

Sermon Series: “Good News for Life”
“A Tale of Two Paths”
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Have you ever been at a crossroads? Where you sit there and you have two options before you, and you have to make a choice? We all go through such situations from time to time— whether it is a choice between two roads, two restaurants, two schools to attend, two majors to which one commits, or even between two people whom to marry. E.g., that reminds me of Laurent Duvernay-Tardif, offensive guard for last year’s Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs, who is the only medical doctor in the NFL, and came to a crossroads at the beginning of this football season as COVID-19 hit the nation; he decided to take the year off of football, with Head Coach Andy Reid’s permission, to be a doctor and help people; he plans on coming back next season (from *Time*, February 15-22, 2021, “9 Questions”, p. 112). Life is often one of decisions at crossroads. In fact, life can be described as a tale of two paths. That is how the book of Psalms begins, with Psalm 1— “Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked or take the path that sinners tread, but their delight is in the law of the Lord”. Jesus takes up this situation of a crossroads or two paths in our text today.

READ John 12:44-50 (p. 107)

CONTEXT: Jesus is closing out His public ministry in John’s gospel where He enters Jerusalem for the final time for Passover. Some people decide to stop following Him, and some continue to follow Him, but secretly, being afraid of the religious leaders.

READ vv 44-45. “Jesus’ cry to the crowd shows the urgency of His message, and that His message is one of unity with the Father. Cf. 5:23; 10:23; Matthew 10:40.” There is a sense of urgency in the verb choice in v 44 with Jesus crying out. It is His final appearance in John’s gospel where He is addressing the crowd and He wants to make His point in summarizing His message— many of the themes in our text this morning have been made earlier. Have you ever had that urgency to get the gospel message to someone? E.g., I recall talking to a grown son, a Christian man, who said on his Mom’s deathbed inquired from her whether she had accepted Jesus as her Lord and Savior, and she had, much to his relief. I know of many such stories where adults would go to their parents in their last days and be sure they had a chance to accept Jesus in case they had not. And that is a wonderful ministry, indeed. However, of course how much more wonderful it would be if far before someone comes to his or her deathbed that the person accepts Christ and knows the joy of knowing Him! Some of us may wonder, though, what if the person rejects Christ after hearing us share the gospel? What do we do with the relationship? Do we press the point every time we see the person? Do we feel guilty if we don’t? E.g., I recall a book by evangelist Paul Little called *How to Give Your Faith Away*, and he said that in such a circumstance where we have shared the gospel and the person does not want to become a Christian, then we are not obligated to continue to bring it up— unless the person wants to talk about it, of course. But we are free to love the person unconditionally. Some of my great friends of the past have been non-Christians. We need to know that everytime they see us they see the gospel lived

out, the Bible proclaimed in a sense, and God the Holy Spirit can work on them to come to Christ. E.g., I recall James Dobson's grandfather was not a believer, but his wife was, and she prayed for him regularly to come to Christ, and she did not pressure him in any way but loved him dearly. When he was about to die, he did pray to receive Christ and let her know it, and it was a great joy to her. So please do not ever give up on someone coming to Christ— Jesus does not! The urgency, we need to remember, is always there for people to come to know Him. And Jesus gives us a window in these opening verses of our passage to the Trinity, that He and the Father are one, not gods in competition with each other. This is found also in the synoptic gospels, where Matthew 10:40 says, “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.”

READ vv 46,49-50. “Jesus essentially offers two paths by which people may live. The first is to follow Him and His message, whereby a person goes from darkness to light, and from death to life. Cf. Vv 35-36a; also 1:3-5; 9:5; Matthew 5:14-16.” What we have are dramatic images, don't we? Jesus is trying to say that there is a great difference between someone who follows Him and someone who does not. In John 3 Jesus talks about following Him is where the person is born again. It is like the difference between a moral tweaking and a total remaking of the heart and the person's worldview. E.g., it reminds me of the difference between two cars in my history of having cars: one was running a bit rough, and the other was running really rough; the former needed a tune-up, and got it, and ran better; the other one, I had accidentally let the engine run when it was running very hot and it warped the valves and I could feel it in the car, from what I understand— the mechanic said I needed a new engine, and would cost about \$5,000. The car was only worth about \$2,500, so that did not seem like a good investment, so I sold it for a couple of hundred dollars to a mechanic who would put a new engine in it. Which care are we like more? The Bible says the latter— we need a new engine. I.e., we need a new heart, because we are

systemically flawed, rebellious, disobedient people in desperate needs of a Savior. Let's be clear, Jesus seems to be saying, that being a Christian and not being a Christian is the difference between light and darkness, between day and night, between death and life. E.g., I can tell you that over the years I have asked Christians is someone is a Christian, and they say things often like, "I think so" or "they just don't talk a lot about it, but they went to church and they helped others". Sometimes I think Christians think the song goes, "This little of light of mine, I'm gonna hide it yeah! This little light of mine, I'm gonna hide it under a basket!" E.g., I recall Elena and I seeing on TV the testimony of a man who was an atheist and university professor, and he had a health crisis, a heart attack I believe, that left him technically dead at the hospital, and he had an experience where he was in darkness and demons were aggressively approaching him, and he cried out for Jesus because he remembered learning about Jesus as a child, and all of a sudden a bright light began to shine and this scattered the demons, and Jesus approached him, and he eventually came back to his body and his body came alive again; this professor became a committed Christian, he was so overwhelmed and impressed by the experience. I think we need to know that being a Christian is more times than not an *obvious* thing— Jesus said His followers are the light of the world. Why? Because He Himself is the light of the world, and His followers are to be like Him.

READ vv 47-48. "The other path is one of rejection of Him and His message, and thus involving judgment. Cf. Romans 1:18-32. How do we reconcile v 47 and 3:17 with 9:39?" READ 9:39. We should understand in that verse that Jesus' ministry would be polarizing and divide people. Is Jesus' message still polarizing today? Yes, it certainly is. But His primary purpose was to save people, as 3:17 shows. When people reject Jesus they are judged already by Jesus' message. And they begin to experience that judgment already on earth, as Paul says in Romans 1:18-32 that God gives people over to the lust of their

hearts and to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, to a debased mind and to doing things that should not be done, to worshipping the creation rather than the Creator. We can think of the many in the history of Rock n'Roll who died way too early from wasteful, indulgent, druggy, substance-abusive lifestyles— Brian Jones (27), Janis Joplin (27), Jimmy Hendrix (27), Jim Morrison (27), Keith Moon (32), John Bonham (32), and Amy Winehouse (27). But we don't even have to go to that drastic of cases. What I find becoming more popular today is deciding not to decide about God— agnosticism. But in reality, not to decide is to decide. And the decision beomes a total belief and reliance on oneself and others in life. I.e., this material world is all there is. So one is, in essence, condemned to a transitory life which can promise nothing after the grave, and offers only temporary highs and lows on earth, and everything on earth that one accomplishes and makes and buys and accumulates will be lost to them once they die, after which the best for which they can hope is that a street or a building is named after them. This what Jesus means when He says that His Word will judge them— they have rejected life and light and have embraced darkness, death, and meaninglessness.

“Which path will you and I choose?” If we already are believers, communion is a great time to renew that choice we have made for Christ, and remember the wonderful truth that Jesus is the light of the world who offers eternal life. If we are not believers, then I invite you do step out of your darkness and into His marvelous light, and surrender to Him as Lord and Savior, and take communion with us.