



Going Deeper - Weekly Sermon Discussion Guide

Two Paths - James 4

9/6/2020

"God's loving motive is to bring us into total harmony with Himself so moral power & holy usefulness become ours."

A.W. Tozer

In Matthew seven, beginning in verse thirteen Jesus explains the two primary paths available to each of us as we chart the course of our life through this world. One path leads the way to destruction, and the other to life. A little further on in Matthew Jesus uses a different illustration to teach the same principle. Here, starting in verse twenty-four Jesus explains we have two options when choosing a foundation for our lives. One option is sand and the other is rock. To choose sand (shifting, temporal and infirm) is to surely choose destruction, and to choose rock (solid, permanent and firm) is to surely choose life. Dallas Willard said that our lives run on the rails of our beliefs. Our lives play out according to our choices, and our choices are based on what we genuinely believe (not what we say we believe).

In the book of James, chapter four, James is starkly admonishing a group of Christians who say they have chosen the path of life, but look like they have chosen the path of destruction. Of course James is deeply concerned because, as he learned from Jesus, a good tree cannot bear bad fruit. That is, if the building looks like it's being built on sand, this is likely because we are building on sand. In the case of the group to which James is writing, what they say they believe and what they appear to believe are evidently two different things.

But what exactly are these destinations of life and destruction? If we do not know, if we can't clearly and tangibly understand them, we will have a psychologically difficult time wanting either to attain or avoid them. That is, if we have only a vague and shadowy notion of where we are going and why, we'll very likely lack the commitment required to get there. Thus Jesus describes the way to destruction as broad and the way to life as narrow. We can get to destruction accidentally, but we can only get to life on purpose. So, are we talking about heaven and hell? Yes, but those destinations flow naturally from our relationship with God. That is, they are natural progressions of our friendship or enmity with God. More fully, the life Jesus speaks of is one lived in full view of heaven now (Matt 5-6, John 10:10, John 8:36), while destruction is the rejection of heaven now, which manifests itself as all the things James talks about at the beginning of chapter four, and of course so much more.

So what to do? What we cannot do is simply will ourselves down the path of life. A bad tree cannot bear good fruit. As James said, we must instead draw near to God, such that, as Justin said we learn to love what Jesus loves. That is, we must become a dedicated student of Jesus, being brought into harmony with God through him, which *then* gives us "moral power and holy usefulness" as we walk the path of life.

So, Consider:

1. Where in your life might you be making choices that do not match with what you say you believe?
2. How do you describe the destinations of life and destruction Jesus talks about?
3. Why must we learn to interact with God as we walk the path to life?

Take Action:

This week, read through and meditate on Matthew 6:9-13 (the "Lord's Prayer") at least once a day.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Ben Scott