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Luke 13:22-30

MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW DOOR!

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One of my goals for this year was to lose thirty pounds. I'm happy to say that I only have forty to go! You can say that's a bad joke or you can say that it is true. My weight has been a lifelong struggle. I have lost 40 pounds three times and it keeps coming back. It's not fun. Right now I need to get new clothes. I keep putting it off because I tell myself that it would be better if I lost some weight and I could buy smaller sizes. But it's not working. I have some clothes that are very tight. I struggle to fit into them. Some of them I've simply placed on a pile for a different time.

Perhaps you have had the same struggle. Perhaps you haven't put on a lot of pounds but your weight has shifted from the time when you were younger. You can't squeeze into your old army uniform or football jersey or wedding dress. It happens gradually over time. You may not even realize that it has happened.

Sadly the same thing happens on the spiritual front. We have a lifelong battle before us. Satan, the world and our own sinful flesh will load us down with all kinds of baggage that prevent us from entering the joys of eternal life. We may not even know that it is happening either. We get distracted by many things. There is a door that leads to eternal life. It is very narrow. It is presently open but the time will come very quickly when that door will be shut forever. Let me assure you that you do want to go through that door. Our Lord Jesus urges us to MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW DOOR!

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. We have to keep this in mind. The Scriptures must be fulfilled. Jesus had a goal, a purpose. He would offer up his life for the sin of the world. There was nothing more important than that. Everything would be according to God's timetable. It would happen at the time of the Passover as Jesus would fulfill the Passover, being the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. As he made this journey, Jesus would teach the people in the various towns and villages about the kingdom of God and what that meant.

Now Jesus was asked a question: "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" It is a very basic question and an important question. There are some who believe that everyone will go to heaven except for a few horrible people like Hitler or mass murderers or child molesters and others. Others aren't quite so sure. They wonder what they have to do to make themselves worthy of getting there. Do I have to do certain things? Do I have to abstain from doing certain things? Are there things that I have done that disqualify me permanently from having that opportunity?

There were many who taught in Israel. We know that Jesus was not like the other teachers of the Law. He taught as one who had authority. Many taught that simply being a physical descendant of Abraham was good enough. It was automatic. Others like the Pharisees taught that you had to keep the Law of Moses almost perfectly. We remember that they had 613 commandments that they debated every day in the temple courts. The Pharisees believed that most of the people outside of themselves including their fellow Jews were totally unworthy of God's favor.

Jesus' teachings were different. It appeared that he was teaching that salvation and being in God's favor came neither through being a physical descendant of Abraham nor by observing the Law. Rather he pointed people to himself. It would come through God's mercy, love, and grace. People didn't like that. Jesus would change the focus of

this man's question. He didn't want people thinking of numbers. He wanted people to be thinking about their own personal relationship with God and with him. He makes us all stop and consider, "How will I be saved?"

"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to." Jesus pictures God's kingdom as a stately mansion. It can be entered by a door. The door is narrow but it is open and it is open now. The time is coming when that door will be shut. Therefore the time to enter it is now!

We are to make every effort. Once again we have the word that points us to a struggle. We talked last Sunday about running the race of the Christian life. It is a marathon. We are often tempted to quit and give up. We have to keep on going. Now when we hear these words, we might be tempted to think that getting into the kingdom of God is at least in part due to our own efforts. We are reminded that we are by nature spiritually blind to truth, dead in our sins and enemies of God. The effort or struggle is what we call repentance.

Repentance is not a human work. It can only be worked by God. The Holy Spirit works in our hearts. He turns us from unbelief to faith. But we always have our sinful nature with us. The Christian is both saint and sinner at the same time. We sin, but we want to do what God wants us to do. The Word of God calls us to live a new life, but our sinful nature likes the old one just fine. The struggle is resolved when the Law is preached and our sinful Old Adam dies and the Gospel is preached and our new man is raised to life. That struggle will be with us every day of our lives. Sadly we still have the sinful desires of greed, envy, jealousy, lust, selfishness, hatred, anger and many more. We know what we should be doing but we don't always want to do that. We know the things that we shouldn't be doing and we want to do those. We know our sins and we turn to Christ. He offers us the gift of the forgiveness of sins.

But many do not want that. They have absolutely no intention of changing their lives and admitting that what they are doing is a sin. They don't want to struggle. They don't want to admit their sins and they don't think of them as something bad. They see themselves as pretty good and certainly better than most others. They are blown up by their own self-righteousness. They can't get through the door.

A few years ago I had the opportunity to go through a door I never imagined that I would go through. We were in Cairo, Egypt and I had the chance to enter the great pyramid. I didn't think that I would have another chance to do that so I jumped at it. The door was very narrow. You had to bend down and slowly go through it. You couldn't carry a backpack or any kind of baggage. You just squeezed in there.

There is only one way into the kingdom of God and it is through Christ and in him alone. He is the Gate. He is the Way. We cannot get to the Father except through him. Now the world will tell us that Jesus might be a way to heaven, but he certainly can't be the only way. That wouldn't be fair and nice to other religions. They may say that all roads lead to heaven and many people will stand there nodding in agreement. Does that make sense? We all need directions to go from one place to another. Some will use their computer program like Mapquest or a navigational device on their car or their phone. Some will ask others for directions. If someone or some program told you that you could get from Point A to Point B by taking any road, whether north, south, east or west, highway or cul-de-sac, for two minutes, two hours or two weeks, and get to the very spot you wanted to get to, what would you say? Wouldn't you say that was the craziest thing you ever heard? You have to take the right road, the correct road. So why would any road lead to God?

Every other religion in this world is a works-based religion. They tell you that if you want to get to heaven or paradise or nirvana or whatever you want to call it, you have to do something. You have to do so many good things. You have to refrain from doing so many bad things. In the end you hope that you've done more good things than bad.

It's not very comforting. The Scriptures tell us that there is nothing that we can do. God's Law demands absolutely nothing less than absolute perfection. We are all sinners. The good news comes as we learn that Christ was our Substitute. He lived the perfect life we were unable to live. His death took the punishment that our sins deserved. We are forgiven. Our sins have been taken out of God's sight forever. That forgiveness is offered to all.

But all do not want it. The time is coming when that door will be shut. Our Lord Jesus will return. All those people who had absolutely no time for Jesus and his Word will be screaming, "Sir, open the door for us!" Then will come the sad words, "I don't know you or where you come from." While the door was open, they didn't want to have anything to do with Jesus and his Word. They had their own priorities. Jesus was not one of them. Perhaps they even openly mocked Jesus and his followers. We don't know how long our life will last. Some live to be over 100, others not quite so long. We don't know how many chances God gives a person, but the doors are open now.

They will continue to protest: "We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets." Everybody has some familiarity with Jesus and the church. Maybe they went to Sunday School for a few years as a child. Maybe they were baptized and confirmed. They might even show up every Christmas and Easter. They can still recite the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed. It might be in their head but it is not in their heart. It meant nothing. Jesus may have taught in their streets, but he didn't teach them. They refused. They had every advantage but they refused to take advantage of it. They didn't want Jesus' righteousness or forgiveness. They have no one to blame but themselves.

Jesus has prepared a wonderful feast for us in heaven. All the saints will be there from both the Old and the New Testaments. They were all flawed sinners who believed the promises that God gave. It is a place of eternal love and peace and joy. On the other hand there will be those who are cast into hell where there is no love whatsoever. No one has to go to hell. People go there because of their own stubborn unbelief and rejection of Christ. They have nobody to blame but themselves.

Many of the Jews rejected Jesus' message. They who were first would become last. Many tax collectors, prostitutes, Samaritans and Gentiles saw their sins, confessed them and turned to Jesus. They who were last would become first.

The narrow door is still open. It will be shut. See your sins and see your Savior! He will get you through!
AMEN.