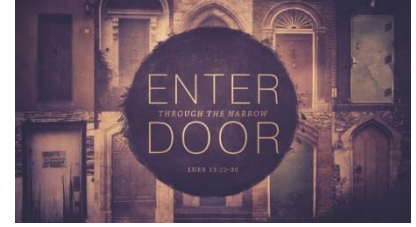


Luke 13:22-30 “Enter through the Narrow Door”
August 21, 2016



Just ask anyone who has moved recently, narrow doors are a pain. Narrow doors present absolute truths about life that you cannot ignore. No matter how hard you try, you cannot get a 32” fridge through a 31” door. You either need a bigger door or smaller stuff.

My earliest recollections of moving go back 60 years. I was 4 years old. I remember two things as if they were yesterday. I remember coming home from kindergarten one day to discover that my parents had moved! I also remember one of the reasons why we moved from that house on Windermere St. in Windsor to Chilver Rd. The house on Windermere had a door that was too narrow. With three young children, my parents had saved and saved so they could buy a freezer to put food away for the winter. We could get lots of inexpensive vegetables in the summer from the garden and from my grandparents who had a small farm, but when Eaton’s came to deliver the 21 cu. ft. freezer, it would not fit through the door and down the stairs to the basement. They tried for half a day, but to no avail. My parents had to send the freezer back until they could get a bigger house. Now, we didn’t really need a bigger house, just a bigger door, but we got a bigger house anyway. Even that new house had its drawbacks. We bought that house in 1957 and later when my dad traded in our 1952 Pontiac for a sleek new 1964 Strato-Chief, it wouldn’t fit in the garage. Now that door was too narrow!

Why is it that we are so pre-occupied with wide doors and wide screen TV’s? We have double door refrigerators and wide mouth pickle jars. Yet Jesus says, “Strive to enter through the *narrow door*.” All of a sudden, wide is bad and narrow is good! But then, according to Scripture, narrow has always been good. In the Sermon on the Mount: “*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. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*” John 14: “*I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.*”

To the rich young man who wanted to know, “What must I do to be saved?” Jesus said, “Give away everything you have and follow me.” He didn’t like that answer and walked away sad. So Jesus said to His disciples, “It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” You can’t get in carrying all that stuff. The evangelist Billy Graham was noted to say he never saw a hearse pulling a U-Haul. You really can’t take it with you.

Not only does Scripture talk about narrow doors, there are also narrow windows. I’m talking about narrow windows of opportunity. In the parable of the ten virgins, five were wise and five were foolish. They were all awaiting the bridegroom, and when he was delayed, they all fell asleep. When the call came that he was drawing near, they all got up to trim their lamps. The foolish ones hadn’t brought extra oil and had to go buy some more. While they were gone the bridegroom arrived and everyone else went in to the banquet. When they got back, the door was locked and they were left outside. They had missed the window of opportunity. One day there was a young man willing to follow Jesus and be His disciple, but he said, “Let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said no. This moment is the window of opportunity. Delay not. If you ignore this moment, what does it say about who or what is really your God?

In 1 Kings 18, the prophet Elijah said to wicked king Ahab, “*Summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table.*” So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. *Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.”* But the people said nothing. There was no reply, there was no response.

That's the way sin works. We want wide doors and wide windows of opportunity. We want to keep all our options open. There is a disturbing trend within many churches today. People keep wanting to make that narrow door wider. Then they get all in a huff if you try to suggest that God might actually leave some people out of heaven. Is Jesus really the only way to heaven or just one of many? They want to ease up and lighten up on the requirements for heaven. Just be a good person. Just be true to your chosen spirituality, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, it's really all the same God. A life of sexual depravity and wickedness doesn't preclude you anymore. We have wide doors; we accept everyone. Doesn't quite sound like the words of Jesus in our text today. In fact, there is a tone of urgency to strive for the narrow door.

In 2 Corinthians 5 and 6, St. Paul expresses this in the most serious of terms. He says, "*We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*"

Did you catch it ... we implore you ... we urge you. Don't wait, don't delay, don't think you will always have tomorrow. Be careful, for today is the day of salvation. Today's Epistle reading from Hebrews 12 asks and answers an important question: "What is the purpose of the Lord's discipline?" It is to teach us what is important and what isn't. It flows from the love of God who wants all people to be saved. He would teach us what to hold on to and what to leave behind. He would point us to the narrow door. Why? Well, it turns out that the narrow door is the *only door*. Should I follow the crowd, or look for a way that is less obvious?

Someone said to him (Jesus), "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" And he said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."

It seems like a well-meaning question but it gets a much different answer than was expected. When you think about what's behind that question, the reason becomes obvious. If most people will be saved, if hell isn't real, then following the crowd is a good bet. So the one who asks the question is really looking for affirmation and approval of his or her crowd-inspired lifestyle. But Jesus has a way of refocusing the question and pointing the questioner to a deeper truth. Don't rely on the crowd. Don't expect to find comfort in being part of the majority. Jesus' goal is this: to point people to himself.

So how do we come to that Narrow Door? The Word of God calls each of us to repent and trust in Christ. Our sinful human nature wars against God's Word. It rebels. It tries to throw off the truth. It doesn't want to leave behind all its beloved stuff. But that is not a reason to despair or exhaust yourself attempting to "struggle" through the door by your own efforts. Even though the path leads through bad news, the Gospels always bring us to good news. Time after time, God brings people through that narrow door by grace. People discovered that as faith led them to God's door, it was surprisingly easy to get through. Yes, they had to leave things behind but they were glad to be rid of the excess baggage. God set them free.

So St. Paul would rejoice to say, "*Whatever was to my profit, I now consider a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ.*" Paul had all this stuff in his heart and in his life that he thought was valuable, that he wanted, that he thought he needed, that was until he found Christ, or until Christ found him. Then he realized how utterly worthless all that other stuff was. He didn't strive to enter the narrow door as much as he rejoiced to enter through the narrow door! That narrow door is pretty wide. It is not so narrow that sinners cannot get in. It's hard for the proud. It's hard for the self-righteous. But for sinners in need of grace, the door is wide. Did you ever notice how ecstatically happy Zacchaeus was to leave behind his tax office or how thankful Nicodemus was to finally abandon his self-righteousness?

We strive and struggle and fight against self-righteousness and independence. We think that we can save ourselves by our works. We think that we don't need a Saviour. What we are fighting against here is pride. We may know about God, but do we know God? Are we part of His family? Does God get an hour a week once in a while, or is your life shared with God at every level? When God says, "I don't know you" it means that you are not part of His circle of close and intimate friends. Being among His circle of friends only happens through faith in Christ Jesus as your Saviour. To be known by God means that God recognizes you as one of His redeemed children.

Jesus went on to talk about those who went in to the banquet and those who showed up late and were left out. Those who were left out had some strange ideas about who should get in. We ate with You, they said. You taught in our streets, they said. Never did they say, "We believed in You." They knew who Jesus was, but that's as far as it went. What they had seen and heard from Jesus had no effect on their lives. Nothing had happened to change their hearts. The truth is, there will be many who are ultimately excluded from the kingdom of God. They never received or took hold or trusted in what Jesus did for them on the cross. They never had real fellowship with Him. They never believed His word of forgiveness, life and salvation. We are not truly known to God unless and until Jesus introduces us to Him. That's why He says, "No one comes to the Father, but through me."

A person can be religious, but not Christian. You can be rightly known of God only through Jesus. He is the narrow door. Apart from Jesus, God only knows you and me as sinners. Apart from Jesus, we are evildoers. Apart from Jesus, our prayers are not heard. Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem where He will suffer and die for the sins of the world. Someone asked Him a question ... will many be saved? That's really a dumb question. In the book of Acts, what did the jailer at Philippi ask Paul? He didn't ask, "Will many be saved?" His question didn't come from intellectual curiosity. It didn't come from a desire to justify himself. His was a question born out of his consciousness of his own sin, knowing that he can never save himself. What must I do to be saved?

It's the same question asked by the crowd on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. They were not asking, "Will many be saved?" They were asking "What must we do to be saved?" The answer is always the same: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus. Lord, are only a few going to be saved? This is the wrong question to ask. It comes from thinking that if half the world will be saved and I'm in the top half, then I've got a pretty good chance of making the cut. The real question is not how many, or how few. The question is you. Jesus' answer focuses in on you and me. The verb he uses in the original Greek calls for a continued action. Entrance into the kingdom of God comes because Jesus walked the road to Jerusalem for us. He is the way, and the truth, and the life. He is the door, and today is the day of salvation!