**PERISHING IN THE PEW**

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* **Lesson**: People can be members of a church and yet remain lost. Their names might be on the church roll, but not written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.
* **Key Passages:** Matthew 7:13-29; Revelation 3:17-20
* **Writer:** Ginny Porter
* **Hear the Word:** This lesson is available on audio

**Introduction**

***Jeremiah 8:20-22 (NASB)***

***Harvest is past, summer is ended, and we are not saved. For the brokenness of the daughter of my people I am broken; I mourn, dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has not the health of the daughter of my people been restored?***

Churches of all denominations are full of broken people living lives in sin, and separation from the life of Christ Jesus. Seasons come and seasons go, yet nothing changes because even though they attend Church, they are not saved. This describes the first twenty-six years of my life. Although I attended a house of worship all my life, I was *perishing in the pew.* Oh I knew Bible stories, but not the one whom all these stories pointed to. The problem was this - I did not know I was lost. Are you aware that it is possible to believe facts about Jesus, and yet this knowledge has never penetrated your heart? I was one of many on the wide road, and so was my husband. We both believed in Jesus, but so do the demons. Paul called it vain belief. We were both lost religious church members on the wide road to destruction, and completely blind to the fact. And this is the most dangerous place to be. Mark this down: *The devil does not care if he takes us to hell from a brothel, a bar stool or a church pew!*

**A Road That Makes All the Difference**

***Isaiah 53:6 (NASB)***

***All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.***

I wrote my first Bible study for a small group of women at my church in 1997. My sister in Christ, Michelle Glenny, was “the scribe” for our little workbook. I entitled the Bible study *The Road Less Travelled* based on Matthew 7:13-27 (printed below.) I chose this title from a poem by Robert Frost titled, “The Road Not Taken.” “*Two Roads diverged in a wood, and I - I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the Difference.*” This was my senior quote in my high school yearbook. At the time of my graduation the poem had an entirely different meaning. Then, I was traveling my own path of destruction, and going *my own way* on the wide road. I called Jesus “Lord,” but did not do what He said.

Frost’s poem has an even greater significance to me now than it did when I wrote that first Bible study. What do I mean? To follow Jesus as Lord and obey His command to make disciples is definitely a road less traveled. Many people write and teach Bible studies, but few are they that are investing their lives and God’s truths into lives of others in spiritual relationships. May the Lord raise up a whole army of men and women who will follow the narrow road paved for us by Jesus and obey His last command to make disciples!

**Digging Deeper:** 1 Corinthians 15:1-2; James 2:19; Romans 1:21; Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 6:43-47; Luke 8:21

**A Picture Worth a Thousand Words**

My husband Art is not only intelligent, but also quite artistic. His most famous work, in my opinion, was done in his senior year of high school. He won an award for his portrait of the king - Elvis that is. Art had not come to know the real *KING* yet. In fact, I thought the painting was so good, that I took it to Graceland and entered it in the annual Elvis art contest. (I was sure we would win thousands of dollars. I had hoped Elvis would pay for my daughter Allie’s wedding.) Well, that did not happen. However, Art’s painting did make our local nightly news. When the contest was over we picked up the painting and drove Elvis home. On the way home we sang part of this old hymn: “Coming home, coming home, never more to roam, open wide thine arms of love, Lord I'm coming home." When we got home, Elvis returned to the closet!

A picture is worth a thousand words, so they say. So now I want to tell you about a more important work of “*Art*.” When I began to write the study of the wide and narrow roads I asked Art if he would do a painting for me, and so he did (you can see it above). As our three young children watched the painting unfold, they appropriately named the wide road “Death Road.” See below how fitting that title is.

# *Ephesians 2:1-9 (NIV)*

***As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9not by works, so that no one can boast.***

Art painted a beautiful gold mirrored gate at the entrance to hell. The gate was to reflect the people on the wide road. Have you ever been to Las Vegas, Nevada? If so, you have an idea of what I am describing of the facade of the gate to hell which stands at the end of death road in Art’s panting. All that the world offers us may look good on the outside, just like the shiny facades on the outside of the casinos; it’s all a grand illusion. The devil never gives you a true picture of what is at the end of his road. The longer I live, the more I realize the Bible is true! Every word is true! We reap what we sow, we reap later than we sow, and we reap much more than we sow!

Doctor Adrian Rogers used to quote this saying: “Sin will take you farther than you want to go, and keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you wanted to pay.” If we stay on the wide road, separated from God in our sins, we are in the domain of the one who comes to steal, kill and destroy. At the end of this road lies our worst nightmare.

Art’s painting was never completed. He stopped short of painting the people on the wide road, although we talked in detail about what they would look like. Have you ever read the short tale by Hans Christian Andersen titled, The Emperor’s New Clothes? If you have, then you will remember the Emperor’s *new clothes* were really *no clothes at all*! If Art ever completes his painting, the people on “Death Road” will be dressed like the Emperor! They are naked, but they don’t know it, because the reflection in the gates of hell shows them wearing their Sunday best. The reality for every person who is on the wide road is this: they are as naked as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They are not covered in the blood of Christ and His righteousness.

I would like to paint a mental picture. Suppose, if you will, an artist is at his easel painting a portrait of a man who survived the atrocities of the concentration camps in Poland. Have you seen the images of the emaciated, naked, half-dead, human beings? Now picture the artist standing next to a mirrored wall in his studio. As he paints, he glances at himself in the mirror and he sees a well-fed, well-dressed man. Yet he is totally unaware that he is painting a self-portrait! That was my husband Art! Perhaps he was beginning to see himself on the wide road, and that’s why he stopped painting. If that’s the case, then he was like the man who looks into the mirror of the Word of God, walks away and quickly forgets what he looked like. Admittedly, I’ve done the same thing.

# *James 1:21-25 (NIV)*

***21Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.22Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror 24and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.***

However, there was one thing I never liked about the painting. It was Jesus’ face. It was not the face of Jesus I saw when His light shone in my heart. You see, Art was blind to the glory of God in the Face of Jesus. And consequently, he was blind to the true condition of his own heart. This is the exact condition of the Church of Laodicea in Revelation chapter three. We will read about them in a moment.

**Digging Deeper:** Isaiah 59:1-5; Ephesians 2:11-14; Revelation 2:1-22

**The Wide and Narrow Roads**

***Matthew 7:13-27 (ESV)***

***“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.***

***“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’***

***“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”***

True Christians have always been in the minority. Jesus made this abundantly clear with this statement *“For the gate is small and the Way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”* How few? Well, if you take the parable of the Sower, and Jesus words to the seven churches in Revelation, it appears that out of 100 people who hear the Word of God, only 25 are saved. That’s shocking when you think about it. But what is most disturbing about Jesus’ words is the fact that *many* who are on the wide road that leads to destruction are religious and completely blinded about their true condition. Can you even imagine thinking you are on the road that leads to life until the day you meet your Maker, and hear him say, “…I never knew you”.

How is this possible? First of all, the road that leads to life is narrow, difficult and lonely. It’s costly to follow Jesus. It requires death - death to sin, self-rule and love for the world. The Germany theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, understood exactly what Jesus meant. He said, “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.” Bonhoeffer was executed for his faith. As someone has fitly put it, “The *tongue* in his shoes, matched up with the “tongue” in his mouth.” And secondly, Jesus goes straight to warning about false teacher who propagate false gospels; thus insuring that those on death road remain there. This is why the road is *narrow* and *few* follow Him. The definition of the Greek word Christian is follower of Christ. Most count the cost too high and choose comfort instead of a cross. (Galatians 2:20) But, if we desire to live we must die. This is the cost of discipleship.

How does Jesus teaching line up with the prosperity gospels being taught today? This is one example; take if you will, the book by Joel Osteen with the title: Your Best Life Now. What merit do we find in this kind of gospel? Is this really the gospel that Jesus propagated? Quite the contrary!

But just for the sake of argument, I will concur with Osteen on one point. For the lost person, here and now *is* their best life. In reality for them, living in this sin cursed world is truly all the heaven they will ever experience. But just like the rich mans who was on that wide road, all his riches could not buy him a ticket out of hell. (Luke 16:19-31) By the way, this was not a parable, but a true glimpse of reality.

You see, Satan give the best at first and saves the worst for last. He says “Do what makes you happy. Enjoy yourself!” For example: one moment of indulging in sinful sexual gratification with a person whom you are not married to, will last only for a short season. But that is as good as it’s going to get. Then comes the consequences that are not simply momentary. Like, sexually transmitted diseases, babies conceived that end up being killed or raised by a single mother. And this is not to mention, broken marriages and homes and years of shame, guilt and regret.

***Ephesians 5:3-13 (ESV)***

***But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore, do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible.***

All of this is quite the contrary for the saints in Christ. Our temporary residence in this world is all the hell we are ever going to know. Furthermore, if we have been saved from this wicked and perverse generation, then we are more and more uncomfortable with the darkness that is so prevalent in the here and now!

Not only has the Lord Jesus saved the best for last, but our best life will last forever! Amen!? Our hope and future home is a place where there is no sin, shame, death, crying or pain.

**Digging Deeper**: Matthew 13:36-42; Luke 9:22-26, 14:25-33, 16:13; John 15:18-25, 16:1-4, 33; Acts 8:9-23; Isaiah 35:5-10

**Jesus is Not in The Building**

***Revelation 3:14-22 (NIV)***

***To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: ‘I know your deeds that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. ‘So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. ‘Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. ‘Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore, be zealous and repent. ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. ‘He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”***

Religious people can be lost in houses of worship because they are blinded to the fact they are sinners. Like the Pharisee who condemned the woman caught in adultery or the sinful woman who anointed Jesus feet. You can hear her story in the lesson Alabaster Box. In John MacArthur’s commentary of Revelation 3:16-20 he states: “In the Church of Laodicea, there was not one single true believer.” Something was missing from this Christian church - Christ Himself! Jesus did not attend the church of Laodicea. He was outside. By the way, *people are the Church*, not buildings! For Christ to be in a church building, He must come in with His people! If you pay close attention to Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:13-27; Matthew 13:1-30, and his letters to the seven churches in Revelation, you will see how *few* are on the narrow road that leads to life. The majority of people who think they are saved are lost and spiritually bankrupt. This is a vivid description of Art and me, before the Lord opened our eyes to see *who we were* and *where we were* spiritually.

***2 Corinthians 4:3-6 (NIV)***

***And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.***

**Digging Deeper:** Revelation 3:16-20; Matthew 3:13-27; Matthew 13:1-30; Luke 5:18-32, 7:36-50; John 8:1-11

**The Cure - Repentance**

***Luke 15:3-10 (ESV)***

***So he told them this parable: “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”***

Many, who attend churches of all denominations, are trusting in church *affiliations*, *reformations, confirmation, dedications* and *family relations* as their salvation. God does not have grandchildren; He only has children birthed by the Holy Spirit into His family. If you are trusting in anything or anyone other than Jesus Christ to save you, then you are still lost in your sin, and you are separated from the God who loves you. Thankfully, the Lord is not willing to leave us in this condition. In Luke chapter fifteen we find the Parables of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin and Lost Son. In the Parable of the Lost Coin, a woman loses a coin in her *house,* and then she *lights a lamp* and searches carefully till she finds the *coin*. This is a perfect analogy to describe lost church members. When we are lost in the *House of God, the* *Lamp* He uses to find us is the *Word of God*! In each one of the parables found in Luke chapter fifteen, one thing causes all of heaven to break into a joyful celebration. What is that? …It is *One* *sinner* *who* *repents*!

He has brought His Lamp (His Word), and come to seek and save his lost sheep even in houses of worship. Is it possible that you are one of *His lost sheep*? If so, then turn around, *repent* and put your *faith* in the One on whom God the Father put your sins. He knocks on the door of your heart, He desires to come into you to reign and rule as King and write your name on the only roll that ultimately matters… the Lamb’s Book of Life.

**Digging Deeper:** John 1:11-14; 3:1-18;Acts 20:20-21;2 Peter 3:9; Luke 13:1-5, 24:47; 1Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Timothy 2:19; Titus 1:6, 2:11-14; Revelation 13:8

***Revelation 21:22-27 (NIV)***

***I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.***

**Think On These Things**

1. Will you please study the above passages and truly contemplate the gravity of this situation?
2. In your own words define the difference between each of the following statements:

Remorse is not repentance, conviction is not confession, and sorrow over sin is not surrender to Christ.

1. What will be at the end of the road for those who remain blind?
2. From all that you have learned from this lesson, make a list of reasons why someone can be in church and remain lost.
3. Ask other believers about their testimony and make a note of how many had some kind of spiritual experience but later in life had a true conversion.
4. If you are just not sure where you are spiritually, then please see the following lessons: The Gospel of the Three Crosses and Signs of Life.
5. If you have received the Lord through the hearing of His Word, please let us know so that we can join the *Lord Jesus in rejoicing over you*!

**Memory Passage**

***2 Peter 3:9-10***

***The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient towards YOU, not wishing for ANY to perish but for ALL to come to REPENTANCE. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.***