

Message: The Narrow and Difficult Way

Hello and welcome to JesusFamilies.org's audio messages!

The title of this message is, "The Narrow and Difficult way".

Most people in the western or quote 'developed' nations, have life pretty easy compared with most people groups in history. This is especially true of people who live in the united states. The nation and culture that is the united states is arguably one of the most materially wealthiest nation in history and its wealth distribution system has been very effective. The nation that is the united states has been and still is arguably the most secure nation in terms of lack of threats of a person's physical survival. The US continues to have the strongest military on the planet and thus the people of the united states do not have to deal with other nations or people groups threatening their physical safety.

In light of these facts, let's consider what Joshua means when he says...

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

As the listener is probably away, it is very import to read things in context. For example, if you read an few sentences about how a particular athlete enjoys eating chocolate cake after winning an event, but the article is in a magazine entitled, "Athletes Superior Diets", then there is no doubt some context about the few sentences about chocolate cake that would not support eating chocolate cake regularly. Thus, it is very important to read things in context to get the correct meaning.

So, what does Joshua mean when he says, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it".

Perhaps the most reasonable reading would be to say that it means what it says...that there is something difficult about following this Joshua fellow, and not many people enter the gate and way that leads to life.

However, we generally don't want to do something we consider difficult. We must have faith in order to get past the fear of needing something difficult. If we don't have faith, or enough faith, to get past the fear of doing something difficult, a popular way around that is appoint religious leaders who will 'explain' what Jesus really means. And so, narrow and difficult way will be for the Christian in china or iran, or a person becoming a christian in a jewish family. One thing is for certain, the narrow and difficult way is for someone else in some special circumstance, it is not a general teaching for all people who listen to Jesus. This is one of the great lies or falsehoods that is used to prevent or hinder people from actually following the one who calls himself the Light of the world. The truth is that his teachings – the principles he gives regarding human relationships - apply to all people of all times in all cultures and nations.

So, what exactly is the small or difficult way that leads to life? The simple answer is listen to, and follow Joshua, and you will find out.

Or, you can read his story and teachings and know what it is as well. Let's consider the context of the small or difficult way that leads to life that few will find.

He follows the saying with a warning about quote false prophets, or people who claim to speak for God who actually do not. So, it is reasonable to conclude that narrow and difficult way that leads to life is hindered by people who claim to speak for God or for Joshua.

He follows that concept up with another teaching that says that many people will claim Jesus as their lord or god or whatever, and who will do many things in his name, yet who don't actually listen to him or do what he says. The two concepts of...

1. His warning us about people who claim to represent him, or false prophets, and two;
2. That many will claim his name or will claim he is something meaningful to him, yet who will not actually listen to him nor do what he says.

...fit very well together. In fact, they describe the religious systems of men, particularly the Christian religious system. If the Christian leaders do not represent him properly, and the people who listen to them are only too glad to believe the falsehoods of their leaders, then the people will not be doing what Joshua says. Instead, they will be substituting their religious traditions for the actual word of God, who is Joshua of Nazareth.

Would it not be hard to find the way to life if Joshua is misrepresented by the religious leaders, and the people are only too glad to also not listen to Joshua and instead do their relatively easy religious things as substitutes for the difficult things Joshua asks people to do?

Joshua elsewhere calls himself the Way to life. He is just one man who made some very significant claims, and of course many people are very uncomfortable with a single source of truth when it comes to beliefs about human life and destiny. In the way that there are so many people and religions and religious leaders who claim to know the way to God - and yet Joshua says he is the one sure way to know God and to know God's will for people – in that sense the way is very narrow indeed. After all, who is one man to speak for the God who created humanity? Who does he think he is?

You must, however, read all of Joshua's story and teachings to understand other aspects of the narrow and difficult way that leads to life.

One teaching in particular is hard to us to receive. Joshua repeats this core teachings of what it

means to be a follower of his several times. Here is the teaching:

“Those who seek to keep their life in this world, shall lose Life; while those who seek to lose their life in this world for my sake, shall find life everlasting”.

This fundamental teaching of the Light on what it means to be one of his followers is hidden from the vast majority of people claiming that ‘jesus christ’ is somehow important to them. It is hidden not by some clever natural means, but rather by people’s lack of faith. If we have faith that Joshua is real and his sayings are true, and that the living God Creator is his Father; and that our Spiritual Father loves us and has a state of existence waiting for us with him that is so much better than our current experience in the world; then why would we be afraid to lose our life in this world? Using faith and reason, we would not be afraid to lose our life in this world.

Therefore, part of the narrow and difficult way is that we must be willing to lose our life in this world in order to find the Life Joshua offers. So, what exactly does it mean to lose our life in this world? There are two aspects to that.

First, it could mean that we will be killed for our faith – that we will literally lose our physical life in this world, and when we do that by faith, we will enter into everlasting life.

Second, it could mean that we will reject and turn away from all things that people consider important in the world. Things like money, material security, power, education, influence, pleasure, entertainment, shallow friendships, success as those who don’t know the Light define it. To be a follower of the Light is to be different, and to be different in a world where people are supposed to or expected to conform is to be feared, misunderstood, not trusted, rejected and persecuted.

Either way, both aspects of losing our life will result in something difficult. Being killed for our faith is actually easier, but doing what causes people to want to kill us is difficult and there are few people who are willing to consider that narrow path. Our nature is to comply and to get along with others and ‘don’t rock the boat’ and don’t do anything that will cause others to not like us. But this way of life is incompatible with being a follower of the Light.

How about you, dear listener?

Do you claim to be a follower of the Light of the world, and are you willing to lose your life for his sake in order to find Life everlasting?

Most people stumble on two tightly associated aspects of following Joshua. Religion and natural or legal family. This is a key aspect of the difficult and narrow way to life. People are extremely reluctant to allow reason to lead them to the understanding that aspects of their religion nullify or cancel the teachings of Joshua of Nazareth. To do so – to allow Joshua and reason to lead them to see the error in the religion they grew up with or that others they care about still believe or do – is to be willing to admit we were wrong for all those years, and possibly give up those relationships. People are easily offended regarding their religion, and beliefs about God or our ultimate destiny are generally strongly defended by those who hold them. Thus, to disagree with those beliefs or practices is usually taken as rejecting God. And to be seen as rejecting God will generally result in a separation of relationships.

To know Joshua and his Father is to reject man’s religion or people’s beliefs about God or about human’s destiny after death. Some people get that far – they personally change their beliefs about God, but they keep that to themselves. However, to be a follower of the Light is to speak his truth’s to the people we encounter or are around regularly. Thus, the follower of Joshua will be rejected

by their natural or legal relatives if they speak about and care about trying to get them to see that Joshua is the only one people ought to be listening to in order to understand God or the meaning of their life.

These facts have little relevance to most who take some christen labels since they truly don't care about what Joshua says. Their religion is merely some intellectual facts that they can recite about God in the right circumstance, which circumstances are highly infrequent...perhaps once a year or less.

So, what is supposed to happen is this. A person find's Life – they hear the words of the Light of the world and believe him. They turn away from the darkness of their hopeless life without the Light, and they now have faith to see the Light and to start to follow him. As they do this well or properly, they will be rejected first by the people who are closest to them – their natural or legal relatives. They will be rejected by any religious people they are associated with. They might will be rejected by people they work with or their employer. In short, and over time, we will find ourselves alone. Why? Listen to the Light for the answer:

“This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.”

So, people love the darkness rather than the Light. If we be bearers of the Light, what do you think people will generally think about us and do to us? Embrace us and welcome us? Please, listen to the Light again as he describes the normal experience and way of those who follow him:

“I have given them Your word, Father; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. 18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.”

This is a key aspect of the narrow and difficult way. We will be disliked, rejected, hated by the people of the earth who reject the person and claims of the one we follow – the Light of the world.

Again, this is not some strange and unusual experience that some christian's face in specific circumstances. That is not at all what Joshua taught or lived out. Rather, is the normal experience of all who love the Light's Father and seek to do the Light's will. And no, the Light's will is not some mystical thing that has to be figured out by smart people. No, and rather, it is plainly given:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

So, dear listener, you have heard a simple and clear truth in this message. That contrary to the Christian view, it is difficult to follow the one who calls himself the Light of the world. He really and actually meant it when he says that they way to life is narrow, difficult and hard to find, and that few make it. After all, what is so difficult about going to a comfortable religious organization's building a few times a week in order to hear and sing some nice music and hear a nice sermon. What is so difficult about serving at the local homeless shelter? What is so difficult about giving some of your disposable income to help other people?

What is so difficult about celebrating the religious holidays with your family and friends? The answer is absolutely nothing. That life is in total contrast to a life where you are being disliked, hated, rejected and persecuted due to your expressions of faith in, and love for, the one who says about himself – I am the way, the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through me.

How is your life, dear listener? Are you experiencing the difficult and narrow way to Life? Are you losing your life? In what way is your life different than the average american's life? How is the new command coming to pass in your life? How is it that people can look at you and your life and say, 'look the way those people are living – caring for each other and caring about what is right and they aren't even related to one another'.

If these things are not happening in our lives, perhaps we ought to be very concerned about the Light's warnings about being misled and deceived by those who claim to represent him, and his solemn warning about deceiving ourselves with empty 'christ' words or 'relationship with christ' claims when all the while there is nothing difficult in our lives that is caused by faith in the Light.

Dear listener, we only get one life to live. The simple truths in these messages are pointing you to a Father who cares deeply for you and who knows what is best for you. Why don't you do what your Father says when he says this about his beloved Son:

“This is my Son in whom I am very pleased – listen to HIM”.

To listen to the Light is to love him and his Father...it is to hunger and thirst for what is right...it is to make loving other's a top priority...it is to be willing to go down the difficult and narrow path knowing that a glorious and loving Father awaits us to welcome us and to say,

Well done my son or daughter, welcome home, welcome to the fullness of everlasting Life.