

**The Gospel According to Luke**  
Luke 13:22-30  
Reading: Matthew 7:13-23

Sermon #61  
December 8, 2019

## **Strive to Enter the Narrow Door**

### **Striving for Salvation**

Jesus having just taught that from a small seed a good tree will grow and from the small beginning the church would grow, he now teaches on salvation. As we had discussed last week those following Jesus would have heard the teachings of the Kingdom of God over and over and Luke reminds his readers that Jesus continued to journey towards Jerusalem for the cross was ever before Jesus and his mission for the salvation of mankind. Back in chapter 9, Luke gives us the key focus on Jesus' mind, [“When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.”](#) (v.51) Jesus' time was growing short. Please open your Bible to Luke chapter 13 as I begin at verse 22, *Jesus “went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem.”*<sup>23</sup> [And someone said to him, ‘Lord, will those who are saved be few?’](#)” This question was very relevant in view of the confused religious state of Jesus' day. There is evidence that who was saved, was widely discussed, as found in variety of ancient writings outside of the Bible. An example is the books of Ezra which are dated by scholars to have been written in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. The writings are attributed to the prophet Ezra, but since he lived in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, the writer had to be someone else. However, what it says is important in understanding the struggle of perception by Israel in general and its leaders in specific. Most believed they were saved by being descendants of Abraham and because they were God's chosen people.

Reading from the book of 4 Ezra, a noncanonized writing, God said,  
<sup>57</sup>“*Judge therefore which things are precious and desirable, those that are abundant or those that are rare?*” <sup>58</sup> I said, ‘O sovereign Lord, what is plentiful is of less worth, for what is more rare is more precious.’ <sup>59</sup> He answered me and said, ‘Consider within yourself what you have thought, for the person who has what is hard to get rejoices more than the person who has what is plentiful.’ <sup>60</sup> So also will be the judgment that I have promised; for **I will rejoice over the few who shall be saved**, because it is they who have made my glory to prevail now, and through them my name has now been honored. <sup>61</sup> **I will not grieve over the great number of those who perish**; for it is they who are now like a mist, and are similar to a flame and smoke—they are set on fire and burn hotly, and are extinguished.’” (4 Ezra 7:57-61) So, despite the common belief that Jews were saved purely as descendants of Abraham, Jesus answers this man’s question concerning salvation in a way to provoke the crowd’s thoughts.

Jesus responds, <sup>24</sup>“**Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.**” <sup>25</sup> When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ <sup>26</sup> Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ <sup>27</sup> But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’ <sup>28</sup> In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. <sup>29</sup> And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. <sup>30</sup> And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.” This person after hearing Jesus teach, possibly multiple times,

was beginning to question what the Jewish leaders taught concerning the favored status of Israel before God as descendants of Abraham and the conflict concerning national and personal salvation taught by Jesus the Messiah.

This person had seen Jesus preach and teach and heal people. He had also specifically heard Jesus speak about repentance and faith. What was beginning to develop in and around Palestine was a realization that salvation did **NOT** come automatically just because one was a descendant of Abraham. In fact, what was beginning to be understood was that being Abraham's descendant had nothing to do with salvation whatsoever. To be saved, one must be spiritually born again and as a result of the new birth repent and believe. Jesus taught that salvation came to those who were in fact spiritual Israel through the manifestation of the Spirit's work in their repentance, there was no blanket salvation on a national level. So, compared to national Israel being saved through their lineage, the number actually being saved undoubtedly small.

### **Striving with Faith**

Jesus taught that salvation was not a birthright of the Jews, but one of faith and that faith needed to be strived for and he taught this over and over. As recorded in Matthew's Gospel Account, Jesus said, **“Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. <sup>10</sup> Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”** (Matthew 3:9-10) People listening to Jesus' teachings were conflicted with what they had been taught by the religious leaders of Israel and listen as these religious leaders responded to Jesus, saying <sup>39</sup> **“‘Abraham is our father.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham**

did, <sup>40</sup> but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. <sup>41</sup> You are doing the works your father did.” (John 8:39-41) When Jesus told them they were “doing the works your father did” he is telling them they are no longer walking with God but living under the influence of Satan, the prince of this world and therefore their works did not honor God and were works separating themselves and others from God. Is this not true in our day as well? Just as the Jews claimed to be the favored children of Abraham there are churches and people who claim Christ and therefore say they are Christian, but because they do not have faith and do not believe in the Bible as the Word of God and even dare to change God’s Word and change who they think Jesus should be; they are not children of God but are doing the work of their father, the prince of this fallen world.

Salvation is neither by inheritance or works as the Jews thought and as many also think today, Paul made it clear, <sup>7</sup> “Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. <sup>8</sup> And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ <sup>(Genesis 12:3)</sup> <sup>9</sup> So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” (Galatians 3:7-9) Salvation is based on faith and salvation or the lack of salvation is a matter of eternal life or death. Therefore, Jesus says one should strive to enter the narrow door of salvation. In the Greek the word “strive” means compete for the prize or to contend for or to battle with an adversary for victory and in the case of salvation it is battle of life or death.

This need for people to strive to enter the narrow door of salvation brings up the Doctrine of Election and people’s free will. Who is the elect? What if I am not among the elect? What if my children are not part of the elect? Can all people be

saved? Are there people who cannot be saved? Is election fair? Paul wrote, <sup>16</sup>“So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. <sup>17</sup>For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.’ (Exodus 9:16) <sup>18</sup>So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.” (Romans 9:16-18) Paul wrote to his spiritual son Timothy, <sup>10</sup>“Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. <sup>11</sup>The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; <sup>12</sup>if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; <sup>13</sup>if we are faithless, he remains faithful.” (2 Timothy 2:10-13) To the church in Ephesus, Paul taught, “You were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience — <sup>3</sup>among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. <sup>4</sup>But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved.” (Ephesians 2:1-5) In the Revelation of Jesus Christ given to John, Jesus said, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.” (Revelation 3:20)

All these questions are important to consider at different times, but for right now think along these lines - since God has chosen those for salvation from eternity past and future he gave the Gospel as the means of salvation and since He has chosen those whom He will save by the Gospel and since the demands of

salvation are repentance and belief, when one hears the Gospel, if one's soul is regenerated and they **must** strive to repent and believe. You see, Election and the Gospel must go past theory and enter into reality and deeply affect our thinking and behavior. It is through repentance and belief that we are assured and know we are among the elect. Many of the speculative questions concerning Election fade away as one begins to live out the Gospel and live in submission to Christ and live as the Gospel teaches by becoming a willing and joyful slave of Christ and a child of the Living God. Salvation is both, and not, not either or. God has chosen before the foundation of the world those whom He will save and at the same time one must respond and repent and believe. This is very much what Jesus tells this crowd before him. Does this make sense to you?

### **Striving for Sanctification**

Now let's explore of Jesus' answer about salvation, reading verse 24, **“Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”** Strive, contend, fight, battle – to strive is to exert oneself to their fullest. But, understand Jesus is NOT saying that salvation is won through one's own exertion and effort or works, but salvation is all of his grace. Also know, that God's grace that saves is grace that enables one to have the desire and ability to strive to the finish line by perseverance. As Paul instructed the believers in Philippi, <sup>12</sup> **“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”** (Philippians 2:12-13) God saves us by his grace and he calls us to strive in working out our sanctification as God the Holy Spirit works within us and fills us with faith. God says those he has saved will make every effort to live as his children in this fallen world and strive to enter by the narrow

door or gate. Jesus said plainly, <sup>13</sup> “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. <sup>14</sup> For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” (Matthew 7:13-14) Jesus wants us to understand that the narrow door or gate will not always be open – it will not always be there for people to enter. The narrow door is open for now, but it will not be open forever. Time and history are moving towards Jesus’ return and then time and history will close forever and there will only be the eternal.

### **Striving Against the Closed Door**

Jesus makes clear that salvation is a limited time offer, reading at verse 25, “When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’” <sup>26</sup> Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’” Once the door is shut – it is too late and it will never be reopened. The narrow door leads to life eternal in the very presence of God but we do not know when it will close.

Jesus said his return will be unexpected and at his coming, “Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. <sup>42</sup> Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.” (Matthew 24:40-42) The picture Jesus paints for us is a sad picture for the lost and a wonderful picture for the elect. Sadly, he says that there will be people knocking and pleading for entrance but they will not be able to enter. For the saved they will already have entered.

Jesus Himself will be the One to close the door. They will plead and say, “We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.” Understand,

that the very people who were among the five thousand being fed by Jesus and hearing Him teach heard but not responded. Many of the ones who “were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22) many of these would be the very people outside knocking after the door is shut.

Jesus continues with the difficult truth in verse 27, <sup>27</sup> But he will say, “I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!” <sup>28</sup> In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out.”

Jesus very pointedly declares that those outside the narrow door are not striving for salvation and do not have the Holy Spirit’s presence in their lives. These are the rebellious evil doers who are not willing to submit to Christ and enter through the open but narrow door. These are those who think that God should make special exception for them and may hope to fain belief at their last breath as insurance against hell. They have accepted the lie of Satan that God should submit to their will and he exists to serve them. This lie appeals to the lost but stands the truth on its head.

Salvation is a free gift. However, it is not going to always be available. Those still outside when the door closes are the evil doers who really do not want Christ, they just do not want hell. They do not love Jesus but they also dislike hell. A song that was popular when I was a teenager, a long, long time ago, in 1968 still sums up the way the world lives. The song, “*And When I Die*” by Blood, Sweat and Tears contains these lyrics: *I'm not scared of dying and I don't really care. If it's peace you find in dying, well, then let the time be near ... My troubles*

*are many, they're as deep as a well. I can swear there ain't no heaven but I pray there ain't no hell. Swear there ain't no heaven and pray there ain't no hell...* but, the truth is hell is where they all go for those who never enter through the narrow door! This is bad, but for unbelievers it gets worst.

Notice what Jesus now says – in hell everyone will be able to see heaven and know the truth of God. Reading verse 28, **“In that place, referring to hell, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out.** Can you imagine how terrible it would be to see heaven and yet never having any hope of being there yourself? The result is they will suffer eternally - **there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.** This is the picture of evil frustration. The weeping is inconsolable, never-ending wretchedness and utter - everlasting hopelessness. The gnashing or as some translations say, grinding of teeth is frenzied anger. The Apostle Paul understood when he wrote, **“For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; <sup>11</sup> for it is written, in Isaiah chapter 45, verse 23 ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’”** (Romans 14:10-11) Even those in hell will bow and confess Jesus, but not be allowed in God’s presence. My beloved, this should move us to action in sharing the gospel with the lost for time is ever marching on and growing short.

### **Striving Involves All People**

The good news is Jesus finishes with two verses of great hope. Beginning in verse 29, **“And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. <sup>30</sup> And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”** It should be noted that in this

context, Jesus is speaking to the Jewish people. Their belief that they were given entrance into the Kingdom of God based on their birthright is false. Most failed to hear Christ and repent and for them the door is closed. They are forbidden to enter. The door to heaven will never be opened for them. However, look at all the Gentiles who God has graciously saved - **people will come from east and west, and from north and south.** This narrow door is for all people. It is not just for a certain nationality but for people of all ethnic origins. As Christ revealed to John, **“I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”** (Revelation 7:9) The door to salvation and a relationship with the Living God is for everyone who believes in Jesus the Christ as their Lord and Savior – while the door is still open. For all will believe, even the lost, when the end comes.

Again, in context, in verse 30, Jesus explains that there are some who at first had the message of salvation preached to them but who refused to listen because of their hard hearts. Now, those previously who were the last to receive the Gospel will in fact be first in the Kingdom. He is not teaching universalism here, but giving a metaphor of everyone’s responsibility to listen to the warning and act.

The first point of application is not that there will be some who cannot enter but that there is no sinner too evil to enter. All who come through Christ may enter. He is the narrow door to God and eternity and even though narrow the door is wide enough for all. There is no sinner too wicked, once they repent, that will not be given entrance. Jesus promised, **“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.”** (John 10:9)

The narrow door is wide enough to receive the chief of sinners and it is wide enough for you and me. If the grace of Christ can overpower the rebel Saul of Tarsus and make a new creation, Apostle Paul, it is sufficient for us. Paul said, <sup>18</sup>“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup>For it is written, *in Isaiah 29:14* ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.’ <sup>20</sup>Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup>For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup>For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup>but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup>but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup>For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

Have you walked through that narrow door? It stands open. Jesus is ready to receive sinners. It is open now but not open forever. Come to Christ today and be saved! Amen!