

May 14, 2023

St. John 14:19-21:

## **“Shackled to Eternal Life?”**

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St. John 14:19-21

Dear Friends in Christ,

I don't know the author of the statement but I appreciate the validity of what it says:

We poor humans boast of our freedom, the exhibit of our shackles of material enslavement (that's the freedom). We insist that nobody can tell us what to do - but the clanking of our chains gives our plight away.

Don't you find truth in that statement? Most are shackled to something of this world. The shackles of this world are released at the moment of death, only for most to find they are permanently shackled to the cry of the rich man: "I am in anguish in this flame (Lk.16:24)."

On a daily basis, do you ever stop to think about the things you're thinking and wish you didn't? On a daily basis, do you ever think about the verbiage that flies out of your mouths and wish it didn't? On a daily basis, do you ever stop to think about the things you haven't done and wish you had, or the things you have done and wish you hadn't? Do you ever wonder how God could possibly go on loving us? Do you want to be . . .

## SHACKLED TO ETERNAL LIFE?

### I. Always a Concern.

We're looking at some very basic truths connected to our walk with the Lord and the want to know He loves us, to know we are shackled to His eternal joy and presence. It starts with these words from our text: "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him (v.21)." The opening words of that statement can be a bit upsetting, don't you think? "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them..." So, maybe you're thinking, "I love Jesus, I know the commandments, but I don't and can't keep them perfectly." Well, listen to these words Jesus spoke to those who chased after Him:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, you, are seeking me...because you ate your fill of the loaves (you were getting what you wanted out of this world). Do not work for food that perishes, but for food that endures to eternal life"...Then they said to him, 'What must we do to be doing the works of God? (Works!)' Jesus answered, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent (Jn 6:26-29)."

You see, the work we do is to believe that Christ has done everything necessary to win our forgiveness and eternal life. He kept the commandments perfectly for us. To believe that is the gift of faith God works in us because, as Scripture says, "you were dead (spiritually) in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked...(Eph.2:1,2)." That which is dead cannot make itself alive. It's what John wrote, words we've heard plenty of times, but can fade in the midst of great guilt: "In this is the love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (I Jn.4:10)." And there's that term, *the propitiation* - the gift to win God's favor. And so, as Jesus said, "whoever believes has eternal life."

And there is another point. We surely understand that our walk with the Lord involves a daily struggle with sin. I think most here are very familiar with these words of Paul:

"For I know that nothing good dwells in my flesh (nothing good in spite of all the positive thinking). For I have desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out (I want to keep God's commands, but the ability is not there).

"For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive

to the law of sin that dwells in my members (it's the terrible war that goes on within). Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin (Rm. 7:18,22-25)."

Paul is not excusing sin. The struggle is always there. Repentance is not restricted to Sundays. It's daily. Again it is Paul who writes, "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift...(Rm.3:21-23a)."

## II. The Need to Face Reality.

And having said all this "familiar", there's still the need to face the familiar reality. I have recalled many times the Christian gentleman, not a member of our church, who just stopped by and wanted to discuss a couple of church issues. At the close of the discussion, he started to leave, then turned around, sat down and said, "I'd like to ask your opinion about something." He said, and I quote (and this is close to 100% accurate):

My wife and I are designing a tombstone for our daughter. A cross is going to be etched on one side and our daughter's picture is going to be at the center of the cross. Do you think it would be wrong to put her picture there? Do you think people will think that we're trying to put her on a level with Christ?

My answer to him was "No." However, before I elaborated, I asked a couple of questions because I knew our conversation was more than church issues and his daughter's picture at the center of a cross. I asked, "How old was your daughter?" He said, "14." I asked, "How did she die?" He said, through his tears, "From acute leukemia." The real issues of our meeting were about a mom and dad wanting to make sure their little girl was safe with Jesus; about a brother wanting to spill his emotions to another; about the reality of life's hardest issue: **death**. Life is short and uncertain. We're going to die. It is the most important issue we will have to face. Some might think that's morbid. That's nonsense! As a Christian, it's the reason why Christ came into this world. You'll recall the words of Job:

Man who is born of woman is few days and full of trouble. He comes out like a flower and withers; he flees like a shadow and continues not...his days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass...(Job14:1-2,5).

"Days...months" - short and sweet - "determined." It's not for adults only. Listen, this is the issue of your life, my life, our babies and older children and teens . . .

## III. Shackled to Eternal Life.

Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.

Recall these words of Jesus: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live (Jn. 14:25a)." *Though he die.* We can't stop the process. We can only hide from it so long. There will be no human cure for dying and death. But there is the heavenly cure; Christ who gave His life for our sin, as Jesus said: "whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live..." Not here. But there, in eternal joy and light.

Listen: the day will come when the body shuts down - an accident, a disease, a catastrophic event, aging. There is no age distinction. But the promise stands: "whoever believes in me, though he die (to this world), yet shall he live." That's a promise that goes with us to the grave.

There was a story from a number of years ago I found so very appropriate. It was about a man from Buenos Aires who feared the pain he might experience from bunion surgery. You might recall this. It reads . . .

He requested a general anesthetic. Tragically, the general anesthetic led to a heart attack. The physician opened his chest and massaged his heart and revived him. But later he suffered a stomach contraction resulting in a rupture of the stomach...Then while being carried on a stretcher, he tumbled off, broke a leg and a collar bone and injured his heart further. At the end of his ordeal the unfortunate man had a breathing tube down his throat, a drainage tube in his stomach, a leg in plaster and an arm in a sling. He still had not had the bunion removed (Source unknown).

Welcome to life in the world; a life of unknown circumstances and length of time. A fellow by the name of Paul Eldridge wrote, "We free ourselves from the womb, but there is no knife sharp enough to cut the umbilical cord which binds us to our grave." On the contrary, there is a "knife" that cuts and destroys death: our Lord Jesus Christ who promised, "Because I live, you also will live."

Somebody once said, "What death did to Jesus is nothing compared to what Jesus did to death." And I would add, what He did for us: ***Shackled Us To Eternal Life.***

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott