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# 14<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

AUGUST 25, 2013

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## HELL, LET'S FACE IT

Pastor Jim Dunn

(Quotes are from David Brickner's lead articles in two *Jews for Jesus* monthly newsletters – April 2012 and August 2012, the sermon title is from a *Jews for Jesus* online article)

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### Luke 13:22-30

#### The Narrow Door

**22** He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. **23** And someone said to him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" And he said to them, **24** "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. **25** When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' then he will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' **26** Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' **27** But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!' **28** In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. **29** And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. **30** And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

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This past week, the court martial of Nidal Hasan has been wrapping up. He's the Army psychiatrist who fired on unarmed, fellow soldiers at Fort Hood, Texas in November, 2009, charged with and now convicted of the premeditated murder of 13 soldiers and the attempted murder of 32 others.

Though months ago, Hasan decided to serve as his own counsel, on Wednesday, when given the opportunity to present his defense, he announced, "The defense rests." The judge then told the jury to return Thursday, when it would hear closing arguments. But on Thursday, Hasan chose not to give a closing argument. On Friday, the jury returned with a verdict of guilty. Yet, the question of justice in this case, of whether the jury would find Hasan guilty, has never been the central question. The central question has been the sentence, the judgment, which may be rendered as early as this coming week. Will the jury unanimously vote for the death penalty? If one member of the 13-member jury disagrees on a death sentence, then Hasan will get a sentence of life in prison.

But there is also the question of the other judgment. Will Hasan go to hell?

Just like that, with just one word, we go from a subject on which most Americans wouldn't mind sharing their opinion to a subject that most people avoid. The British author G. K. Chesterton was once asked his views on hell. His reply was, "While I cannot speak from personal experience, it seems a place to be avoided." (as quoted by Brickner) A Christian, Chesterton may have been thinking of Jesus' description of hell here in Luke 13:28: "...a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." "Hell sounds like a *place* to be avoided. But for most, hell is a *subject* to be avoided." (Brickner)

If the subject of hell is avoided, though, "if people are not allowed to hear the bad news about sin and hell and eternal separation from our loving Creator and Father, how will they ever see that Jesus' conquering of sin and hell is good news?" (Brickner) If we care about seeing people saved unto eternal life, we have to explain the bad news along with the Good News.

The thing is, "we don't mind talking about justice, but to speak of judgment and hell seems well, too judgmental." (Brickner) We don't mind talking about justice. It's not just the families and loved ones of those killed by Nidal Hasan that seek justice. We all do. We hear of children being sold into and living in slavery. There is much talk about justice for these children.

But what about judgment? What about prison sentences not just for those who are in the business of buying and selling children? What about sending to prison those “respectable” people who buy these children for household servants? Who will talk about that?

It's the same issue when it comes to talking about hell, because God's judgment is upon not just despicable people like child slavers or mass murderers like Nidal Hasan. God's judgment is upon respectable people, too. “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. If anyone calls his son an idiot, he is subject to the court. Anyone who yells at her sister in anger, ‘hey, stupid!’ will be in danger of the hellfire.” (Matthew 5:21-22) Jesus speaks of judgment for everyday sins like anger. And for those who are guilty of nothing more than name-calling, He says the punishment is the death penalty. Eternal death. Hellfire. They are going to the place that should be avoided. Well, it's one thing for Jesus to say that. But if we say such things to respectable people, it seems judgmental and self-righteous.

It seems wiser to worry about ourselves and our own sins and even more so, when Jesus seems to tell us to do just that. Jesus was asked about His views on hell: “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” Did Jesus answer that there will be only a few in the new creation but a lot of people in hell? “Strive to enter through the narrow door,” He said. (Luke 13:24) Make sure that you yourself enter eternal life. That sounds like, “Worry about yourself.” Or, is that only what we want to hear?

There's a video that's making the rounds on the Internet. It shows a tiny girl, who looks to be about 2 at the oldest. She's buckled into a car seat in what appears to be the family car. She's trying to push the button that unbuckles the car seat. And she is apparently receiving an offer of help from her father. But this two-year-old repeatedly says to her father what sounds like, “Worry about yourself.” At least that's what it sounds like.

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Or, is that merely what we want to hear, because those words, “worry about yourself,” appeal to us on so many levels, including when it comes to talking about the place to be avoided? Sadly, we worry about ourselves, and we avoid talking about that place of weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Thankfully, talking about hell openly in our witness is not the narrow door by which we enter eternal life. Jesus is that door. As He Himself said, “I am the door. I am the gate for the sheep. Whoever enters through Me will be saved.” (John 10:7,9)

If we have any concerns about whether the narrow door involves anything else but faith in Jesus, then remember this. When Jesus is asked about His views on hell, unlike G. K. Chesterton, Jesus can speak from personal experience. Jesus personally experienced hell so that we have eternal life in Him. Jesus conquered hell for us; Jesus conquered eternal separation from God for us by personally experiencing eternal separation from God while He hung on the cross. “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” The door of heaven was closed to Jesus. So the words of our text practically serve as a transcript of the cross examination between our Father and His Son Jesus when Jesus was nailed to the cross. “When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Open to me,’ then he will answer to you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ Then he will begin to say, ‘I ate and drank in your presence (in heaven).’ But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from Me, you worker of evil!’” That’s what Jesus heard from His Father, so that we will never have to hear those words. Jesus is our narrow door.

Because He did not worry about Himself, nor does He say to us that we are merely to worry about ourselves. When Jesus answered the question about whether few will be saved by saying, “Strive to enter through the narrow door,” He was simply turning the question toward a more practical direction. What good is speculating about how few will be in the new creation or how many will be in hell?

Practically speaking, we have a struggle still ahead of us, the battle of holding to faith in Jesus against the schemes of the devil. Of finding the door to making disciples of all people and teaching them whatever Jesus has taught us, including the subject of hell. Jesus is that door, also. Paul once wrote: "Now when I went to Troas to preach the Gospel of Christ, I found that the Lord had opened a door for me..." (2Cor. 2:12) Jesus, THE Door, will open doors for us to tell the whole truth, and He will give us the strength to go through them, He who made it so that you and I never have to speak of hell from personal experience.

Amen