

Explore God

“Is Christianity Too Narrow?”

February 2/3, 2019

Digging Deeper

Explore God: “Is Christianity Too Narrow?”

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Background Notes

Key Scripture Text(s): Several throughout.

*This series is part of **Explore God Chicago 2019**, a Community Outreach Initiative led by a committee of local pastors and business and ministry leaders. We all have questions about God, faith, and purpose; Explore God is a unique effort to come together to look at these questions in an open, authentic way. Join us as we explore The 7 Big Questions over the next 7 weeks.*



Introduction

“Is Christianity too narrow?” is the question that shapes our conversations this week.



We live in a global and therefore *pluralistic* world where belief and religion are pluriform and thickly layered. With the advent of media technology, open societies that do not restrict or censor the spread of ideas have ready access to all forms of religious creeds and ideas. It is no longer possible to keep the lid on the widespread sharing of many viewpoints about God, the world, human nature, sin, ethics, afterlife, and the variety of theological topics. More significantly, the migration of people groups from east to west has brought the practice of diverse beliefs to the block where we live. My neighbors are Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Muslim, and Jewish. They talk with us next door and across the fence. They sell our groceries, repair our cars, operate on our bodies, report our news, act in our movies, marry into our families, get elected to in our district and to our legislatures. They fight alongside us in battle, teach our children in school, and serve with us on community committees. When western style democracies practice their ideology, their citizens must grapple with the fact of their dual loyalties across a spectrum of religious pluralism. I do not have the luxury of isolation, but must face the *reality* of human diversity all around me.

The natural tendency, of course, is to live in cultural and religious silos and stake out a position apart from the differences of religious belief. But there is also another problem: to mistake diversity for validity and to assume that every belief is equally true. Few adherents to any of the faiths listed above actually agree with that perspective, else they would not identify themselves as Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and the like. Furthermore, there is an inclination to deal with the differences through the use of the word “tolerance,” thinking that if we tolerate other beliefs that alone will make peace with the diversity and no further effort is required. It turns out that toleration is not generosity or equality at all, but the subtle way for “our group” to affirm superiority over the others and to do so in the most self-serving and cynical way. A society of mutual tolerance among differences may well become nothing less than a “cold war” of religion in which each group co-exists in the most uneasy and disingenuous fashion. In such cases persons don’t really talk to one another at all, but instead remain silent about their faith differences so as to avoid conflict. But ignorance is not bliss, nor is silence relationship.

Our question this week is perhaps the most personal and “loaded” that we have asked thus far: *personal*, because religious belief is about commitments to truth that are calls for responsibilities to live a certain kind of life; *loaded*, because our commitment and responsibilities as Christians (or Muslims, Hindus, Jews, etc.) are in no sense neutral or negotiable. Persons of faith, of whatever creed, if they are honest with themselves, know that all religious claims cannot be simultaneously true otherwise the idea of truth is meaningless. At the same time, and more felicitously, is the fact of similarity and sameness within religious diversity such that we are able to talk intelligently about *comparative religions*. Whereas different religions speak of “God” almost universally, they discover in dialog with each other that a few ideas are remarkably the same.

Early Christian writers within our faith tradition acknowledged this sameness and sought to capitalize on it. For example, Paul in his letter to the Romans could say things like:

²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (Romans 1:20).

In point of fact the great world religions speak with one voice on the existence of the Supreme God whose being precedes all other beings and gives to them His own being so that they might exist. How far was Paul willing to go in recognizing the correlation of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the Father of Jesus His Son with the supreme god of Greek or Roman religion? If Paul recognizes the connection of Israel's God, now revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, with the traditional supreme being of contemporary pagan faiths, perhaps the best example of this would be his famous speech to the Athenians found in Acts 17:16-34. More than any other text, this one sees Paul engaging with his interlocutors in ways that both affirm the connection, but then proceed to move beyond it to the claim that Jesus is God's man in a thoroughly more complete expression. As we begin our study this week, considering the question “Is Christianity too narrow?” we will look closely at the passage in Acts 17 for help in one of the sections which follows.

A Closer Look at the Question

Perhaps the question itself requires further examination. Is the question *clear*, for example? To begin with we must wonder if there is an underlying assumption in the phrase “too narrow.” For anything to be “too narrow” it must be assumed that it is first “narrow” in some meaningful sense. “Too narrow” adds intensity and therefore introduces what grammar considers a “superlative” into the base meaning of “narrow,” making it “more so” than if the word were used by itself. In the case of Christianity, there is, as with all religions, a foundational claim, in this case, about Jesus “the Christ.” The religion is called “Christianity” precisely because the heart and soul of its creed and ethics is the person of this one called “Jesus the Christ.” Of this one person much is believed that if it was not believed would render the religion empty and without significance. And so we might say, of course, that there is something “narrow” about Christianity if by “narrow” we mean that Christians confess, witness, and believe something about Jesus Christ that makes Christianity utterly unique, wholly different, and finally meaningfully in ways not seen in other religions. A similar claim could be (and is) made by other religions about their central beliefs that “narrows” to a fine point the heart of their identities as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, or Judaism. Remove that uniqueness, and these faiths would collapse into undifferentiated masses, like cosmic “soup” without form or dignity. Therefore, we take “narrow” here to imply a definiteness and concreteness of religions without which they would not exist as religions at all.

However, if we add the word “too” to the word “narrow,” we introduce a controversy into the term which takes the form of a value judgment, an evaluative element that is not neutral or innocent to its meaning. Suppose someone should say, “Look, I'm fine with narrowing the subject matter of the Christian religion so that we all know what it claims about itself, but I'm not willing to allow that act of definition to go *too far*, else those claims will interfere, conflict, or compete with the claims of other religions (for example).” Yet, it is precisely the “too far” which ensures that the believer commits herself to Christianity and is willing to give her life for the sake of what she believes. She believes, not only with the narrowness of defining her faith, but also with the necessity of it for the whole of her existence.

Broad and Narrow Ways

The committed Christian is committed to *the way of Jesus*. One key text from the gospels underscores how far the believer in Jesus will go.

¹³ "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. (Matthew 7:13-14).

When the gospel of *Luke* takes up this saying of Jesus, he supplies further narrative which supplies the context:

²² Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. ²³ Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, ²⁴ "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. ²⁵ Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' ²⁶ "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' ²⁷ "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!' ²⁹ People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last." (Luke 13:22-30).

Read in the broader framework, the narrow door implies genuine commitment that comes from truly knowing Jesus and being known by him. Its intention, as a metaphor, is not to exclude arbitrarily, for Jesus proceeds to tell his audience that people will come from every direction of the earth "to take their places" in God's coming kingdom, His realm where all sorts of people are welcome at the table. Salvation indeed requires entrance through the "narrow door," but the narrowness refers to the prior commitment of the dinner guests: they are welcome to enter, but they must have a relationship with the "owner of the house" in order to be granted admittance. Jesus sends his invitation to the feast for persons "from everywhere."

The opposite image of the "broad road" which ends in destruction intensifies the crucial importance of the "narrow road." Through the contrast of broad and narrow, the words of Jesus reveal his gracious concern that is alert to the danger of a free-wheeling and unconstrained life. The broad road is the sign of mindlessness to the dangers, whereas the narrow road indicates carefully chosen steps and attentive direction. Jesus dedicated his public ministry to demonstrating the advantages of the judiciously practiced life, formed by "following" him. His deeds and words made the case for what he called "kingdom living" epitomized in his inaugural "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew's version) and "Sermon on the Plain" (Luke's rendition). Taken together these two perspectives are the manifesto for the narrow road that leads to life.

The Way of Jesus

Learning the path of Jesus is beyond ethics as a system of ideas. In the world of Jesus, the path turns out to be Jesus himself. Consider this enlightening dialog from John's gospel:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:1-6).

"I am the way..." is no abstraction: it is not only a way of life, or the road to success, or the path to victory. The "way" — the narrow road — is Jesus the person, God's Son, who comes from the Father and returns to the Father. In his earthly sojourn, Jesus "prepares the way of the Lord" (compare Isaiah 40) for those who will follow him. Through a startling bit of irony, Jesus announces the "big house" of His Father, and then instructs his disciples to find their way to that house through himself, the "only way." The road is narrow, but the house is large. To live with God forever is the "prepared place" that lies along the narrow way and also at its end. Such a journey, narrow though it is, builds trust in God the home and in Jesus the road. Christianity is about roads and ends, about truth and life. Like the narrow way itself, truth and life are not abstract ideas but are the relationship with Jesus. His "end" is "to take you with me that you also may be where I am."

What, then, is it about Jesus that establishes our trust that he is the only way — the narrow way — to the Father? It is important to contextualize John 14 to answer that question. Jesus has just left the upper room

where he celebrated his last meal with the disciples, and renewed his covenant of love with them by washing their feet. Fresh on their minds is the image of their “master” suddenly becoming their “servant.” He leaves that context on his own road to the cross and his death. Jesus, the one who is the narrow way, is himself on the narrow road with a definite ending and for a defining end. The road to his ending must end on the cross. He will struggle with that ending in the Garden of Gethsemane, facing courageously “The Last Temptation.” Will he drink the cup of suffering or not? Will he fulfill the Father purpose or not? Will he sacrifice himself for the sake of the world or not? The answers to those questions for Jesus will define his own narrow road. How can Jesus invite his followers to embrace that road if he refuses to do so at the end? What happens in the next few hours will prove the kind of Son Jesus really is. How he faces death matters. Each of these ominous realities adds poignancy to his call for others to follow him. Looked at in this fashion, the narrow road becomes the only road that matters for Jesus and therefore for his disciples — for you and me.

Far from being “the problem” of Christianity, the narrow road turns out to be the indispensable solution of Christianity. The way of Jesus is the way of the cross that reveals the love of God to the world, for the sake of the world. Had Jesus chosen the “broad way” of refusal to die at this defining moment, destruction would have been both his ending and his end. And if ending and end for Jesus, the broad way would have spelled doom for the world.

However, the story told by John 14 is two-fold: it is about Jesus “going away” in suffering and death; it is also about coming back again to bring his followers with him. We have a tendency to read this text in long-distance terms, applying the words to a far off second coming of Jesus at the end of the world. Such a reading hastily ignores the context plainly staring the disciples in the face. They would understand his going away to be the darkened hours of his coming death. Read this way, his coming back would necessarily point to his resurrection when they would see him again. It is this return to a fully embodied human life after death that promises to return joy to “hearts that are troubled.” A careful survey of the resurrection accounts in the four gospels reveals this return to joy. Jesus, the one who chose to take the narrow way into death, confronts the cause of death, sin, and then defeats it by sacrificing his life for the world. Jesus is Christ the Victor because he accepts with courage the narrow way of the cross.

Christ the Victor is the necessary condition for the forgiveness of sin: only the One who defeats sin on the cross is qualified to forgive sin in us. The narrow way of Jesus is not the *problem* of Christianity, but the gracious *promise* it offers. Following this way, brings us into the Father’s big house, where there are enough rooms for those who follow that way. In the words of a skilled poet: “He is the way, without him there is no going. He is the truth, without him there is no knowing. He is the life, without him there is no living.”¹ Too often this text (John 14:6) is quoted defiantly to elevate “our religion” over all others, a weapon against the barbarians at the gates. And yet, Jesus speaks these words, not to defend himself against alternatives, but to assure his disciples of the way to the Father’s house. Through long experience and disciplined practice, his disciples will discover that of all the ways they have ever known only this way will bring them to God. The message of the narrow way of Jesus is not a weapon, but a witness. It is the witness to this truth that by means of this way and no other, this kind of life is possible.

What does that life look like? John 14 continues the dialog of Jesus about the “way”:

⁷ If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

⁸ Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ ¹⁰ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. (John 14:7-10).

¹ Commonly attributed to Thomas à Kempis, 13th century German theologian.

The narrow way of Jesus opens up the inner life of God the Father. Within the orthodoxy of Judaism, God is, in principle, unseen: “No one can see the face of God and live,” were the famous words heard by Moses on Mount Sinai when God gave him the commandments:

¹⁸ Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." ¹⁹ And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. ²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." ²¹ Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. ²² When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen." (Exodus 33:18-23).

For Moses, the deep desire to “see God’s glory” reflected the yearning of the human heart, shaped by God for relationship with Himself. Moses wanted to find the “way” to the “glory.” Israel retained and nurtured the hope of seeing God’s glory, commonly described by the biblical writers as the *shekinah* — the glory that lives among them, that pitches its tent in their midst. Jesus is the fulfillment of that glory, not simply by “passing by,” but by becoming human, by being the “way” for seeing God truly. In the case of Moses, his desire is granted through enormous conditions that deny him the complete “face” of God. Moses is placed in a mountain crevice, covered by God’s hand, shielded from the face of God. But Jesus stands face to face with his followers who will witness “the goodness, mercy, and compassion” of God as eyewitnesses of his suffering death and of his glorious resurrection life. John would write about the way of Jesus in his descent to human life:

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14).

¹⁶ From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. (John 1:16-18).

When Jesus became a human being, the glory of God itself compressed into the narrow way: of flesh and blood; of a Galilean peasant from the obscure town of Nazareth; of a man of sorrows and death. God became a human being so that human beings might become the children of God. That is the true meaning of the narrow way: first of Jesus coming to us; then of us coming to God.

The essence of Jesus “the way” comes in a two-fold understanding: there is only one way to God, and that is through Jesus; but there are many ways to Jesus. By reading the stories of the gospels, we encounter the many ways people met Jesus, shaped by a variety of circumstances. Those stories continued in the life of the early church, witnessed by Luke in the book called *Acts*, where men and women “came from east and west” and found their place with Jesus at the table in the kingdom of God. The narrow way of Jesus, when followed with judicious care and trusting faith, leads his followers into the wide-open spaces of God’s kingdom land; His house where there is room for everyone.

What About the Other Ways?

These early followers of Jesus inhabited a world where “other religions” abounded. Indeed, at the beginning of the Christian movement, the majority of Jesus’ disciples were Jewish, and because they were Jewish they already knew the constant threat of cultural annihilation at the hands of a cultural phenomenon known as “Hellenization.” The product of the much earlier campaigns of Alexander the Great, this view of things imagined the creation of societies that were very much aware of foreign practices and beliefs and sought to benefit from incorporating the “best” into their own culture. Culture became a commodity of sorts, and the ancients traded in memes much as we do in modernity. Jews knew the dangers of immersion in cultures formed in this way, but also knew the opportunities afforded them by getting their own message “out there.” At the heart of the Jewish concern was the fear of losing “identity” by “living among the nations.” For example, the Old Testament book of *Daniel* begins with the challenges of four Hebrew exiles in Babylon, whose imperial masters guided their training in the ways of a foreign culture. Believing that the faith of Israel was necessary for their own fidelity as Jews, these four young men resolved to remain observant in the face of cultural pressures. Like them, later generations of Jews under Hellenization faced similar choices, and in the age of the Maccabees needed to negotiate identity as the cost of their faith.

The life and times of Jesus were immersed in Graeco-Roman culture, such that the politics, religion, and culture of the ruling elites in Israel were thoroughly saturated with foreign influences. By contrast, the pious members of the Jewish community in the land of Israel practiced “the narrow way” through Torah obedience, Temple ritual, and synagogue worship. Israel was a religious community, formed into the people of the one true God, Yahweh. Maintaining identity was a constant struggle. In their long history this people needed to renew their commitment to the creed found in Torah — a body of belief that taught the narrow way and promised the blessed favor of their God:

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. ¹⁰ When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you-- a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, ¹¹ houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant-- then when you eat and are satisfied, ¹² be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ¹³ Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. ¹⁴ Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you; (Deuteronomy 6:4-14).

“Do not forget ... serve him only ... do not follow other gods of the peoples around you.” With these words, the people of Israel were formed and to this God alone Jews were to devote itself as a “holy people...” set apart through the uniqueness of God’s choice of them. If they were to embrace this creed and live this life, they should not yield to the compromising influences around them. Should they fail, they would run the risk of losing this uniqueness and ceasing to be this people.

Following the narrow way was necessary for survival and flourishing: Israel’s very existence depended on consistent obedience. Trust in *one God* resulted in a coherent community inhabited by a faithful people. Rejection of other gods was the necessary corollary of such trust, for Yahweh would not tolerate infidelity of His holy people — the people who bore His image in the world and among the other religions.

Therefore, when the New Testament writers tell of the birth of the Christian faith, it is not surprising that they reaffirm the precepts of their Jewish roots. And yet, Jesus proclaims the renewal of those roots and expands upon them by fulfilling their original intention. He refused to overthrow the Torah, but instead “fill it full” with fresh meaning. Jesus did this by word and deed, climaxing his ministry on earth with the sacrifice to end all previous sacrifices and with the resurrection to exceed all previous precedent. The dying and rising Jesus transformed the form and shape of Torah and gave birth to a new Israel, symbolized by his calling of the Twelve disciples in correspondence to the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus becomes the “new and living way” that brings his followers into the very presence God (Hebrews 10:20), and in so doing, transcends the limitations of Judaism.

“I have not come to destroy, but fulfill...” is the radical promise of Jesus (Matthew 5:17). In consequence, Jesus in his own person becomes the new way, no less narrow in its personal demands while deepening its meaning. Jesus refocuses the narrow way by filling it with new power and purpose. He enlarges its vision so that it would come to include more persons within its community — “from east and west, north and south” (Luke 13:29). From John’s gospel we hear a new inclusivity:

¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. (John 10:16).

Jewish identity, based on the narrow way, grows into universal identity with Jesus as its center. An incident from Mark’s gospel illustrates the tensions of the old and new in the universalizing of the narrow way:

³⁸ "Teacher," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." ³⁹ "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, ⁴⁰ for whoever is not against us is for us. (Mark 9:38-40).

Moving beyond the sectarian tendencies within Judaism would require fresh reading of old texts in light of Jesus the new way. Most telling here are the words “because he was not one us...” The narrow way, in Jesus’

teaching, must not be equated with group monopoly or exclusive membership in the community of faith. A refreshing openness to the in-breaking of God's kingdom makes room for the supposed outlier. Including such persons in the mission of Jesus does not undermine the narrow way, but only gives to it deeper meaning and richer possibilities.

It would not be long before the Christian movement would come to terms with another outlier: "Gentiles," a word indicating the whole conglomerate of non-Jews that filled the four corners of the Roman Empire and beyond. Among Gentiles could be found the dizzying variety of world religions whose beliefs and practices were on the whole inconsistent with the creed of Israel. Gentiles were, in Jewish terms, idolaters whose gods proved to be "no gods at all:"

We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. ⁵ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), ⁶ yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. ⁷ But not everyone knows this. (1 Corinthians 8:4-7).

Although the gods of the Gentiles were legion, still the Gentiles themselves were persons made in God's image. They were "the other sheep" waiting to hear the voice of the Shepherd Jesus. That Jesus was the new expression of the narrow way by no means excluded Gentiles from participation in the community birthed by Jesus. The manner in which Christians preached the message of Jesus throughout the Roman world prompted Gentiles to describe them with the moniker "The Way" (see Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22;). There was an attraction in the Gospel of Jesus that drew the attention of the "others" who heretofore knew only the way of the gods. Had Gentiles been completely satisfied with "their way" they would have paid little attention to Christians who followed "The Way." Jesus the way opened up a new way for such persons: not because Christians attacked their religions, but because Christians offered a better alternative.

We notice in the practices of early Christians an eager engagement with world religions that was inviting, yet honest; loving, yet truthful; inclusive, yet faithful. Christianity in its early beginnings did not wage a culture war with the weapons of the flesh, but instead gave witness to the living Jesus through the community of his followers with the narrow way of the Spirit. In the gospel announcement, Christians said to the Gentile world, "This is the way, walk in it" (compare Isaiah 30:21).

Guided by their Jewish roots, early Christians knew that Israel was called to open up the way of the Lord for the nations, for the Gentiles, the *goyim*.

¹⁰ Pass through, pass through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations. (Isaiah 62:10).

When the followers of Jesus made their initial foray into the heartland of the Roman Empire, they carried the promise of texts like this one, preached the way of Jesus, and thereby "raise a banner for the nations" (i.e. the Gentiles). The narrow way of Jesus turns out to be the open way for all the nations of the earth. Christians knew that human beings of whatever culture were formed by God to live with Him forever. Even within the god-filled landscape of the Roman world, the one true God had laid down the pavement to lead humanity home. The way was broken and strewn with stones, but the Christian movement brought the good news of Jesus to build up the highway. remove the stones, and raise the banner.

Encountering Other Ways

Among the early records of Christianity's engagement with world religions, we find an illustrative narrative that highlights the approach taken by the first messengers of Jesus to the Gentile world:

⁸ In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. ⁹ He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰ and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. ¹¹ When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" ¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them. ¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ¹⁵ "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We

are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. ¹⁶ In the past, he let all nations go their own way. ¹⁷ Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." (Acts 14:8-17).

"He has not left himself without testimony..." Paul and Barnabas begin their encounter with an extraordinary act of love extended to the crippled. They brought the gospel with concrete evidence that the way they proclaimed was more powerful to save the sick than the remedies known by their audience. Having spoken the *word* of the gospel in the hearing of the lame man, Paul gave him the gift of faith that only comes by hearing the word of Jesus. On the basis of that faith in Jesus, Paul makes possible the *deed* of the gospel. His audience responds with the only frame of reference they knew, namely, "the gods have come down in human form..." With tragic-comic drama, Luke the narrator tells us that the audience calls Barnabas "Zeus" and Paul "Hermes." The celebration which follows sets the stage for the two apostles to explain "the good news" more accurately than Greco-Roman religion could do. The narrow way of Jesus is "narrow" because its results are more "true" than the accepted beliefs of the audience. The apostles elevate the understanding of "God," and thereby focus attention on "the living God who made heavens, earth, sea, and everything in them." God "is" in ways that cannot be contained within the idolatry believed by the audience. This God — the God who made possible the healing of the man through the word of the gospel — has permitted the Gentiles ("all nations") to "go their own way" and yet remains faithful to those same nations by sustaining His creation with food and filling human hearts with "joy." The unspoken message they offer is this: "When did your gods ever do that for you? Have you ever experienced the kind of joy on display today when you saw this crippled man healed? Isn't this good news better than any other you have known?" In effect the apostles are publicly, openly, and authentically presenting to the residents of Lystra of Anatolia (in modern day Turkey) with the evidence of a new *way*: a narrow way that is Jesus; a better way that restores human life; a fulfilling way that fills the heart with joy.

What is important to observe about this incident is the approach of the apostles to the challenge of conventional religion in the Roman world.

- They show their audience, first by gospel and miracle, that God is greater than the gods of the Empire.
- They do so with complete humility, disavowing any personal superiority: "We too are only men, human like you."
- They announce a new message: "We are bringing you good news."
- They invite a response from their audience: "Turn from these worthless things to the living God."

What they do not do is *begin their visit* with censorious words directed against the indigenous religion or its gods. They come, not with argument, but with announcement and authentication; with good news and good deed. "The only way" is the way of the "living God" whose message of good news is able to fill the heart with faith and the body with transforming power, leading to hearts full of joy and celebration. Although the celebration led by the priest of Zeus is tragic-comic, it is celebration nonetheless. The residents of Lystra celebrated the mighty deed of the gospel with the only forms they knew, and yet the apostles receive their joy with receptive hearts and then proceed to narrow the focus to the "living God."

We might well fill in a few blanks with words not found in the text above. When the people declared, "The gods have come down in human form..." the apostles might well have responded: "No, but you are moving in the right direction: God has come down in human form, and His name is Jesus." When the priest celebrated in the only way he knew how, the apostles might have said: "No sacrifice to us, but we can tell you about another sacrifice that makes all of this possible, and his name is Jesus."

When Christians advocate that Jesus is the only way to God, they are not saying that Jesus is in any sense *limited* in the *ways* he attracts persons of other religions to himself. "God has not left Himself without testimony" even though "in the past he let all nations go their *own way*." World religions share much in common with Christianity, and that is because "God has not let Himself without testimony." For Paul and his companion, the exhibition of religion at Lystra was a simple display of *myth*: about the gods and how they

organized the world. His roots as an observant Jew led him to abhor the paganism of world religions in general, disconnected as they were from belief in the One True God — the “living God.” He no doubt saw polytheism to be a corruption of God’s true Being: not as a being among beings, but as the ground of all being. Lystra proved his point. *And yet* Paul also reveals in his speech to Lystra that the God, yet unknown to its residents, was very much at work in its history. That perspective allowed Paul to *engage* with his audience and *nudge* them forward in their understanding of God. Healing the lame man opened up the way for that conversation, by *focusing* their attention on “the living God” — the God who enters human history and thereby transforms it.

The Narrowing of Christianity: C. S. Lewis

C. S. Lewis, literary figure and Christian convert of the 20th century, developed an understanding of world religions that was consistent with Paul’s approach at Lystra. In this section of our comments this week, we’d like to leverage Lewis a bit in our consideration of the question: “Is Christianity too narrow?” Our summary below comes from the work of Jacob J. Prahlow in his essay “C. S. Lewis on Myth.”²

Our purpose for incorporating this lengthy essay is germane to this week’s theme. C. S. Lewis was well aware of the plurality of religions throughout human history, especially the large body of literature they produced. What Lewis concludes about the status of Christianity in relation to these other religions is that the Christian religion is the supreme focus — the narrowing — of belief to its true and essential form. Underlying world religions is a collection of central and controlling stories which Lewis labels with the word “myths.” Such myths are archetypes — patterns of truth — woven into the fabric of other religions. But they are incomplete and in a certain sense unfulfilled as *facts*. When Christians claim that Jesus is the only way to God — the narrow way — it is in this sense acknowledging the fulfillment of the other religious stories in preparation for the story of Jesus. And so we join our discussion with C. S. Lewis and his understanding of this week’s question in a unique direction.

While for many the term “myth” connotes feelings of falsehood or story, Christian thinkers such as C.S Lewis conceived of myth in other terms. In the essay that follows, we examine Lewis’ conception of “myth,” as well as his understanding of the relationship between “myth” and “fact” in the Christian narrative.

The idea of myth was an important one for C.S. Lewis, especially with regard to his conversions to theism and Christianity, and his later apologies for the Christian faith. Lewis came to define myth in perhaps a non-traditional manner, writing that “Myth in general is not merely misunderstood history... nor diabolical illusion... not priestly lying... but at its best, a real unfocused gleam of divine truth on human imagination” (*Miracles*, 138). Thus, one must understand that what Lewis refers to as myth is not some cleverly narrated story but truth wrapped in narrative which can, when properly understood, convey great truths to its readers.

Early in his life, Lewis enjoyed the idea of myth, especially the mythology of the Norse gods. Yet as his theological journey brought him closer to theism, he expressed reluctance to fully embrace the myths of theism and (eventually) Christianity. In a letter to his friend Arthur Greeves, Lewis expressed that he was not reluctant to profess faith in God because of historical considerations. It was instead his hesitancy concerning the propitiation and sacrifice of Christ (*To Arthur Greeves*, 976) that he wrestled with. He pens that the idea of a god dying for man moved him except when he found it in the Gospels, for he felt that he could not understand the event there; he “could not in cold prose say ‘what it meant’” (*Ibid.*, 977). Yet even then Lewis viewed the myth of Christianity as holding certain historical accuracy. He writes “Now the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with this tremendous difference that it really happened” (*Ibid.*, 977). At this point Lewis believed that while the Christian story was true, that “The ‘doctrines’ we get out of the true myth are of course less true: they are translations into our concepts and ideas of what God has already expressed in language more adequate, namely the actual incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection” (*Ibid.*, 977). Thus, Lewis came to believe that Christianity ought to be approached in a manner similar to other meaningful myths and that the story of Christianity almost certainly happened.

In *An Experiment in Criticism*, Lewis approached “myth” in several ways, most importantly as a story which has “a value in itself — a value independent of its embodiment in any literary work” (*Experiment in Criticism*, 41). Here Lewis defined myth in several ways. First, myth is ‘extra-literary’ as it has value outside its manifestation within a literary context. Second, myth elicits pleasure from the reader, but not pleasure based upon any specific literary device such as surprise or suspense (*Ibid.*, 43). Third, human sympathy is minimal — the reader generally does not project himself into the myth (*Ibid.*, 44). Fourth, myth is fantastic and deals with the seemingly impossible (*Ibid.*, 44). Fifth, the experience of the myth, while possibly joyful or sad, is always serious and grave (*Ibid.*, 44). Finally, even within the midst of the seriousness, the myth is awe-inspiring, portraying the communication of some great truth to the reader (*Ibid.*, 44). From this literary perspective, the importance of myth to Lewis was the experience: “When I talk of

² The essay appears in four parts on the website: <https://pursuingveritas.com>. Search for: “C. S. Lewis on Myth.”

myths I mean myths as we experience them: that is, myths contemplated but not believed, dissociated from ritual, held up before the fully waking imagination of a logical mind" (Ibid., 45). Myth is to be thought-provoking, awe-inspiring, and contemplated. Yet, the appreciation of myth does not necessarily have to be literary and scholarly. While any man can read myth, only the truly literary will be impacted by both the literature for its own sake as well as the delight that accompanies the meaning behind the myth (Ibid., 46-47). Having viewed Lewis' literary approach, we now turn to examining his perspective on myths in terms of their historicity.

In *The Pilgrim's Regress*, Lewis' characters, John and the Hermit, talk of the history of the Landlord and the Island, during which the history of the 'myth' arises. John asks the Hermit if it is "really true that all men, all nations, have had this vision of the Island?" an indication of John's own experience with myth (*The Pilgrim's Regress*, 197). The Hermit responds that "it does not always come in the form of an Island: and to some men, if they inherit particular diseases, it may not come at all... It comes from the Landlord...It has brought you to where you now are: and nothing leads to him which did not first proceed from him" (Ibid., 167-168). Here we see Lewis espousing the idea that while most men are given an opportunity to experience the joy of myth and respond to it, others are not. However, when the experience of a myth that points towards God comes, it can only be from God, since all things that lead to God come from Him. Later, the Hermit speaks of the battle between the Landlord and the Enemy, and how the Landlord communicated with the pagans. "The pagans couldn't read, because the Enemy shut up all the schools... But they had pictures... Those pictures woke desire" (Ibid., 169). The Hermit goes on to explain that as hard as the pagans tried to copy the images they had seen, they would always fail because the Landlord would send a new picture to awake fresh desire in them. Lewis here seems to be speaking of the various religions of the pre-Christ world, which seemed to possess elements of the truth, but ultimately failed to fully grasp the plan of God. Furthermore in *The Pilgrim's Regress*, there were the 'Shepherd People'; those who had the written rules from the Landlord, but who were perhaps a bit 'narrow' in their working of the rules (Ibid., 170). However, they found a way to the Island by the help of the Landlord, marked the way for others, and kept it for others for some time (Ibid., 170). This seems to be Lewis referring to the Children of Israel, who were given the law of God in order to bless all the nations of the world. It appears that Lewis' view concerning the Israelites was that they had come to prepare the way for Christ, introducing the world to the laws and belief in the one true God, whom the pagans could not find on their own. For Lewis, the Israelites were the preparation for the revelation of the Myth becoming Fact.

In *Miracles*, Lewis reflects on the importance of myth in regards to the Old Testament and Israel. Lewis writes that "The Hebrews, like other people, had mythology: but as they were the chosen people so their mythology was the chosen mythology –the mythology chosen by God to be the vehicle of the earliest sacred truths, the first step in that process which ends in the New Testament where truth has become completely historical" (*Miracles*, 218). For Lewis, myth is historically important in creating the context of beliefs for the truly factual, the person and work of Jesus Christ. He writes that "Just as God is none the less God by being Man, so the Myth remains Myth even when it becomes Fact. The story of Christ demands us, and repays, not only a religious and historical but also an imaginative response" (Ibid., 218)

Thus, the Christian should accept the Bible, not based purely on the factual, but based upon the myth as well. To understand Lewis as a Christian, one must realize that his "view of Scripture is inseparable from his view of myth" (Vanhoozer, 76). Lewis distinguished himself from both theological liberals and theological fundamentalists by professing the Biblical importance of both myth, that is, imagination, and historical fact (Ibid., 76-77). For Lewis books like *Jonah* and *Job* were clearly myth, whereas books such as *Acts* should be accepted as historical fact (Ibid., 78). Furthermore, as Kevin Vanhoozer writes, "Scriptural interpretation is for Lewis a matter of reading the whole Bible with one's whole being" (Ibid., 85). An integral part of this reading is the importance of myth, the imaginative side of God's work among men. Transformation was an important part of the Christian life in Lewis' understanding and the transforming power of myth is an important part of God's Word. Where then does this transforming power of myth come from?

In *Reflections on the Psalms*, Lewis discusses the topic of interpretation of 'second meanings', with respect to Christianity. He writes "We are merely considering how we should regard those second meanings which things said or written sometimes take on in the light of fuller knowledge than the author possessed. And I am suggesting that different instances demand that we should regard them in different ways. Sometimes we may regard this overtone as the result of simple coincidence, however striking. But there are other cases in which the later truth (which the speaker did not know) is intimately related to the truth that he did know; so that, in hitting on something like it, he was in touch with that very same reality in which the fuller truth is rooted" (Ibid., 364-365). Lewis indicates that there are differences within texts than can be interpreted in a 'Christian' manner. For example, Virgil's 'Christian' prophecy, "The great procession of the ages begins anew. Now the Virgin returns, the reign of Saturn returns, and the new child is sent down from the heavens" (Ibid., 364) is to be interpreted differently than the writings of Plato in *The Republic*, such as where he asks the reader to "imagine a perfectly righteous man treated by all around him as a monster of wickedness. We must picture him, still perfect, as he is bound, scourged, and finally impaled (the Persian equivalent of crucifixion)" (Ibid., 365).

If we are to agree with Lewis' historical account of myth, namely that God reveals Himself to all men through nature, stories, and myth itself, it seems to follow that even pagan philosophers may speak concerning the plan of God, if in some dimly lit way. For Lewis, Plato is not simply illustrating a point and using an image that we later come to see as reflecting upon the death of Christ. He is "talking, and he knows he is talking, about the fate of goodness in a wicked and misunderstanding world" (Ibid., 366). In the same way that the imperfect goodness of Socrates was snuffed out by the world, so also the exemplar of perfection would be wiped out. As Lewis notes, Plato was saying this not "because he was lucky but because he was wise" (Ibid., 366).

This reading is in contrast to that of Virgil, which Lewis says may be read in such a reflective manner, but must be understood to be "wholly irrelevant to all he was" (Ibid., 367). Lewis wrote that "There is a real connection between what Plato and the myth-makers most deeply were and meant and what I believe to be the truth...One can, without any absurdity, imagine Plato or the myth-makers if they learned the truth, saying, 'I see... so that was what I really talking about. Of course. That is what my words really meant, and I never knew it'" (Ibid., 367). In same view, other writers, such as Virgil, may not see the connection between what they had said

and later events (Ibid., 368). In reading Plato and Virgil as 'myth', Lewis makes a connection between those writings and the ultimate Myth, saying that even the pagan myths may reflect some truths of ultimate significance. But we must take care not to superimpose our later knowledge unnecessarily onto all such writings. As Lewis concludes, "there are good reasons for not throwing away all second meanings as rubbish" (Ibid., 368). For Lewis then, the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, while not written for the precisely Christo-centric purpose for which they are sometimes used, nevertheless portray Christian values within the myth.

Lewis gives perhaps his clearest exposition on myth in his essay entitled "Myth Became Fact". Lewis begins this essay with the idea that he is going to refute his friend Corineus and his assertion that no one who calls themselves a Christian is actually a Christian in any meaningful sense. To Corineus, Christianity is something horrible that no modern man could accept in its totality, and thus those who confess Christianity are really confessing modernism using Christian jargon. Lewis seeks to dispel the idea that Christianity is a "system of names, rituals, formulae, and metaphors which persist although the thoughts behind it have changed" ("Myth Became Fact, 138). Lewis asks Corineus, and those like him, "Why, on his view, do all these educated and enlightened pseudo-Christians insist on expressing their deepest thoughts in terms of an archaic mythology which must hamper and embarrass them at every turn?" (Ibid., 138)

This concern addresses Christians to this day, especially as academic Christians are still asked why they profess belief in such an outdated religion as Christianity. Lewis counters this claim by stating that "Even assuming... that the doctrines of historic Christianity are merely mythical, it is the myth which is the vital and nourishing element in the whole concern" (Ibid., 139). The Myth is itself part of the draw for the Christian faith. While Corineus postulates man should move with the times, Lewis responds that times move on without us, but that in religion we find something that does not pass away, something that abides even as the world shifts: Myth. A quick glance at history proves Lewis correct; He cites examples of Julian the Apostate, the Gnostics, Voltaire, and the Victorians—all who professed ideas that found wide acceptance in their time, but have passed to the wayside even as the myth of Christianity has expanded. Furthermore, Lewis argues that "those elements even in modernist Christianity which Corineus regards as vestigial are the substance: what he takes for the 'real modern belief' is the shadow" (Ibid., 140). To substantiate this, one must look closer at the idea of myth. Lewis delves into the difference between contemplation and enjoyment of an experience. "Human intellect is incurably abstract" (Ibid., 140) he says, but the reality we experience is concrete. Thus in experience, we are faced with a dilemma, "either to taste and not to know or to know and not to taste... You cannot study Pleasure in the moment of nuptial embrace... nor analyze humor while roaring with laughter" (Ibid., 140). We are incapable of both enjoying an experience and contemplating it at the same time; we may do one or the other, but not both. This perplexity presents us with a dilemma: How do we know real pain or pleasure? If we're unable to conceptualize ideas concerning an experience until after the fact, do we not lose much of the integrity of our argument?

To this difficulty Lewis presents the solution of myth: "In the enjoyment of a great myth we come nearest to experiencing as a concrete what can otherwise be understood only as an abstraction" (Ibid., 140). But this is often not what one looks for in a myth; frequently one reads a myth for the experience of 'tasting', not knowing a principle, "but what you were tasting turns out to be a universal principle. The moment that we state this principle, we are admittedly back in the world of abstraction. It is only while receiving the myth as a story that you experience the principle concretely" (Ibid., 141). While we cannot truly experience both contemplation and enjoyment at the same time, the event which brings us closest to that experience is myth. Furthermore, our acquaintance with myth brings us closer to the truth of reality. Lewis writes that myth is "the mountain whence all the different streams arise which become truths down here in the valley" (Ibid., 141). Myth transcends human thought; it is something that is so wonderful and deep that it at once provides a sense of joy and conveys upon us some great truth. Additionally, "as myth transcends thought, Incarnation transcends myth" (Ibid., 141). The myth of God coming to earth actually happened, without ceasing to be myth and transcend human thought.

"By becoming fact it does not cease to be myth: that is the miracle" (Ibid., 141): to Lewis, it is belief in this miracle that makes Christianity exceptional. "To be truly Christian we must both assent to the historical fact and also receive the myth (fact thought it has become) with the same imaginative embrace which we accord to all myths. The one is hardly more necessary than the other" (Ibid., 141). Christian faith then is both holding to the facts of Christianity as well as the mythical aspects, those things which are perhaps too great to comprehend cognitively but are incredible, joyful experiences. Lewis is encouraging the Christian faith to neither rely wholly upon 'scientific and explainable' fact nor solely upon the puzzle and experience of myth. Lewis indicates that the mystery of faith is perhaps more important than the facts in saying, "A man who disbelieved the Christian story as fact but continually fed on it as myth would, perhaps, be more spiritually alive than one who assented and did not think much about it" (Ibid., 141). This should not be viewed as a defense of those who disbelieve that facts of Christianity but accept the myth, but as a challenge to contemplate and experience both the facts and the myth of the Christian faith.

Lewis concludes his essay with a reminder to not forget that, "What became fact was a myth, that it carries with it into the world of fact all of the properties of myth" (Ibid., 142). As Christians, we can assent to the facts of Christianity, but we must never minimize the myth and mystery behind our faith. "We must not be ashamed of the mythical radiance resting on our theology. We must not be nervous about 'parallels' and 'Pagan Christs': they ought to be there—it would be a stumbling block if they weren't" (Ibid., 142). As Christians, we should be glad for the way in which God speaks to man through myth. For in this way God reveals Himself to all men that they may find Him; proof of His love is evident in the parallels and similarities in morality and myth across the world. To Lewis then, the myth of Christianity is of the utmost importance. This myth allows us to experience and enjoy truth in reality while simultaneously conveying upon us principles of truth. Myth is the way God communicates with man, the medium by which truth is given to mankind. Myth speaks to man where he is, allowing him to enjoy and be fed, speaking as no other form of communication can. The Myth that Became Fact, the Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection of Christ for the redemption of those who believe in Him, is the unsurpassable myth which gives life to all men who believe. This fact embodied in the truth of myth allows all men to come to God. "For this is the marriage of heaven and earth: Perfect Myth and Perfect Fact: claiming not only our love and

obedience, but also our wonder and delight, addressed to the savage, the child, and the poet in each one of us no less than to the moralist, the scholar, and the philosopher" (Ibid., 142).

Conclusion

The word "narrow" is susceptible to a less noble usage than we have chosen to follow in this week's discussion. Who would want to imagine, for example, that the faith of Jesus is "narrow-minded," suggesting a social disengagement from healthy conversation about that faith with others. That would be paramount to saying, "I don't really care what you believe; this is what I believe and it's the only way." For Christians, caring about others, regardless of their religious differences, is a matter of paramount importance. On that point, Paul's approach to world religions in Acts 14 is highly relevant: "We too are only men, human like you" is the kind of humility essential to a follower of Jesus. All else is hubris. Human pride fails the test of genuine Christianity, and any claim to "the narrow way" that entails pride is counterfeit. God's approach to the human situation is embodied in the self-emptying and humiliation of His Son when he became a human being. Any authentic follower of Jesus "should have the same mind" (see Philippians 2:5-11).

Christianity is founded on the testimony of witnesses to the life of the historical Jesus. By the same token, contemporary Christians bear witness to Jesus with the same attitude as his: in love and with humility. We accept the observation of others that the Christian road is the narrow way because that way is none other than Jesus himself. Early Christians left no doubt about that in the minds of those who heard and watched their witness:

It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹ He is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone." ¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." ¹³ When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:10-13).

The truth of the narrow way does not lie in the arrogance with which we proclaim or in the narrow-mindedness with which we communicate it. Rather than truth of the narrow way is seen in the witness of the community which reflects it. When others encounter those who walk this narrow way, they ought to ask: "What makes this kind of people possible?" In reply and with humility, the authentic follower replies: "We have found no other way that can make our lives possible except Jesus, who is 'the way, the truth, and the life.'" Christians "love to tell the story of Jesus and his love." They love to tell it because "once they were blind but now they can see." They love to tell it because their sins are forgiven. They love to tell it because they've never lost the wonder that Jesus would find and rescue them. They love to tell it because they are compelled by his love to share that story with anyone, everywhere, for "God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

The narrow way of Jesus excludes no one, and yet no one can find another way to come home to the Father. Walking the way that is Jesus is where human beings belong. A few months ago, during a visit to my retinal specialist, she told me about the presence of blood at the periphery of my right macula. This fact concerned her, as she offered a tentative diagnosis. During the course of her explanation, she said to me, "Blood is only supposed to be found in one place: blood vessels. The blood in your eye is out of place, where it doesn't belong." Human beings might well be found on the wrong road, outside the place where they belong. Was my eye doctor *narrow-minded*? Hardly. She was giving me a truthful report about the health of my eye, and determined that I make changes to be whole again. Christianity, rightly practiced, offers good news that human beings can travel on the narrow way where they belong, and when they do, they will be whole again. "Narrow" in this sense is a word about commitment, direction, and wholeness. It's about being in the place where they belong. Blood in a blood vessel; is not too narrow; life on the Jesus' road is not too narrow.

Glory to God, Amen!