

Christian Retirement

By [Thomas Reade](#)

1837

ON THE TWO WAYS

"Unto this people you shall say, thus says the Lord: behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death." (Jer. xxi, 8.) These important words were spoken to the Jews, when the king of Babylon was drawing near to besiege the city of Jerusalem. Those who went to the Chaldeans should find the way of life; while those who remained in the city should be in the way of death. But these expressive words may be addressed to all, in every age; and more especially to those who live in Gospel times.

The commission given by our Lord to his apostles, just before his ascension into heaven, speaks the same language: "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature; he that believes, and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believes not, shall be damned." Thus, faith in Jesus is the way of life; rejection of him is the way of death. The Gospel, therefore, sets before us life and death. Hence, John says, "he that has the Son, has life; and he that has not the Son of God, has not life."

In conformity with which truth, John the Baptist declared, when bearing witness to the divinity and Messiahship of Jesus: "he that believes on the Son, has everlasting life; and he that believes not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." Our Lord declares also respecting himself, in terms too plain to be misunderstood, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes unto the Father but by me."

All, then, who receive the Lord Jesus Christ; by a true and living faith, are in the way of life. They draw near to God by that new and living way which he has consecrated for us; and, persevering in this way, shall reach the heavenly Zion, and have right to enter by the gates into the city. This way of life our blessed Lord represents as difficult to fallen nature. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leads unto life, and few there be that find it." This difficulty arises not from the road itself, but from the nature of those who walk in it.

The first entrance is truly difficult to the awakened sinner, owing to the abounding evils of his heart, all rising up against the strait, self-denying, flesh-crucifying gate by which he must enter. Grace, however enables him to overcome these

workings of corruption, and to pass, by deep repentance and humble faith, through the strait gate. This is a blessed step towards eternal felicity.

But when in the way of life, he finds it narrow; for his desires, being sadly mixed with evil, too often wander after those gratifications which lie beyond the limits of the way in which he is to walk. This grieves the Holy Spirit, wounds his conscience, and occasions that warfare with his corrupt inclinations which constitutes no small part of the fight of faith. He labors to keep his heart within the boundary of the narrow way, and to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. But still, when he would do good, evil is present with him. The law in his members wars against the law of his mind, and compels him to cry out, "Oh! wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" Yet, this painful consciousness of evil is mercifully overruled for good, by driving him continually to the strong for strength,—to the Savior for salvation. By experience, he learns that his sufficiency is of God; that under all exigencies, the grace of Jesus is sufficient for him; that when he is weak, then he is strong.

The Christian has to journey to the heavenly Canaan, through the wilderness of this world; therefore, like the Israelites of old, his soul is sometimes discouraged because of the difficulty of the way. The world frowns—Satan assaults — providences darken—corruptions harass. All these things produce, for a season, much discouragement. Like Peter, he looks at the raging waves, instead of the omnipotent Savior; and then he begins to sink into despondency, and would be overwhelmed in the depths of mental affliction, did not the compassionate Jesus stretch out the hand of mercy, and uphold him by his mighty power.

He now learns the evil of unbelief and mistrust of a Savior's love. He is much in prayer for the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit, by whose sacred influence and direction he is enabled to look unto Jesus under every trial, and to walk before him in love and childlike obedience. Thus, to every humble pilgrim, strength is imparted; realizing views of the faithfulness of Emanuel are granted; and he is made to rise superior to every discouragement, and to walk, with increasing alacrity and joy, along the narrow way which leads unto life eternal.

How awful is the condition of those who, entering by the wide gate into the broad way, "enlarge their desires as hell;" until, having filled up the measure of their iniquity, they come, as vessels fitted for destruction by their own willful transgressions, into the place of everlasting torment.

What a painful consideration, that, respecting the narrow way, "few there be that find it;" while of the wide gate, our Lord has said, "many there be which go in there at." I am a dying creature, walking on the verge of an awful eternity. Heaven and hell lie before me; to one of these places I am, at the close of every day, advanced a day's journey. This day may bring me to my eternal abode of happiness or misery. The sleep which I take this night may be the sleep of death—and should it be so—where would my spirit, dislodged from earth, find

itself? Oh! my soul, ask yourself, with all the solemnity which becomes so awful a question, where am I going? Soon I must be called into the presence of my Judge; but, what reception shall I meet with there? What award does conscience now make? Have I believed with the heart unto righteousness? Is the life which I now live, a life of faith in the Son of God? I find, from the word of God, that two roads lie through the wilderness of this world. The one, at its beginning, is pleasant to carnal nature, being strewn with forbidden pleasures, sensual delights, and materialistic gratifications; but, growing darker, and more crooked and thorny as it advances, it ends abruptly in eternal misery. The other, difficult at the entrance, requires many sacrifices, and much self-denial; but, gradually increasing in light and beauty, it terminates in the blissful regions of immortal glory. In which of these roads am I now walking?

"Oh my beloved Savior! you know my heart; you are acquainted with every thought, affection, and desire that rises within me. You know that I would follow you along the narrow way. Lead me in the paths of righteousness—draw me, and I will run after you. You are yourself the way to heavenly glory. When I find a cross laid before me, help me not to turn aside, but give me strength to take it up and follow after you. When the travelers in the broad road, with specious arguments and smiling faces, though with aching hearts, would labor to entice me from the path of life, let me not be deceived by their sophistry, or ensnared by their wiles. When the clouds of adversity darken my prospects, and the night of sorrow obscures my way, then, Oh! blessed Jesus, support my fainting steps, cheer my drooping soul with your celestial promises, and give me strength and courage equal to my day. When Satan tempts and harasses my soul; when inbred evils rise within me and rebel: then, gracious Savior, put forth your mighty arm in my defense, lest I fall, through manifold temptations, from the heavenly road. You alone are my strength. In you I am strong. Increase my faith, that I may be daily united more closely to yourself. Wean me from the vanities of the world. Screen me from the enticements of sin. Guard me from the fiery darts of Satan. Thus may I walk, Oh! blessed Emanuel, in close communion with you, in the consolations of your Spirit, in the enjoyment of your love, in peace of conscience, and serenity of mind, until I arrive at the gates of death, where some appointed herald of glory may be stationed to conduct my disembodied spirit into your blissful presence, there to dwell with you, and gaze on your glories with rapture and delight forever!

Oh! could I feel the sweet transforming power,
The holy influence of my heavenly Friend;
Then should I hail the last dissolving hour,
When sin and sorrow would forever end.

A pilgrim journeying through a land of woe,
I daily need the Shepherd's guardian care;
It is he alone my every grief can know,
It is he alone can break the fatal snare.

Blessed Savior, look in pity on my soul,
Enfold me in your arms of boundless love;
Permit a traveler on your strength to roll
That burden, which you only can remove.

Oh give me faith, to reach the blissful place
Where joyful hope shall to fruition grow;
Where Zion's pilgrims shall behold your face,
And ever dwell where living waters flow!

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