹⁶ in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong *your* days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, ²⁰ by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.' – Deuteronomy 30:15-20

4. today, you may be facing a choice,
 - a. a branch in your road of life
 - b. like Frost's poem, the two ways may seem much the same
 - c. but the right choice will make all the difference

B. The Right Choice is God's Way 26:7

1. here is a more literal translation: [The way for the righteous is straight, straight wilt thou level the path of the righteous.](#)^{4}.
 - a. the emphasis in this verse is not on righteous –
 - (A) it is not about leading a pious, exemplary course of life
 - (B) nor does it describe how to become righteous
 - (C) but for those already reckoned among the righteous
 - (D) a way prepared for those who choose God's way
 - b. Let me digress for a moment to that word 'level.' It can also be translated weigh. What is the connection between the two meanings? Picture how things used to be weighed. My grandfather and uncle ran a family business. On the desk in that section of our house there was a small postage scale. Not one of our modern electronic scales but rather it was a balance beam with two pans: into one pan you put the letter and in the other you put the various weights until the two weights were equal and the balance beam level.
2. the emphasis of this verse is that God's way is straight or level
 - a. for Israel, in practical terms, this meant that God would prepare a way for them to come home from exile
 - b. but the verse has wider application to all of God's people, and that brings us to a kind of paradox
 - c. God's way for the Christian is straight and level, but not necessarily smooth: for as Paul and Barnabas told the new believers, '[Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.](#)' (Acts 14:22)
 - d. yet the way that God in his providence prepares for the righteous person who chooses it, is the path that keeps us heading directly to God's intended destination for us

C. The Right Choice Involves Radical Change 26:8-9a

1. ⁸ Indeed, *while following* the way of Your judgments, O LORD, We have waited for You eagerly; Your name, even Your memory, is the desire of *our* souls. ^{9a} At night my soul longs for You, Indeed, my spirit within me seeks You diligently ...

- a. these were words to encourage Judah's faithful remnant
 - (A) all around them God's judgement was falling
 - (B) for them faith and trust were not academic ideas
 - (C) their very lives and livelihoods were being affected
- b. yet in all this, their eyes were turned upon God
 - (A) they continued in the way He led, in God's way
 - (B) their values and attitudes were radically changed

2. the right choice will always involve radical change

- a. in NT terms, it involves death and life – '*For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God ... Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead ... and ... put on the new self .*' (Colossians 3:3, 5, 10)
- b. dead, yet alive: how much more radical can you get!

3. look at how radical change is involved in making right choices

- a. one: a radical change in our priority
 - (A) *we have waited for You eagerly*
 - (B) not just for an answer to today's problem
 - (C) not for deliverance from the impending judgement
 - (D) but for God Himself, He who is in Himself the answer
- b. two: a radical change in our desires
 - (A) *Your name, even Your memory is the desire of our souls*
 - (B) God's name is His revelation to us of His nature
 - (C) God's memory is His manifestation of His works
 - (D) their proclamation is to be our greatest desire

- c. three: a radical change in our affections
 - (A) my soul longs ... my spirit within me seeks diligently
 - (B) the AV is better, translating diligently as early and thereby bringing out the picture involved: in effect it is saying, night and day, You are the One I love
 - (C) loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, might
- d. my making the right choice as a Christian involves
 - (A) more interest in my God than in my cares
 - (B) more interest in God's reputation than my own
 - (C) more interest in loving God than anything else
- e. is this how I, is this how you, as a Christian face the choices that we have to make in life, weighing everything in terms of our relations to the Lord Jesus Christ?

- D. The Right Choice Is Life Changing 26:9b-11
1. ^{9b}... For when the earth experiences Your judgments The inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.¹⁰ *Though the wicked is shown favour, He does not learn righteousness; He deals unjustly in the land of uprightness, And does not perceive the majesty of the LORD.* ¹¹ O LORD, Your hand is lifted up yet they do not see it. They see Your zeal for the people and are put to shame; Indeed, fire will devour Your enemies.
- a. here choosing God's way is shown by means of contrast
 - b. some, through the convicting and converting work of the Holy Spirit will take warning when they see and hear of the coming judgement of God, and will choose God's way by the righteousness that comes by faith in Jesus Christ
 - c. but many lost men and women, though good and upright in the eyes of their friends & neighbours, yet wicked because they are outside of Jesus Christ; these, though they are shown favour, do not heed, do not listen, do not learn
 - d. these are those of whom Paul writes in Romans 2:4, 'Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?'
 - e. and so they are shamed, devoured, lost
 - f. another aspect of this life changing is shown by

2. Paul's life before and after his conversion – see Philippians 3

- a. before his conversion, his life was centred in himself, and his dependence for salvation on his own works:
'⁴ although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.' (Philippians 3:4-6)
- b. but all that changed when Paul was turned to God's way, 'But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.' (Philippians 3:7) and you may read for yourself the rest of that testimony.

E. The Right Choice Brings Peace 26:12

- 1. LORD, You will establish peace for us, Since You have also performed for us all our works.
 - a. first note this that all the action in this verse is by God
 - (A) it is He who establishes peace
 - (B) it is he who performs all of our works
- 2. what is this peace?
 - a. not the mere cessation of hostility, not simply living in a comfortable situation free of anxiety
 - b. peace, God's peace, is the wholeness of being, body, soul and spirit, that takes place when God forgives our sin and takes up residence in our life by His Spirit
 - c. this he establishes – and Isaiah uses a rather unusual word: one that describes a person taking a pot or pan and placing it upon a fire – it implies that God, taking a very personal interest, carefully takes and places His peace upon us – as Jesus said, 'Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.' (John 14:27)
- 3. and it is God who has done the works in Christ that are now credited to our account; in NT terms, 'for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.' (Philippians 2:13)

F. The Right Choice Enthrones Christ 26:13

1. O LORD our God, other masters besides You have ruled us; *But through You alone we confess Your name.*
 - a. Israel had worshipped Ba'al's or idols, substituting them as husbands for Yahweh who was their rightful husband
 - b. literally this verse says, '... other masters besides You have "ba'aled" us – we have subjected ourselves to false gods and to the nations that taught us those false Gods
2. but, with the choosing God's way, that now is past – now it is You, You our covenant God and Redeemer who we acclaim to be our King and it is you alone that we will confess
 - a. once, O Lord Jesus, I walked in the way of this world, making my choices looking only at myself and others
 - b. now, I want my choices to show that you are indeed Lord, King of my life may you be seen to be

G. Conclusion

1. The primary choice of God's way comes at the moment when by the grace of God, the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, and of our need of the saving work of Jesus Christ in his death in our place on the cross of Calvary
 - a. that choice is made when we turn to and accept Jesus Christ as our own personal Saviour – *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,* (John 1:12)
 - b. but God also, in his grace, gives freedom and choices to his children, whereby they can draw ever closer to Himself
 - c. it is James who shows that our decisions in our so-called secular life should always be framed within our spiritual life and relationship with God: *'Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." ... Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."* (James 4:13, 15)
2. Amy Carmichael spent the rest of her life in India. Her story inspired others to missionary service, including Elisabeth and Jim Elliot, who in turn have inspired others. Those deciding to follow God's path in their lives will only know in eternity what a difference their taking the path less travelled has made.

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Various other English versions of the Holy Bible may be used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in {braces}. The versions are identified as:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
ERV	The Revised Version of 1885
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

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2. The Road Not Taken – Robert Frost (1875-1963)– Poems Worth Knowing , © 1941, The Copp Clark Company, Limited; Toronto
3. From various sources: most are available on the internet.
4. EJY, *in loc*