

A CHRISTIAN'S DNA-DISCIPLINE

Matthew 7.13-14

Today we continue to talk about the character and conduct of a Christian's DNA.
And so we'll focus on THE CHRISTIAN AND DISCIPLINE.

First, we need DISCIPLINE TO DISCERN.

In Matthew 7.13 Jesus says, ***“Enter through the narrow gate.
For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction,
And many enter through it.***

Jesus uses the word here as a wish and a warning.
He is not only concerned about our eternal destiny,
but that many will take the wide gate and broad road that leads to destruction.

Jesus wants us to make good choices and to grow in Christ likeness.
He wants us to grow as faithful disciples who want to serve him willingly and well.

It's not out of anger or arrogance that he says these words, it's out of concern.

Reverend Ole of the Norwegian Lutheran Church
and Pastor Swen of the Swedish Covenant Church were pounding a sign into the ground.
The sign read, “DA end is near! Turn yourself around before it is too late.”

A car drove by and the driver yelled, “Leave us alone you religious nuts.”
In a few seconds there is the screech of tires and a big splash.
Pastor Swen said to Reverend Ole, “Do you think the sign should have said, ‘Bridge Out’?”

Not to heed Jesus' warning invites spiritual disaster.

Would it be enough if 50%, 75%, or even 99.9% of your sins were forgiven?
What if John 3.16 read, “God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son
that only 99.9% of those that believe would not perish but have everlasting life?”

It might seem “narrow-minded” but when we profess Christ as savior and Lord,
God declares that we are 100% justified, 100% of our sins are forgiven.

How about a new reading of Isaiah 1.18,
“Come now let us reason together,’ says the Lord,
though your sins are like scarlet they will be as white as snow.”
Instead we read, “Though your sins are like scarlet they will be pink like...”

”It might seem narrow-minded to expect or require 100% effort from someone.
But think of what happens if people set their standards at 50%, 75%, 95% or even 99.9%?

If 99.9% is the standard here are some things that would or wouldn't happen:
the IRS would lose over 2,000,000 documents a year.
12 babies would be given to the wrong parents each day.
291 pacemakers operations would be incorrectly performed.
20,000 drug prescriptions would be written incorrectly.
And would you feel comfortable if you knew a surgeon's gloves were 99.9% sterile?
And what if 99.9% of your water was safe and the other .01% had strychnine in it,
would you want to drink it?

If you were going to a ballgame or a movie...you pay the price, you buy a ticket.
If you want to vote, you register.
If you want to hunt or fish, you get a license.

If you want to get into the Church of the Nativity
you bow low because the door is low.
(Remember the door was made lower to prevent warring horsemen
intent on desecrating and destroying the church from entering.)

The same goes those who want to belong to God's Kingdom.
All are invited to be part of the Kingdom of God, the family of God
but to enter we need to humble ourselves, to confess our need,
ask for forgiveness, and to profess our faith in Jesus Christ.
Jesus is the "*way, the truth, the life.*"

The Message translates Matthew 7.13 this way,
***"Don't look for shortcuts to God.
The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas
for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time.
Don't fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do."***

It seems most of us are looking for an easier way, the broad way so to speak?
We always seem to buy into what is most convenient, most comfortable, most whatever.

To many folks in the church want the broad way
and maybe this is why the church is less effective in our world today.

Max Lacado in his book, When God Whispers Your Name,
writes about a fictitious game called, "What Is Your Price?"

The host entices the contestant by saying,
"All you have to do is agree to one condition and \$10,000,000 will be yours.
Not one, not two, not three million but \$10,000,000.
Tuition paid off! Retirement guaranteed!
It would open a few car doors! And maybe the doors to a few new homes!!!

Think about what you could do for others!

Help a few orphanages! Feed a few nations!

Build a few churches!!! (Now he's got the idea, right?)”

This is the opportunity of a lifetime.

All you have to do is one thing. Just take your pick.

Just choose one option.

Abandon your family;

Abandon your church.

Become a prostitute for a week.

Give up your American citizenship.

Leave your spouse.

Kill a stranger.

Change your race.

Have a sex-change operation.

Put your children up for adoption.

There you have the list! Now make your pick!

Do-da-do-da-do-do-do...Do-da-do-da-do-do-do...

Interestingly enough, the American public was asked that question.

And the “survey said,”

25% would abandon their family

25% would abandon their church

23% would become a prostitute for a week

16% would give up their American citizenship

16% would leave their spouses

7% would kill a stranger

6% would change their race

4% would have a sex-change operation

And 3% would put their children up for adoption

More incredible-most of the people polled would agree to do something,

And even more incredible, 2/3's would do more than one of those things for \$10,000,000.

Now I'm sure there are a few wheels turning out there, mine are.

You know, we're thinking, what would be wrong with leaving my spouse, family, or church, getting the \$10 million only to come back and be reunited with my spouse, family, or church?

The point of the sermon is not how to figure out

how **not** to sell your soul without selling your soul,

it's about the discipline of discerning and doing what is good for your soul.

It's **not** about looking for loopholes,

it's about the discipline to discern, to overlooking the loop holes and do the right thing.

It's **not** just about doing what is legal,

but it's about the discipline to discern, to know and do what is legal and what is ethical, too.

Jesus counsels us not to take the broad way, not to take shortcuts in our spiritual lives,
not to buy into the wide gate,
the “everybody is doing it” gate,
the “go and flow” with whatever gate,
the “do what you think is right in your own eyes” gate,
the “say what is politically correct” gate,
because entering these gates without discernment will lead to destruction.

SECOND, IT TAKES DISCIPLINE TO MAKE DECISIONS.

In Luke 13.24, “*Jesus says strive (make every effort) to enter the narrow gate.*”

The operative word is “strive.”

That word implies tough decisions made with thought and time,
with effort and energy about deeds and dollars.

We as people of faith, want to be totally committed to Jesus-don't we? ABSOLUTELY
We want to leave no shadow of doubt about our faith-don't we? ABSOLUTELY
We as people of faith, want to be unwavering in our faith-don't we? ABSOLUTELY
We want to be able to say no to temptation-don't we? ABSOLUTELY
We want love the Lord thy God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength-don't we? ABS...
We want to love our neighbor as ourselves-don't we? ABSOLUTELY

You know it doesn't take a long time to sign a mortgage.
It may feel like it takes a long time dreaming about that perfect home.
It may feel like it takes a long time looking for that perfect home.
It probably even feels like it takes a long time to prepare the papers.
But what will take 30 seconds to sign will take 30 years to pay for.
“To strive,” means to honor that decision even for 30 years.
That requires month-to-month discipline in making decisions to meet that contract.

You know it doesn't take a long time to get married.
It may feel like it takes a long time finding that perfect guy or gal.
It may feel like it takes a long time to get to the altar-so much to prepare.
It may feel like it takes a long time standing in front of God and country,
family and friends, the long winded preacher and one another before saying the “I do's”
But it takes just a moment to say those “I do's.”
Yet, marriage is a lifetime commitment.
Thus, “to strive” in marriage is being committed to make it work for a lifetime.
That requires day-to-day discipline in making decisions to make that relationship better.

In the same way it may not take long for a person to make the initial commitment
to Jesus Christ, to repent of one's sins, and to decide to follow Jesus.
It may seem that it's taken a long time for God's grace to prepare the heart.
It may seem like it's taken a person along time to put aside their fears and put on a faith.
But “to strive” means to honor that decision for a lifetime.
That requires moment-to-moment discipline
in making decisions committed to make that relationship better.

Our relationship with God simply can't be based on how we feel, having just the right set of circumstances or what we get from God.

Here is another old story.

Two guys are left stranded on an island.

They don't know what to do.

The first finally says, "Maybe prayer would help."

The second asks, "Do you know how to pray?"

The first man says, "Not really, it's been so long."

The second man says, "Go ahead and try."

The first man starts to pray.

The second man breaks in and says,

"Hey wait, you can quit praying. There is a ship coming."

Remember to "strive" to enter the narrow gate is a lifetime decision, which requires a lifetime of discipline.

And THIRD, THERE IS THE DISCIPLINE OF DISCIPLESHIP

Matthew 7.14,

"But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it."

The Message is a bit more passionate, it says it this way,

"The way to life—to God!—is vigorous and requires total attention."

Vigorous and total attention, good words to think about, aren't they?

But we want to look at the word "narrow" again.

Now the word "narrow" in verse 14 is used in a different way than narrow meaning "small" in verse 13.

In Mark 3.10, it is the same word used for "pressed."

Jesus has been preaching, teaching, and healing around the countryside, and people swarm to be around him.

"For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward (pushing and shoving, pressing) to touch him."

It was newsworthy that Jesus had calmed storms, cast out demons, cured those that were ill, and raised the dead.

Imagine the press and the paparazzi **pressing in on him**, trying to get the story.

Even more graphic is an image from the Mt. of Olives in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Gethsemane means "olive press" and olive presses are made out of stone.

Olives are dumped into a stone basin,

then a large tone presses squeeze rolls around on top of the olives, squeezing or pressing the olive juice out of olives.

Then remember how Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was "pressed."

He was caught between a rock and a hard place, he sweat blood.
“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup be taken from me.”
And then in the next breath, ***“Yet not as I will, but as you will.”***

Another word for narrow is “persecution.” I Thessalonians 3.4,
In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted.”

Other words for narrow are trouble or affliction. 2 Corinthians 4.17,
“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that outweighs them all.”

And Jesus warns us a number of times about this discipline of discipleship,
Matthew 16.24-25 among others, ***“Then Jesus said to his disciples,
‘if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross.’”***

Pressed, persecuted, troubles, afflictions, and to deny oneself are all images of “narrow.”

Discipleship is difficult.

To be devoted followers of Jesus who wants to serve him willingly and well
requires discipline to discern, to make decisions, and to live as disciples.

You might be thinking, DISCIPLINE, ya right!
This all sounds well and good but you might say,
Pastor Tom, I’ve tried diets and exercise programs,
I’ve even tried to find time to read my Bible and talk to God,
I’ve got to work take care of the kids, my spouse, put food on the table, go here or go there.
I’m tired enough already. I’ll jus fail again.

You know you’re right. It is hard. And you and I will fail from time to time.
We need God’s help, and, we need to stay with it.

It is difficult to always think the right way, always make the right decision,
and do the right thing no matter how much discipline we have.

But we’re in good company.

A guy named Paul who wrote the most letters recorded in the Bible struggled too.
He says something like this in Romans 7.

***“I know what I shouldn’t do, and that is what I do.
I know what I should do but guess what? I can’t get that done.
He is miserable and in his misery asks, Who will save me, wretched man that I am?
Then he says, thanks be to God who give us victory over sin and death in Christ Jesus.***

Paul trusted God. He trusted God’s promise, he tells us this in Philippians 1.6,
“be confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion in Christ Jesus.”

I pray I become more disciplined as a disciple of Jesus Christ
because I want to serve him willingly and well.
That is my prayer for you too. (Let’s stand and sing, “Are Ye Able?)

