

May 21, 2017

St. John 14:19-21: ***“We Are Shackled to Life”***

I. A Concern.

II. The Hard Truth.

III. Shackled to Life.

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Avenue
Decatur, Illinois 62526*

St. John 14:19-21

Dear Friends in Christ,

A fellow by the name of Ralph Larson observed,

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

It's the truth, isn't it? Most are enslaved to something of this world. The shackles of this world are undone at the moment of death only for most to discover that they are permanently shackled to the cry of the rich man who died and found himself in Hell - the cry of "I am in anguish in this flame." (Lk. 16:24)

But that's not our direction. In Christ...

WE ARE SHACKLED TO LIFE

I. A Concern.

I'm going to start with what might be a big concern on some minds. It's rooted in these words of Jesus 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) And I'm thinking that some are thinking, "I have the commandments, I love them, I want to keep them, but I don't keep them perfectly." That's true. None of us keep them perfectly. Please listen carefully...

In the 6th chapter of St. John's Gospel is the account of the crowd that ran after Jesus after He had fed them. Jesus said to them,

"Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me...because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life...' Then they said to him, 'What must we do to be doing the works of God?' [what works?] Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you **believe** in him whom he has sent?'" (vv. 26-29)

Well, the greatest work is to believe that Christ is the One Who came to keep the commandments perfectly in our stead, suffer and die in payment for our sin and be raised to eternal life so that we would be assured of eternal life. As Jesus said, "...whoever **believes** has eternal life." (Jn. 3:16) And keep in mind that, in the first place, it is the Holy Spirit Who works faith in us so that we can believe.

In Romans 7 Paul gets to the heart of the issue with these words:

"For I know that nothing good dwells in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out." [I want to keep God's commands, but I don't have the ability. - this from Paul.]

"For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being [I love the law and want to keep the law perfectly], 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. [There's this terrible war that goes on inside me.] 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 the law of God with my mind [I want to keep and I do love God's commandments in my mind.], but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. [The struggle is always there! He's not excusing sin! The struggle is always there.] (vv. 18, 22-25)

In faith, we have the commandments and keep them in our minds. And though we still struggle with and fail because of sin, **for the sake of Christ and through faith in Christ** God sees us as fulfilling the law. Scriptures are clear: "But now the righteousness of God [the perfect obedience God demands] has been manifested apart from the law....the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." (Rom. 3:21-22) Christ kept the Law perfectly for us. Whoever believes that is forgiven and has eternal life.

II. The Hard Truth.

And yet, having said all that, there's still the hard truth. I have never forgotten an incident from years ago when a Christian brother who was not a member of our congregation, stopped by to discuss church issues with me. At the close of our discussion he started to leave, then turned around, pulled up a chair, sat down and said, "I'd like to have your professional 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?

Before I answered, I asked a couple of questions because I knew there was more to our conversation than my opinion about her picture at the center of the 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."

Do you know the real issue behind the picture of the daughter in the middle of the cross? Well, it was about a Mom and Dad wanting to make sure their child was safe with Jesus. It was about a brother wanting to spill his emotions to someone - another human. It was about a very hard truth: Life is short and uncertain and we are going to die. Some might think that's morbid. As a Christian, that's the very issue of Christ's coming into this world.

You'll recall the words of Job:

"Man who is born of a 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...". (Job. 14:1-2,5)

And in case you didn't catch it, this is not for adults only. We have a serious responsibility to instill the truth of this into the lives of our children. And here's why - the nineteenth verse of our text . . .

III. Shackled to 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. There will be no human cure for dying and death. But there is a heavenly cure: Christ's payment for sin and victory over the grave. Jesus says, "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live..." Not here. But there - in eternal joy and light.

Listen to this; Jesus says, "everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." (Jn. 11:26) The day will come when the body shuts down - an accident, a disease, a catastrophic event, aging - the body shuts down - but the promise is unchangeable: **Whoever believes in me, though he die (to this world), yet shall he live.** That's a promise we can take to the grave!

So, I was re-reading an item from a number of years ago about a man in Buenos Aires who feared the pain that might result from a bunion surgery. The item read:

He requested a general anesthetic. Tragically, the general anesthetic led to a heart attack. The physicians opened his chest and massaged his heart and revived him. But later he suffered a stomach contraction resulting in the 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 in 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 this world, right? So many unknowns. The high moments, maybe, and low moments. And then death. 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 to cut the umbilical cord ...to our grave": The resurrected Lord Jesus Christ who has overcome sin, death and hell for us.

We must echo what Jesus promises: "Because I live, you also will live." We must hold the words of Jesus in front of us day by day: "Whoever believes will not perish but have eternal life." (Jn. 3:16) Unending, uninterrupted - uninterrupted forever and forever! - joy, comfort and peace.

As has been stated, "What death did to Jesus is nothing compared to what Jesus did to death." (Author Unknown) We can say, in Christ ***We Are Shackled To Life - Eternal!***

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott