

Are only a few people going to be saved?

1. The need for repentance
2. Move beyond a superficial relationship with Jesus
3. Don't delay accepting God's grace

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**Luke 13:22-30** *Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem.<sup>23</sup> Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, <sup>24</sup> "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. <sup>25</sup> Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' <sup>26</sup> "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' <sup>27</sup> "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!' <sup>28</sup> "There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. <sup>29</sup> People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. <sup>30</sup> Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."*

This lesson scares me. Someone once said – I don't remember who – that this lesson will scare the staunchest saint. It certainly scares me. It scares me to death. It scares me for myself. It scares me for my children. It scares me for my neighbors. It scares me for those people whom I see drifting from God's Word. It scares me for the flock under my care. It scares me because it illustrates how shallow we can be when it comes to Scripture truth. It scares me because it illustrates how easily we take Christ and faith for granted. It scares me. It scares me with a simple question: *Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem.<sup>23</sup> Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?"* Let's hear how Jesus explained it.

*"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.* The Greek word which Luke writes here means to compete or fight. It is the common word used to describe athletic contests. What Jesus means is that we are to compete for the prize. We are to fight to get in. I read once about a hiker who got trapped in a cave. He found a small opening to escape, but he couldn't squeeze through with his backpack. So he removed his backpack, and then his canteen, and then his jacket before he could slip through the opening. (Dykes) Or do you remember the guy in Utah who had a boulder fall on his arm and trap him. After a couple days he had to cut off his own arm with a dull pocket knife in order to get out of the desert alive. So, we too must leave it all behind – our sinful pleasures and our good works, all that we are and have as we walk through the gate. "Only bent quite low, made utterly small, disrobed of all righteousness of our own, and wholly willing to have the coat of the flesh removed from us down to the last rag, can one get through." (William Freidrich Besser quoted by R. C. H. Lenski, Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel, p 747)

It takes effort to amputate our bloated pride, disregard our good deeds and trust only in Jesus' goodness. And that's what makes the free gift of salvation so narrow. Repentance offends people. Jesus offends people. He was offensive then. He is offensive today. His teachings are offensive and his church should be offensive. But so often the church today is not offensive.

The church today, like the establishment religion of Jesus' day, waters down the offensiveness of Jesus. We want to compromise Jesus; we want to explain and interpret Jesus so that Jesus will sell in society. Too often we want a socially acceptable church – a church that teaches children to be moral and gives them a good education, a church that marries us and buries us but dare never challenge us. We want a church that keeps us comfortable and entertains us. But doesn't such a church scare you? It scares me. It scares me because such a church will not help us get through the narrow door.

The narrow door is one of repentance. Martin Luther said, "Don't spend too much time deciding whether or not you're a lost sinner. Realize that you're up to your neck in sin – and that you need help." (Quoted in Meditations, October 4, 2005) Repentance is taking our big bags of unconfessed and unforgiven sins, dropping them with a shudder as we approach the narrow door, and saying, "Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me." (CW 814:1) There's only one thing to do with sin. You can't forget it or deny it or excuse it. But you can acknowledge it and ask Christ to cover it with his blood shed on the cross. Only Christ can pay the ugly debt your sin has built up in the

account books of the holy God. Only he can reverse the direction of our lives. Only the power of God's Holy spirit can cleanse our hearts and destroy in us the desire to rebel against our loving God.

I'm scared that my old sinful nature will get so big that I won't fit through the door. I'm scared of my own self-righteousness. I'm scared of how easy I can take Jesus and his Word for granted.

What about you? Are you ever afraid that your pride is too big to get through the narrow door? Are we taking Jesus for granted? Do we just attend church because we think we should or are we here to be convicted of our sin and to grow in our trust in our Savior Jesus Christ? Are we willing to be stripped down to nothing with repentance and enter the narrow door of faith in Jesus?

Looking at myself in the mirror of the law is scary. And that's what this lesson forces us to do. But thanks to God, it's not about me. It's about Jesus. And with Jesus, the door to heaven is this wide, as wide as the cross.

And so, the most important thing in this life is to have a relationship with Jesus. *"Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' 27 'But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'"* He was a respected man in his community, a patriotic citizen, and a leading member of his congregation. He could always be seen in church, at both regular and special service. His offerings totaled \$8000 out of his \$80,000/year salary. He was regular in family devotions, no matter how busy. He was scrupulously honest in business. He was never in bad company. He was deeply concerned about purity of doctrine and practice. He was a typical church member, right? No, he was a Pharisee, as described in the gospels. And to such a person Jesus will say, *'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'*

How we live is important, but we can't rely on that to get through the narrow door. What matters is faith in Jesus as your Savior. What matters is having a real relationship with Jesus. That doesn't happen by an occasional church service here and there or saying a prayer once in a while. That happens through regular contact with Jesus in his Word. That shows when we have regular talks with Jesus as our best friend.

Don't be like the student who attends class every day and thinks, because of that, that he will do well on the test. So, he didn't study for the test and flunked the exam. Like that student, there are many who go to church every Sunday or who live outwardly decent lives, who will not be saved. They may have been in the right places and done the right things, but they didn't have a relationship with Jesus.

Will you make it through the narrow door? I can't answer that for you. Nobody can. Only you can answer that question for yourself. Only you know where you stand with Jesus. Make sure that you have a relationship of faith with your Savior. And don't delay.

*Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' 'But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.'* You have a flight to catch, but you've gotten off to a late start. Sure enough, the traffic is slower than usual. The lines at TSA take forever. Running like an Olympic sprinter through the terminal isn't enough. As you finally reach your gate, you see that the entryway is closed and the plane has left. You plead with the attendant, but your pleas are for nothing. They won't turn the plane around.

*"There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out.* It is real, true weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is the reality of a complete loss of happiness. It is the reality of real, lasting pain "where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched." (Is 66) It is the reality of real despair and eternal suffering. And what's really scary is most people don't have a clue that it's coming.

Don't delay. You will never know when your time of grace is ending. When that day comes, you don't want to be on the outside, looking in. Examine your heart and your relationship with Jesus. Make sure it is not just a superficial acquaintance but a close relationship of faith. Be in the Word and Sacrament regularly for a stronger connection to Jesus.

The small boy waited and waited to get chosen to play on one of the two baseball teams. He wasn't fast. He wasn't strong. He wasn't very coordinated yet. But he loved to play, so he waited and waited for someone to pick him. But no one did. Crushed and about to return home, he heard the voice of the best player saying, "If he doesn't play, then I don't play!" For the rest of the summer that little boy was always the first one picked, and those two boys became the best of friends.

*Indeed, there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.* Your friend, Jesus, died and rose again so that you could be on the team, so that you could be first, so that you could be a winner. Don't be last, be first in and through the door through a relationship with Jesus.