**The Narrow Door**

Isaiah 66:18-23; Hebrews 12:4-11; Luke 13:22-30; Psalm 50:1-15 8.25.29

Summary: Jesus teaches us about the "narrow door" of salvation. We are warned to avoid the "broad" way that leads to destruction.

The Bible is the most important book in the world. It is God’s word, and it clearly reveals the truth of this world. It is the cradle of Christ and the message of salvation. Of all the things we do in this life... work, eat, sleep, care for our families, enjoy time with friends, pursue hobbies... It is this time, the time we spend with God in His word that is the most important. Only His word can wash away our sins. Only His word produces faith and hope. Only His word leads and guides us in the truth.

If there is anything in this world that Satan does not want us to do, he does not want us to come to church. He does not want us listen to God’s word. He doesn’t want us to teach children God’s ways. But if he can’t stop us from hearing God’s word, the second best thing he tries to do is to turn us away from listening to and hearing the whole thing. Above all he doesn’t want us to listen carefully to Jesus and to believe in Him. He’s fine if Jesus is just another passenger on our bus. But he doesn’t want Jesus to be the driver.

Think about this as I read again the Gospel lesson from Luke 13:22-30 in the new English Standard Version:

*22He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. 23And someone said to him, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” And he said to them, 24“Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25When 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.’ 26Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ 27But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’ 28In 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. 29And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. 30And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”*

**1. The Question of a Follower.**

“*Will only a few be saved?”* That is the question of an unknown man listening to Jesus. As usual, Jesus does not give him a direct answer. Jesus wants the man to think deeper about his question. The inquirer must be thinking, “I am among those being saved; are there many others like me or just a few others?” Jesus in turn challenges the assumption behind the question. He is not interested in having an abstract theological discussion unrelated to life.

Notice that this man does not ask Jesus “HOW one is saved.” He wanted to know HOW MANY would be saved. Among the Jews this was a hot question. There was a debate between two famous rabbis about this. One said that the number saved would be one third of the world. To support this he pointed to the ancient Flood in which Noah and his three sons and their families were saved. But of these three sons, Shem, the ancestor of Israel, received the greatest blessing. The second rabbi disagreed and said that the number saved would be much less than that. He pointed out that there was a multitude of people who left Egypt during Israel’s great exodus. But it was only two, Joshua and Caleb, who actually entered into the land of promise.

(See J.B. Lightfoot’s Commentary)

The Bible does tell us in many places that the number of those who will be saved will be few. Paul, the Apostle, wrote in his letter to the Romans:

*“Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: ‘Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the REMNANT will be saved.’”* (Rom. 9:27)

The number of those saved will be a “REMNANT,” a small portion of those who could have been saved. Jesus explains why at the end of Luke 13. He said, *“Jerusalem, Jerusalem… How often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not” (*13:34). Many will not be saved BECAUSE THEY RESIST God’s grace.

**2. Jesus Gives Them a Long Answer.**

Jesus decided not to get into a debate on how big or small that remnant of people might be. For Him it was more important to teach HOW a person is saved. That is certainly the more important question.

So Jesus moves from abstract question to personal command. Note that verse 24 begins with Jesus turning to *“them.”* He turns and speaks not only to the questioner but to all those following him. In fact, Jesus’ command in verse 24 can be translated, “*all of you strive to enter.”* Jesus clearly thinks this teaching is something that all his followers must hear, including us today.

Jesus said that those who are saved are the ones who STRIVE to enter through the “*NARROW DOOR*.” He says that this door is NOW OPEN to anyone, but the day will come when it will CLOSE. At that time people will knock on the door and ask to be let in. But the Master will not let them in because He does not know them or where they are from. Then the people will complain that they did know Jesus. They even ate with Him and He taught in their streets. But Jesus will remain firm, “*But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’”* Verse 27.

What did Jesus mean by those who go through the narrow door? The best way to answer that question is to look at the people that Jesus SPECIFICALLY said were saved. Zacchaeus was one. He was a tax collector who cheated people. But Jesus came to His house, and Zacchaeus repented of his sins and promised to restore all that he stole. Jesus said Zacchaeus was SAVED (Luke 19:9). Another time a sinful woman came and washed Jesus’ feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. He knew she had committed many sins, but she was sorry for them, and she looked to Jesus for mercy. Jesus told her that her sins were forgiven and that she was SAVED (Luke 7:48 & 50). In the Gospel of John, Jesus simply says, *“I AM THE DOOR. If anyone enters by Me, he will be SAVED.”* (John 10:9).

So the narrow door is the door of REPENTANCE and FAITH in Jesus, who went to Jerusalem to die on the cross and to save all who would BELIEVE in Him. Jesus said that we have to “*strive*” to pass through that door. The word “strive” in the original language means “*to agonize.”* But this isn’t so much of a physical agony as it is a SPIRITUAL one. It is humiliating to admit of your sins. But Jesus called us to be humble. More than that, it is degrading to admit that you NEED to be saved. But Jesus promises that ONLY those who come to that point in their lives will be saved. That is why He said, “*The last will be first, and the first last.”* The very essence of salvation is that it is God’s work, and we have to let Him do it.

**3. The Application**

So what difference does this teaching that God calls me to repent of my sins and believe in Jesus for my salvation make in my life today?

One of my greatest fears for the American church is that we are so familiar and comfortable with our church culture yet have never really trusted Christ. We are not striving, not serious in our pursuit of Jesus. We have RELIGION, but no RELATIONSHIP with Jesus. We have little or no appetite for Jesus. Our lives are not much different from those around us. We are not striving daily to follow Jesus. Those seeking are shocked that they are not let in. America has become like most of Europe, which was once predominately Christian.

I heard of an LCMS pastor who went to a large church meeting in Germany, and was talking to some German pastors. He told them that he was from America, and that he was a Lutheran pastor as well. Do you know what they asked? They asked, “Are you one of those narrow-minded Lutherans or one of those broad-minded Lutherans?” He said, “I’m a pastor in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.” That definitely raised their eyebrows as they all said together “Ahhhh, narrow-minded...” Our church is thought by some to be “narrow-minded.” But if you really look at what Jesus taught, you can’t help but be narrow-minded when it comes to living out your faith in Jesus. I don’t mean that we should deny anything that is true. But at the same time Jesus never taught that we should just believe anything and everything that comes along.

First of all, this narrow door of salvation is very important to us personally. At times we may wonder whether we are saved. Often, at the point of death, Satan tempts people to question their salvation. He did that with my dear Mother, dying from cancer. We were on furlough in 1991 and I got to spend the last almost 40 days with her at the Good Samaritan Hospital in Kearney, NE before she passed. The nurses learned she had been the church organist for over 50 years and placed a little keyboard in her room. I spent a lot of time plunking melodies and singing. About a week before she passed she told me that the room was so cheerful when I was there, but at night it was dark and cold and she found herself wondering if everything she believed as a Christian was for real. I immediately discerned that the demons of Satan were having their last attack at her faith, so I shared my concern with Mom and prayed a Spiritual shield of protection by Holy Angels over her room when I was gone. She was never bothered again and went so peacefully into the arms of Jesus.

There are many today who say that the way of salvation is very broad and open to anyone no matter what they believe as long as they try to be good. But trying to be good does nothing about the problem of sin. It may sound good, but it isn’t. Jesus urges us in many places not to be deceived by this. Jesus said, “*And this is eternal life that they may KNOW YOU THE ONLY TRUE GOD, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent”* (John 17:3). It is because of this simple NARROW DOOR that people from all nations, from the East, the West, the North and the South will be saved. People that reject this and hold to a broader view of salvation are like the ones who said to Jesus, "*You taught in our streets."* They may have heard some of Jesus' teachings, but they CHERRY PICKED ONLY those teachings that were ACCEPTABLE to them. They didn't really LISTEN, REPENT, and BELIEVE.

The teaching of the NARROW DOOR also has an important MORAL APPLICATION. Many people take a very broad minded view of morality. I call it the “IT’S OKAY” morality. It’s okay to be a Christian and to believe or to practice any number of things God’s word rejects. Such as:

* “People are just animals because we all evolved.”
* “All standards of morality are arbitrary.”
* “Unborn babies are not really babies, and we can do what we want with them.”
* “We can do whatever we please with our sexual relations and marriage. We make the rules, not God.”
* “It's okay to take something from someone else just because they have more than I have.”
* “It's okay to verbally abuse others or be hard to get along with because I just can't help it.”

Jesus condemned anyone who does any of these things as "*evildoers*." As God BRINGS us through the narrow door, He FORGIVES our sins, and He CHANGES our thinking. We no longer say to ourselves “It’s okay,” but rather, “WHAT IS IT THAT GOD WANTS ME TO DO?”

**Prayer:** God grant us Your grace to listen to Jesus. By Your Holy Spirit lead us through that narrow door. Cleanse us of our sins in the blood of Jesus, and help us every day to do those things that are pleasing in Your sight. Amen.