

*August 25, 2019*

*Luke 13:22-30:*

***“The Narrow and Soon to Be Shut Door”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Most of you are probably familiar with the Bachelorette. For those of you who may not care to watch TV, the Bachelorette is an American reality television dating game show that debuted on ABC on January 8, 2003. I personally have never watched it nor do I intend to. But in the last couple of months it caught my eye when I noticed a few articles and caught a couple of promos for the show. From what I understand, the last Bachelorette professed to be a Christian but had no problem with sex before marriage which, by the way, Jesus condemns the Samaritan woman at the well for doing just that (John 4:16-17). Of course, the media labeled her as “sex positivity.” Eventually it was revealed that she had sex with one of the prospective males four times during the span of the game show.

What caught everybody’s eye was what she said to *Entertainment Weekly* after one of the promos aired. “Regardless of anything that I’ve done, I can do whatever, I sin daily and Jesus still loves me. It’s all washed and if the Lord doesn’t judge me and it’s all forgiven, then no other man, woman . . . anything can judge me. Nobody’s gonna judge me, I won’t stand for it.” Is it true that Jesus suffered the hell that we deserve for our sin and died our death on the cross to pay for our sin in order that we may go on sinning and still go to heaven while fully in love with sin? Is it also okay to kill or steal and do whatever? And when she says that “nobody’s gonna judge me,” how does that rhyme with the words of Paul when he writes concerning sexual immorality in the church in Corinth: “For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. ‘Purge the evil person from among you (1 Corinthians 5:12-13).’”

One more thing. There’s a moment when the Bachelorette defends herself with the account of the woman caught in adultery. She is quick to inform us that Jesus is there saying to those who would throw stones at her, “you without sin throw the first stone.” Okay. True that there is plenty of sin to go around, and certainly in my case. However, what she fails to recall is that at the end of the account, when the accusers drop stones and leave, Jesus goes on to say to her: “‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go, *and from now on sin no more.*’” Jesus does not say, “now that I no longer condemn you and you are forgiven, you may now return and enjoy your adulterous lifestyle to the fullest.”

The reason why I have spent so much time talking about the Bachelorette is because the way she defines her Christianity is pretty much how most who go to church see things nowadays. Being Christian is loving Jesus and willfully sinning against him at the same time. It really breaks my heart that so many have such a downright dangerous outlook. Out the window are the words of Paul when he talks about our Christian identity in Baptism (Romans 6:1-4):

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

In other words, there is supposed to be a change in us, a “newness of life,” as Paul says. We aren’t supposed to willfully go back to our old ways. Sin is not supposed to reign or have dominion in our mortal bodies so that we obey its passions (Romans 6:12). And yes, the love and forgiveness of Jesus is always there for us even if we do fall, as John writes (1 John 1 and 2). We have one who speaks to the Father in our defense, Jesus Christ the righteous one who is our atoning sacrifice. And if we confess our sins he will forgive us and cleanse us. But John the Baptist does say, “bear fruit in keeping with repentance (Matthew 3:8).” What that means is this: when you are sorry about what you have done and have received forgiveness you struggle not to do it again and hope to do what is right. That is what Jesus means when he says to the adulterous woman, “from now on sin no more (John 8:1-11).”

Jesus is referring to these kinds of things in our Gospel lesson for this morning when he talks about **The Narrow and Soon to Be Shut Door**. Jesus is responding to a question: “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” He responds:

Strive [struggle] to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, “Lord, open to us,” then he will answer you, “I do not know where you come from.” Then you will begin to say, “We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.” But he will say, “I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!”

What is this “narrow door?” What does it mean to “strive or struggle” to enter? And what shall we make of the fact that there will be those who think that they have a relationship with Jesus only to find out that they don’t? One thing is for sure, there isn’t anything in this text that somehow encourages us to believe that Jesus winks at sin. The harsh words of Jesus, when he says “Depart from me, all your workers of evil,” are absolutely frightening and need to be thoroughly understood.

To begin with, Jesus is the door. He is the way of salvation. As Jesus himself says in another place in Scripture: “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture (John 10:7-9).” These are wonderful words that take us to the cross and the hope of heaven. It is by the work of Jesus, who is both God and man, by which we have forgiveness and righteousness. Now, he who is the door is a narrow door. It is narrow by virtue of the fact that one is saved by Jesus alone in the forgiveness of sin. Most would prefer a wide door that would also allow for works of evil - unrepentant sinning. More on that in a moment.

For now, we must understand what Jesus means when he says that we are to struggle to enter through the narrow door. This does not mean that moral effort is necessary in order to enter the kingdom. The struggle revolves around the fact that one enters through the door in repentance. What is repentance? Repentance is when God works in us sorrow over sin and enables us to look only to Christ for the forgiveness of sin. Arthur A. Just writes in his commentary on Luke:

The struggle is produced when the Word of God - such as the teaching of Jesus here - calls one to repent and trust in Christ, but sinful human nature wars against God's Word. The struggle is resolved as the old Adam is put to death by the Law and the person of faith is raised to new life with Christ by the power of the Gospel. St. Paul offers a window into this inner struggle and how it is resolved in Rom 7:7-8:11, with a concise summary in Rom 8:13. *This ongoing, lifelong struggle characterizes the lives of all who are baptized into Christ (Rom 6:1-11).*

The striving through the narrow door then is to repent of sin which includes belief in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin. All this is the work of God (John 6:29). Since we still carry around with us a sinful nature with passions that encourage us to willfully sin on a daily basis, the life of the Christian is one of ongoing repentance. In other words, whenever the sinful passions arise in us, as they do every day, one remains in a constant struggle whereby sin is trying to kill the forgiveness that comes from Jesus. Sin is always trying to have dominion over us. That means that the narrow door of Jesus is always in danger of being replaced by a wide door, where one begins think that willful works of evil can go along with Jesus who died for all of our works of evil. There is no wide door, but there is a closed narrow door.

Doing what is right never saves us. But willfully doing what is evil destroys the work of Jesus. That is why Jesus says "I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!" As you can see, forgiveness of sin and workers of evil do not go together. It doesn't matter that they appeal to eating and drinking with the Lord. In fact, many will eat and drink the sacrament and will eat and drink judgment on themselves because they do not repent, but embrace sin in the name of Christ. We are bid to proclaim the Lord's death, which is a death in us, the death of sin, and we discern the body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sin. The body and blood of Christ is not given for sinning.

Our Gospel lesson is a whale of a warning. One cannot willfully embrace the best of both worlds, unrepentance and repentance, willful sin and forgiveness, spiritual death and heaven, or God and mammon at the same time and walk into heaven. Jesus says it in this way, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other (Matt. 6:24)." Make no mistake about it, it is a narrow door, a struggle - **The Narrow and Soon to Be Shut Door**. May it then be that we are the people who will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. For now, that narrow door is still open. It is Jesus who says "repent and believe the good news (Mark 1:15)." It is not a wide door of living in willful sin in Jesus name and thinking that all is well.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott