

Two Paths, Two Ends (Part 2)

The word *destruction* in Matt. 7:13 – “*broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction*” – prompts some interpreters to assume Jesus is speaking of eternal condemnation. But the word is used in that fashion in only a few cases in the New Testament, and they are questionable. Vine says the Greek noun means, “loss of well-being, but not of being.” The word is often used to refer to ruin or loss. In Matt. 26:8 – the only other time this Greek noun is used in Matthew’s gospel – the disciples are upset that expensive ointment is being *wasted* on the feet of Jesus.

The word is also used to refer to the ruin of one’s life. In Acts 8:18-19 Simon the sorcerer, who is a new believer (see v.13), offers money to Peter to be given the ability to lay hands on people and endue them with the Holy Spirit. Peter rebukes Simon harshly in v.20 with the words, “thy money perish with thee.” Peter certainly does not pronounce eternal condemnation on Simon, who is saved, but rather warns him that both he and his money will come to ruin if he does not repent. That seems to be how Jesus uses the word *destruction* in Matt. 7.

Examining the verb form of the same Greek word for *destruction* adds further clarification. Consider the following passage that speaks of ruin:

*Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles **perish**: Matt. 9:17*

An even more fascinating use of the word can be found in another discipleship passage, Matthew 10:38-39:

*And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall **lose** it: and he that **loseth** his life for my sake shall find it.*

Twice we read *lose* and *loseth*, which is the same Greek verb, meaning “to destroy or ruin.” The idea is that whoever “finds” his life (i.e., lives selfishly and soulishly) here and now will have it destroyed at the Judgment Seat. Does that mean his life will be removed or cast into eternal punishment? No, in the context of dealing with disciples, it means he will lose the reward that his soul could have otherwise received for living righteously. Literally, it is destruction of one’s works at the Judgment Seat. That is the destruction in this verse.

Of course, the flip side is more glorious. The saint who loses his soul here and now – that is, he gives it up, for he chooses to squeeze through the strait gate and walk on the narrow path – will find it at the Judgment Seat, in the sense of reward. On the heels of this passage in Matthew 10, Jesus closes with the following statement in verse 42:

And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

Again, the word *lose* is the idea of ruin or loss. To lose one's reward is to suffer loss. Incidentally, the phrase "lose his reward" in this verse provides a mini-commentary on the meaning of losing one's life (literally, *soul*) at the Judgment Seat. Clearly, it is not destruction of one's being, but destruction of one's reward.

Two additional passages may help to confirm our understanding of how the word *destruction* is used in Matt. 7:13.

*But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.
Rom. 14:15*

Paul admonishes not to ruin a brother spiritually by selfish choices to continue in some offending practice.

Finally, the father's proclamation after the prodigal son returns home speaks of ruin:

For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. Luke 15:24

The Greek word for *destruction* is here translated *lost*. We must remember the prodigal son was a saved young man. How do we know this? He was a son! Nevertheless, he pursued carnal living for a time, ruining his life, but had since repented and returned home. The beautiful part of the story is the father's eagerness to receive back his son. Incidentally, the word *lost* in the New Testament is very often this same Greek word, meaning destruction, in the sense of waste or ruin. Context should determine (not one's preconceived notions) whether it is referring to eternally lost (unsaved) or temporally lost (a saved, but wasted life, in need of repentance).

Given a fuller understanding of key words in Matt. 7:13-14, we can now put the pieces together. Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to *destruction* – to waste or ruin of one's spiritual life now and consequently to one's reward at the Bema.

In what sense is it broad and wide? In the sense that there is no tribulation, no suffering for Christ, no being made conformable to His death, no counting the cost, no need to die daily, no need to take up the cross – just live however one desires. Many believers live in that manner. Thus, there are two gates, one representing Christ, the other representing the world. The way of Christ is the path of discipleship, obeying the law of Christ, which is costly. The way of the world is the path of fleshly desires

and passions, living for self and enjoying the here and now. The end of Christ's way is life and joy and peace and, ultimately, reward at the Judgment Seat. The end of the world's way is destruction, ruin, waste of one's life and, ultimately, loss at the Judgment Seat.

Sadly, many pursue the broad path of destruction, ruining their lives spiritually. Few pursue the strait gate and the narrow path. Does that not explain much in Christianity? First, it explains how so many people can be saved and not living like it. Second, it explains why there is so little teaching on the kingdom. Third, it explains why teaching on the kingdom is often rejected.

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus uses a different analogy to explain the two ways, providing a visual illustration of the end result of each.

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. Matt. 7:24-27

Those who take heed to all Jesus has just preached will be like a house built on a rock that withstands the storms and tribulations of life. However, those who do not take heed will be like a house built on sand that collapses under pressure. When it collapses, great will be the fall of it. Of course, the two houses are representative of the two ways of life a saint can choose. Those who enter the strait gate and remain on the narrow path of life are like the house on the rock. On the other hand, those who enter the wide gate and pursue the broad path of ruin are like the house on the sand. These two houses are metaphors, not only for life and how one can live it, but also for the end result of life – the reward or loss one faces at the Judgment Seat. Paul uses a similar analogy in one of his letters to the Corinthians:

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. 1 Cor. 3:11-15

Jesus is the foundation on which believers build their lives. Each individual

makes choices as to what type of building materials will be used in the construction (i.e., sanctification) process. There are two options. One is enduring because it is focused on the kingdom and eternity – gold, silver, and precious stones in quality. When the fire of God's testing furnace tries the works of saved men, this structure will survive, like the house on the rock. Accordingly, this believer will be rewarded. In contrast, other believers will choose to use build of the stuff of this world – wood, hay, and stubble – which is neither substantive nor enduring. This house will be consumed in the fire, and the believer will suffer loss. Despite the temporal loss, this believer is eternally secure – saved, yet so as by fire. But the the spiritual loss is of enormous consequence, for it also equates to kingdom loss – no entitlement to reign with Jesus in His coming kingdom.

Examine your own life. Are you on the narrow path or the broad path? Are you building a house on rock or sand? Are you using materials of enduring, eternal value or of temporal, earthly value? Someday, the answers these questions will be manifest to all.