

Are There Just a Few?

LUKE 13:22-30 • PART 2

**Baxter T. Exum (#1621)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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It is a blessing to be together this morning! We plan on partaking of the Lord's Supper right after we study the word of God, so this would be a good time to get the elements for the Supper (from the table in the entryway) if you haven't done so already. Following the Lord's Supper, Michael/Chris will be leading us in three songs before we dismiss [for class]. If you are visiting with us today, we hope you will fill out a visitor card online if you can. The QR code is on the wall up here, on the bulletin board, and also on the bulletin itself. The address is www.fourlakescoc.org/visitor.

As our custom has been for many years now, we are collecting soup for Shults-Lewis Child and Family Services. Today is the last day for this (unless we happen to get a huge blizzard in the next few days, preventing them from making it up here this week). If you would like to help with their perishables (fresh vegetables, and so on), you can get a check to me today (made out to Shults-Lewis), and I would be glad to pass that along.

Before we get to our study of God's word today, we want to make sure we invite everyone to obey the gospel. God sent his only Son as a sacrifice for our sins, he died on the cross, he was buried, and he was raised up on the third day. In response, we hear and believe the message, we turn away from sin (we repent of sin), we publicly confess our faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and based on that confession we allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins, at which point the Christian life begins.

And we do have several examples to share this morning, starting with a post from Matt Jones, who preaches for the Wisconsin Avenue congregation in Huron, South Dakota. Matt says, "Rejoice Church! Another soul has been added to the Kingdom! Praise God!" We don't know her name, but we are thankful for a new sister in South Dakota this week.

The next one comes to us from Gage Coldwater, who preaches in Wewoka, Oklahoma. Gage says, "We finished all three studies last week with Barbara Hail. She was disgruntled with most churches in general when we met her. She had been kicked out of the Baptist church in town for not giving enough, and so she was converted to the Jehovah Witnesses. She quit going there because she celebrated her son's birthday and they got mad at her for doing that. She just kept telling me she wanted the simple truth of what the Bible says. She attended worship with us for several weeks. She told the wife of one of our elders that she was not going to be baptized no matter what! But this week after studying with us for nearly three hours, she exclaimed she needed to be baptized for

remission of sins! We baptized her and she immediately exclaimed that she felt like a heavy burden was lifted. Please pray for us to help her continue to grow in Christ!" Good news from Oklahoma!

This next one comes from a friend of mine, Paul Holland, who preaches for the Lord's church in Swartz Creek, Michigan. Paul says that, "Mary Hazel has been studying with her neighbor, Vicky Stoica, who put Christ on in baptism (Galatians 3:26-27) at the Swartz Creek church of Christ." We are thankful for neighbors who share the gospel, and we are thankful for Vicky's decision.

These next two come to us through Kathy Pollard, whose husband Neal preaches at the Lehman Avenue congregation in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Kathy says, "Oh happy day! Please welcome Jason and LeeAnna Wilson to the family of God!" Good news from Kentucky this morning!

And finally, the last one comes to us from Barry Grider, who preaches for the Riverbend congregation in Dalton, Georgia. I love the hair on this one! Barry says, "Cause for rejoicing. Aiden Basler has visited with us at Riverbend church for several months. He is a friend of Ian Miller. After much study, Aiden today confessed the sweet name of Jesus and was baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27). We are so proud of him and his desire to be a Christian. We look forward to encouraging him as he begins his walk with the Lord." We are thankful for all of these, and we share these examples by way of encouragement: What all of these men and women have done, you can do today. Pull me aside after worship, or get in touch with one of the other elders, and we would love to study with you.

This morning we are wrapping up a two-part series of lessons as we study an interesting request that came from one of our members. Several weeks ago, one of our Christian brothers was asking about the meaning of the passage where Jesus describes ***"reclining at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."*** As far as I can tell, the concept is found twice in the gospel accounts, with the first reference in Matthew 8, and the second found in Luke 13. We've been looking at Luke's account, where we find that Jesus is answering a question. Someone approaches the Lord and wants to know, ***"Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?"*** Many times, as we teach and preach, people will also ask us, "Do you people think you are the only ones going to heaven?" And as we learned last week, that is really the wrong question. The right question is, "What must I do to be saved?" And we see this in the Lord's answer. The man wants to know, ***"Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?"*** and Jesus responds by saying, ***"Strive to enter through the narrow door."*** The main point in this passage, then, is that we need to ***"strive,"*** we are to ***"make every effort,"*** we must ***"agonize."*** And last week, we saw Jesus apply this in two ways: First of all, we must strive because the door is narrow; that is, it is restrictive (like a narrow path up a mountain or like a basketball hoop). But secondly, we must also strive because even this narrow door is only open for a limited time; and so, there is a deadline. And Jesus paints the picture of the head of a house who locks up at night. We discussed the 9 p.m. routine here in Madison. Once that door is closed, it is closed, and for these reasons we are to strive, we are to make every effort.

This morning, I'd like for us to look at a third application of this command to ***"strive,"*** but as we do, let's start by looking at the passage again. And this is where we get to the phrase that led to the request for today's lesson. Once again, let's look together 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."

As we look at this paragraph, as we study this request from one of our members, we are looking at the command to ***"strive,"*** and Jesus has already applied this twice – we are to strive, 1.) because the door is narrow, and 2.) because the door is only open for a limited time.

III. Today, I'd like for us to notice a third application of this passage as we find that our striving (or our lack of striving) to enter through the narrow door has some ETERNAL CONSEQUENCES.

Our choice here is important, eternally important, and we see this in verses 28-30. As we apply this to our situation today, I want us to notice the negative possible result, then the very positive possibility (this is where we'll be looking at the question from one of our members), and then we will close today by looking at the fact that these eternal consequences are somewhat flipped from what we might expect.

A. But let's start with the NEGATIVE, because that's where Jesus starts.

For those who fail to strive to enter through the narrow door, for those who strive but strive too late (because the door has already been closed), in terms of eternal consequences, Jesus says to them (back in verse 27), ***"I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS."*** Today, we learn where they go when they depart. In verse 28, we find that, ***"In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."***

We have a bit more information in the somewhat parallel passage over in Matthew 8:12, where Jesus says, ***"...but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*** So, this terrible place is described 1.) as being a place of ***"outer darkness,"*** and 2.) it's a place where there will be ***"weeping and gnashing of teeth."*** I know it's not found here in Luke, but let's just note the ***"outer darkness"*** for a moment. It's hard for us to imagine. Here in the city, we don't often encounter true darkness, do we? Some of you know I try to go running twice a week now, and I like going at 4/4:30 in the morning. I wear a headlight, and in the past two months, I think I've only turned it on once; and that wasn't so I could see, but that's so somebody else could see me! My point is: We don't even know what darkness is these days. Even in our bedrooms at night, we often have at least something blinking and glowing somewhere – maybe the phone is charging, or there's some kind of standby light on the TV, or a CPAP, or a robot vacuum roaming the house, or a streetlight outside that peeks around the blinds. Last fall, with all of my work with the election and the recount and due to my exposure to the virus, I lived out in the garage for a few weeks. That place is lit up at night – the garage door opener, the power strips, the Milwaukee M18 battery charger, I even had extension cords with those glowing tips, I had a heater out there with a glowing light on it. I could get up and walk around and see where I was going without even having any lights on! That first night I had to walk around masking tape covering up all the glowing, just so I could get some sleep! The point is: We don't even know what darkness is these days! But for those who fail to strive to enter through the narrow door, and for those who

only try when it is too late, Jesus says that they will be ***“cast into the outer darkness.”*** We can hardly imagine the terror.

But as if that is not terrifying enough on its own, the Lord goes on to also explain that ***“in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*** What do people do in the darkness? They weep. They grind their teeth together. And the reason is: As the evildoers are cast into the outer darkness, it seems they will be able to at least briefly see those who are not in the outer darkness – they perhaps look over and they can see the great spiritual heroes of the faith – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – but they are not able to be with them; they are cut off from the table of fellowship for all of eternity; there is an eternal separation that takes place; and so, they weep, they grind their teeth together. Someone has described this as the eternal root canal with nothing to dull the pain. Some of us know what it means to grind our teeth at night. I wasn’t aware I was doing it, but my dentist could tell, based on some evidence of damage – nothing too serious, he said I wasn’t yet at a varsity level of tooth-grinding – but he was concerned; so, several years ago he recommended a guard to wear at night. And I’ve worn that faithfully for a number of years now. In the outer darkness, though, there will be no relief, no protection; and without protection, people have been known to crack their teeth in half – it’s this, but throughout all eternity. And this is the result of the trauma of being cut off, the trauma of eternal separation from God and from all things that are good. We think of the account of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16. The door into the life after this one cracks open just a bit, and we are introduced to a ***“chasm”*** or ***“canyon”*** between the saved and the lost, and there is no crossing over. And perhaps the worst part is: Those who are lost seem to have some awareness that they are not where they need to be, that they are cut off from those who are saved. Imagine being locked out of your own home at night, and you can perhaps look through the window, and you can see everybody on the inside enjoying a lavish feast, but you are on the outside looking in. Perhaps this is a comparison we could make. We want to be on the inside, but we are not. And so, the Lord describes the response as being the ***“weeping and gnashing of teeth,”*** an eternal separation. So, this is the negative side of this. For those who fail to strive or strive too late, they will be cast into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth – these are the negative eternal consequences.

B. The Lord continues, though, by describing A BEAUTIFUL SCENE FOR THOSE WHO ARE SAVED, for those who enter through the narrow door.

And this is where we might bring in the similar reference in Matthew 8:11, where Jesus praises the centurion’s faith and says, ***“I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”*** Here in Luke, we have the reference to seeing ***“Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God”*** (in verse 28), and then (in verse 29), he says, ***“And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God.”*** We combine these references, and we have our reward pictured in a number of ways.

First of all, notice that our reward is described as the end of a long journey. Back in Matthew 8:11, ***“many will come from east and west.”*** Luke adds (in verse 29) that they will also come ***“from north and south”*** as well. So, we have people traveling from far-off places, converging on this table at the end of a long journey. This life, the journey of faith, is described as traveling from one place to another. Heaven, then, is the celebration that comes at the end of that long journey. I think of what might have been the first time meeting my future in-laws. I had an ’89 Honda Civic Si (a tiny two-door hatchback, 5-speed manual transmission, a sunroof), and I would fill that car with anybody who needed a ride going north. My roommate from California was along for the ride, we had a girl from Minnesota, a girl from the Chicago area, and then there was this girl named Keola, whose dad was stationed at the Air Force Base in Rantoul, Illinois, right on my way home. As I remember it, we waited until the

last one of us got out of class before Thanksgiving break, and we left Tennessee around maybe 7 o'clock at night. That put us in Rantoul at some point around midnight (as I remember it). I pull in with the five of us crammed in this tiny car for the past 5 or 6 hours, we make it through base security at the front gate, and when we get to her house to drop her off, her parents are actually awake! And not only are they awake, but they invite us in, and they have the most amazing sandwich buffet spread all over the dining room table. The table was covered with meat, and bread, and lettuce, and condiments, and it was absolutely beautiful! At that moment, I knew I needed to get to know more about this girl whose parents would host a sandwich buffet in the middle of the night! By the way, we went on our first date a week later, which happens to be 30 years ago today (December 5, 1991). I mention this to explain that the kingdom of God is described as a feast at the end of a long journey. What an amazing picture!

But not only is our reward pictured as the end of a long journey, it is also described as something of a rest. In verse 29, those who come from east and west and from north and south are described as ***"reclining"*** at a table. To recline is to relax a bit. Several months ago, I bought my very first recliner. During the pandemic, I've done more reading by the fire in the living room (instead of in my office), so I found a good used recliner on Facebook marketplace, and I am liking it! To recline is to relax. Heaven is a place of rest. Heaven is a place where those who are tired have a chance to sit down. Here on this earth, work has a way of wearing us out. Life is hard. God's eternal kingdom, though, is described as a place of rest, a place where we can ***"recline."***

Another positive aspect of our reward is that this reclining is done at a table, at a great feast of some kind. What a beautiful picture! I love eating! Most of us love eating! Most of us love eating with good friends. We enjoy the conversation. We enjoy the fellowship. We enjoy reconnecting with each other after a long day or a long week. And in this passage, the Lord Jesus explains that we will be reclining at the table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all of the prophets. Can we even imagine this? Can we imagine sitting down for dinner with Abraham, the father of the faithful? Imagine having a conversation with Abraham about the sacrifice of Isaac, with Isaac sitting right there! What an amazing conversation that would be! Imagine eating with Jacob, the patriarch of the twelve tribes of Israel. And these three men are just a sampling of the ***"many"*** who will be gathered around this table.

And before see this as a possible contradiction, we should recognize that although there may be only a ***"few"*** who are being saved (as perhaps a percentage of the population), even a small percentage of everyone who has ever lived would absolutely qualify as ***"many."*** And they will come from all directions (obviously, a reference to the Gentiles). From the Lord's point of view, speaking in Jerusalem, they will come from east and west and north and south. And this will include people from all periods of world history. From the east of Jerusalem would include those from nations like China, and India, and the Philippines, and Japan, and Korea. From the west of Jerusalem would include people from places like Spain, and the Americas. From the north would include those from places like Russia, and England, and Iceland. From the south would include people from Egypt, and Ethiopia, and the many other nations in Africa. Many will come from all around the word – as we learned from Revelation 5, God's eternal kingdom will include those ***"from every tribe and tongue and people and nation."*** Many will come together on the last day to recline at that table.

Before we move on from the positive here, I should also point out how Jesus refers to this as being ***"the kingdom of God."*** Often, the kingdom refers to the church. But here, he seems to refer to something that's coming in the life after this one, on the other side. A kingdom is a group of people (or a territory) ruled by a king, with the king, of course, being the Lord himself. We've been studying King David in our Sunday morning classes. There was a time when the people rejected God as their king and demanded an earthly king. What we see here in Luke is

the opposite of that, a return to God as our king. Sometimes we might be tempted to whine or complain about our government here on this earth. In heaven, there will be no corruption or mismanagement, but God will rule in wisdom for all eternity.

And everything Jesus says in this passage is just a snapshot, a brief picture. There is a time coming when we will recline at the table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all of the prophets in the kingdom of God.

- C. As we come to the end of this passage, there's one more application that comes from the idea of there being eternal consequences of our striving, and that is: There seems to be something of a shakeup of those who seem to qualify for this ultimate reward, a surprise: THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS AS THEY SEEM.

And this is the point for those who hear this for the first time. He's speaking to Jews here. These people assume they are good to go. The Lord, though, ends with a reminder (in verse 30), ***"And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last."***

So yes, the door is narrow, but it is open to all people. And, in fact, those who think they are born into it do not have a free pass. But, there is some striving involved. Remember: He is speaking to Jews here, and he is telling these people to ***"strive," "for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."*** These people will be left standing outside, unable to get in, if they're not careful. These people will be told, ***"Depart from me, all you evildoers."*** They don't look like ***"evildoers,"*** they have robes! But they are. These people will see ***"Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God,"*** but they themselves will be thrown out. And over in Matthew 8:12, ***"but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness."*** So, those who assume they are saved may not be quite as saved as they think they are. There is some striving involved. And on the last day, there will be some surprises. We think of those times when the religious leaders were shocked by Jesus eating with the tax collectors and sinners – like that, but for eternity. And hopefully, we are part of the surprise here! The religious leaders of the first century would think of us as barbarians. But with some striving on our part, and through the grace of God, we have equal access to the narrow door.

Conclusion:

So, one of our members wanted to know more about ***"reclining at the table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob."*** The context of that statement is a question, ***"Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?"*** And instead of giving the man a number or a percentage, the Lord answers, ***"Strive to enter through the narrow door."*** Last week, we focused on the door being narrow and on the door only being open for a limited time (and how urgent this is). And today we've focused on the fact that our striving has some eternal consequences – some negative consequences if we fail to strive and some amazingly positive consequences if we do strive.

The main point of this passage, then, comes in the form of this encouragement that we are to strive, we are to make every effort, to enter through the narrow door. Jesus is the door. He is the only way. As to this picture of reclining at the table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, I would take this as encouragement, as motivation. This is what we have to look forward to. And it's especially encouraging for us as Gentiles. We are the outsiders here. We are the surprise! We are the ones traveling from north and south and east and west. We are the ones pictured as reclining after a long journey. We are the ones, once on the outside, who are now invited to enter. And so, when life gets tough, let's picture heaven. When we are tempted to fall, let's remember this great feast that's been prepared for us. When the way is narrow and difficult, let's think of this grand reunion. When the

road is long, let's remember this great buffet that's waiting for us on the other side. The door is narrow, but for now at least, the door is open, and we are invited to step through it. Are there just a few who will be saved? You, make every effort to enter through the narrow door.

As we close our thoughts on this passage (and before we partake of the Lord's Supper), let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

We praise you this morning as our all-loving and eternal Father. You are the God of heaven and earth, and you are the source of every good and perfect gift. Today, we are thankful for the gift of salvation, for the opportunity you've given us to step through an open door into the kingdom of your Son. We are looking forward to someday reclining at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the others who have gone on before us. If we are on the wrong path, we ask for your patience, and we ask for wisdom and strength as we turn back to you as we should.

We are thankful that John's surgery was successful this week. We pray for a quick recovery and good progress.

Thank you, Father, for hearing our prayer. We come to you in the name of your Son Jesus. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com