

“The Narrow Door”

LUKE 13:22-30

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As all of you know, we live in a society where most people believe that we should all just leave each other alone when it comes to what we believe spiritually. The general way of thinking out there is that you can believe (or not believe) pretty much anything you want, because what is true for you might not be true for me. And even among so-called “Christian” groups, the general idea is that we may disagree over some of the particulars, but that’s okay, because after all, we are on our way to heaven, and we are simply traveling different roads to get there. And so we can pretty much boil it down: Be nice to people, and do your best to be good. And for most people, anything beyond this is ignorant, arrogant, and bigoted. The idea is that we are all headed up the same mountain using different paths, and when this life is over, we will all meet at the top, we will all be reunited, we will have made it there together.

However, as we keep these thoughts in mind, I would invite you to turn with me to a powerful passage in the New Testament book of Luke; we will be in Luke 13 (p. 1628). In this passage, we will find that Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem for the very last time, and we will find that a man asks Jesus a question, and in fact, it is a question that we hear quite often today. Of course today, it is more of an objection than it is a question. We have come here this morning to respect and honor the word of God; so, if you will, please look with me at Luke 13:22-30,

²² And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem. ²³ And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" 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 "Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' ²⁶ "Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; ²⁷ and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS.' 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 yourselves being thrown out. ²⁹ "And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ "And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last."

- I. **As we look at this paragraph of Scripture, one of the first lessons we learn is that Jesus told this man to strive to enter through the narrow door. In other words, the Lord points out that salvation does not happen by accident.**

And what we find is that Jesus redirects the question. The man says, ***“Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?”*** And in response, the Lord does not say “Yes,” the Lord does not say “No,” but the Lord basically says, “You are asking the wrong question!” You see, the man was looking for a number. The man was looking for a percentage. The man was looking for some kind of theological statement. The man was looking for some kind of theoretical discussion. But as we know, the Lord does not deal with theory; the Lord deals with individuals. And so the man hears some of what Jesus is saying, the man starts getting a clue, you can see the wheels start to turn, and the man says, ***“Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?”*** And the Lord says, ***“[You] Strive to enter through the narrow door.”*** This is not some kind of discussion just for the fun of it, but this is a discussion with some eternal consequences for this particular man.

In the same way, our own friends and loved ones may hear something of what we believe, and they may say to us, “So, you guys think you’re the only ones going to heaven?” And yet again, that is the wrong question! The right question is, “What must I do to be saved?” The wrong question is meant to start an argument. The wrong question is meant to avoid the impact of what the Lord has said. The wrong question is meant to change the subject. And so instead of being worried about numbers, instead of being worried about percentages, the Lord turns to us personally and tells us as individuals to ***“Strive to enter through the narrow door.”*** Don’t worry about others, but be concerned with what you are doing!

Each of us individually must ***“strive to enter through the narrow door.”*** Literally, the word ***“strive”*** is telling us that we must ***“make every effort,”*** we must make the tough choices, we must ***“struggle,”*** just as an athlete struggles to win the race or win the game, there is some serious effort involved. The word Jesus uses here is the root of our English word “agonize.” That is, we must agonize, we must struggle, we must work hard and focus to enter through the narrow door. Salvation does not just happen, but there is some effort involved. We have to ***“strive”*** for it. Yes, we are saved by grace, but God’s grace does not allow us to be lazy in our Christian faith. We must still strive and struggle.

The word ***“narrow”*** refers to something that is “restrictive.” Perhaps we could picture the basketball hoop. It’s not impossible to get it in, but it takes some effort because the hoop is restrictive. And so if we are watching a game and the ball hits the rim and goes around and around and around and then falls out, we don’t say, “Oh come on! Give it to him!” We don’t get upset at the refs for not counting that, because we understand that that’s part of it. The hoop is restrictive, the hoop is ***“narrow.”*** We understand this in other areas as well. How many of us get upset that the pilot has to land on that narrow little strip of tarmac out there in the middle of the airport. We don’t argue with that, because we know that the door is narrow.

In the same way, the door to salvation is also narrow. As Jesus said in John 14:6, ***“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”*** And, as Peter said in Acts 4:12, ***“...there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”*** Jesus, therefore, never said that he is one of many ways, He never said that he is the best way, but He said that He is the only way to heaven. Of course at this point, many people will say, “Well, that’s just not fair! How dare God make the entrance so restrictive! How dare He make the door so narrow!” However, we need to realize: God is not narrow-minded because He made one way to be saved, but He is very loving and tolerant because He made any way after what we did to Him. Let me pose a thought question: If

someone murdered your only child, would you invite them into your home for dinner? That is exactly what the Lord has done.

Jesus, therefore, refused to get sucked into the debate concerning numbers and percentages, but the Lord redirected the question to concern for this one man's eternal soul, ***"Strive to enter through the narrow door."*** We do not end up saved by accident, we can not just kind of wander around and happen to stumble through the narrow door, but we must "strive" for it. As God said in Jeremiah 29:13, ***"You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart."*** And, as Paul said in Philippians 2:12, ***"So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed...work out your salvation with fear and trembling."*** We must strive to enter through the narrow door.

II. **As the Lord drives home the importance of striving to enter the narrow door, He introduces a little parable as He very clearly says that MANY PEOPLE WILL, IN FACT, TRY TO ENTER, BUT THEY WILL BE TURNED AWAY AT THE DOOR.**

This is where we find that the open door will not always be open, and this is where we find that ***"many"*** who thought they were already on the inside are actually on the outside. And so at this point the Lord says that ***"many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."*** Many people will miss the deadline. Many people who do not see the importance of stepping through the door will eventually have a rude awakening, and we're talking here about people who were perhaps very interested in what the Lord had to say. We're talking here about religious people, good moral people, people who perhaps even spent some time in this life praising the Lord, people who went to church, people who did good deeds. Many of those who thought they would be in are actually out. And this is where we discover that most people who die do not go to a better place. Have we thought about that? Have we let it really sink in? Most people who die do not go to a better place.

However, at least for right now, the narrow door is still open. Of course we are now 2,000 years closer to the closing of the door than the people here in Luke 13, but at least for right now the door is still open. While we are alive, we have the opportunity to believe in Jesus, we have the opportunity to repent of our sins, we have the opportunity to be baptized into the Lord's death for the forgiveness of our sins, we have the opportunity to live a faithful Christian life. But once that door closes, there are no more chances. Once the door closes, it is too late, and that is why the Lord explains that many will try to enter after it is too late, but they will be turned away. Maybe we could compare it to accidentally consuming some kind of deadly poison. We may know there is an antidote available, but if we die before taking the antidote, the antidote will do no good. There is a day coming when the Lord will get up from His throne, he will walk over to the front door of His mansion, and He will shut the door.

Of course now we start in with the excuses of those who have been shut out, ***"[Lord], we ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets."*** In other words, "Come on, Lord, it's us! Come on, Lord, we spent time together, we ate together, we are friends!" But the Lord says, ***"I tell you, I do not know where you are from; depart from Me all you evildoers."*** Some people might be thinking, "But that's just mean!" But think about it: What if someone starts pounding on your door at 2 o'clock in the morning? Wouldn't you want to make sure you knew that person before you opened the door? I don't know about you, but I would want to make sure I had some kind of relationship with that person before just throwing the door open and inviting him into my house.

And please notice here: It is Jesus who needs to know us! It's not enough for us to say, "Oh, but Lord, we know who You are!" I told you a year or so ago that I had the privilege of meeting Mr. Tom Barrett, the mayor

of Milwaukee, as he was running for governor. We had just a brief conversation. I invited him to worship with us. I told him that we were praying for him. Now imagine I'm standing outside his house in the middle of the night, and I'm banging on his door, and he gets out of bed, and he won't let me inside, and I say, "Hey, it's me! I know you! I met you last summer!" He would have every right to say, "Get off my front porch! I don't know you!" ...even though I may claim to know him. In a slightly similar way, if we do not have a close relationship with God in this life, if we have not stepped through the door in this life, then we will certainly not be stepping through the narrow door into eternity with God when this life is over. Because in reality, if we have not obeyed the good news, then we fall into the category of **"evildoers."** As the Lord said, **"many...will seek to enter and will not be able."**

III. **So, what difference does this little paragraph make in our lives, for those of us who now live nearly 2,000 years after these words were first spoken? In a way, we have already touched on it, but what we really need to understand this morning is that OUR ACTIONS IN THIS LIFE WILL HAVE ETERNAL CONSEQUENCES.**

For those who are shut outside, the Lord says (starting in verse 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 yourselves being thrown out. ²⁹ "And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ "And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last."

We are told that in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, sorrow and anguish that will never end. And contrary to popular opinion, this place of torment will not be a big sinful party with all of the other sinful people. In their suffering, they will apparently be able to look over and see their spiritual ancestors: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They will also be able to see the prophets, God's faithful messengers who warned them of what was coming.

What really impresses me in this little paragraph is that these people who will be shut outside do not look lost at the time. In other words, in this life, we are talking about friends and neighbors; we are talking about loved ones assembled with us here this morning. People we know who have not yet stepped through the narrow door, people we know who have not yet made the tough choices, are heading toward the fate that the Lord described in verse 28, the **"weeping and gnashing of teeth."** If we have not yet stepped through the narrow door, we are classified by the Lord as **"evildoers"** and will live forever in a lost condition. But you know, there are a lot of people in my life who do not "look" evil. There are a lot of people in my life who do not "look" lost. There are a lot of people in my life who do not "look" as if they are on a collision course with the wrath of God. I am thinking of the trial going on in Florida right now. There is obviously a lot we don't know, they are right in the middle of the trial, new stuff comes up every day, but at least for now, the prosecution seems to be making a pretty strong case that Ms. Anthony murdered her own daughter. And yet I see her on the news every day, and she does not "look" like a murderer, does she? To me, she looks like a loving mother. Again, we have no idea how this thing will end, but we need to remind ourselves that looks can be deceiving. That kind elderly gentleman who lives next door will not be judged based on how good he is, but he will be judged based on whether he obeyed the gospel. That sharp-looking young professional will not be welcomed into heaven because he read the Bible a little bit on the weekend, but he will be judged based on his obedience to the gospel. Those who live in poverty in far-off lands will not be allowed into heaven simply because they were poor, but they will be judged based on whether they obeyed the gospel. In the same way,

these people in Luke 13 were shut out, but as they lived in this life, they appeared to be quite normal. Many of them were even religious...but they were lost.

Our decisions in this life, therefore, have eternal consequences. But the good news is that Jesus is not sending us to hell. But rather, in the big picture, Jesus is inviting us to heaven. He wants us to accept the invitation. That's the whole point of this entire passage. The Lord is warning us to strive to enter through the narrow door while we still have the opportunity.

Conclusion:

The good news this morning is that although the door is narrow, by the grace of God the door is still open! ***"Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?"*** As the Lord so gently pointed out, that is the wrong question. The right question is: What must I do to be saved? The crowd interrupted Peter on the Day of Pentecost, and Peter gave the answer in verse 38, ***"Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*** The Philippian Jailer asked that question of Paul and Silas in the middle of the night in Acts 16, and they said, ***"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."*** They then explained who the Lord was, and in Acts 16:34, the Bible says that ***"...he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household."***

The door is open right now, but it will not always be open. When the door closes, which side will each of us be on for eternity? For those of us who already claim to follow Jesus, do we stand up for Him at work? Do we put Him first as we schedule our time? Do we put Him first in our family budget? Do we put Him first in our relationships? If not, we have an opportunity right now to make things right. If the door closes, that opportunity will be gone forever. This morning, then, we would invite you to make sure that you are on the right side of the door. If you are already a Christian and would like for us to pray about some situation in your life, let us know. But if you are ready to publicly admit that Jesus is God's Son, if you are ready to turn away from sin, and if you are ready to be dipped in water for the forgiveness of your sins, by all means let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: foullakeschurch@gmail.com