

Luke 13:22-30

I don't know how many of you have been involved in moving large furniture or appliances, but if you have, then you know how **frustrating** it is when you have a house full of **narrow** doors. It seems that no matter how you twist and turn the furniture, it simply will **not** fit through those doors. You may even begin to think that the furniture was there **first**, and the house was actually built **around** it. A **narrow** door is usually a **disadvantage**, and causes lots of **problems**. As strange as it may seem, today Jesus tells us that the door which leads to **heaven** is a **narrow** door - a door which causes a great deal of **problems** for many people. The door is **narrow** - but since it's the only **correct** door, we must make **every effort** to **Enter The Narrow Door** before it's **closed**.

When our text begins, Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem. He doesn't appear to be in much of a **hurry** because He takes His time and **teaches** in the towns and villages along the way. Jesus was a **good** teacher, as He shows us here when He answered a person's **question**. The person asked, "*Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?*" In Jesus' day it was a widely held Jewish assumption, endorsed by the rabbis, that the entire Jewish **nation** would be saved. That would involve **many** people, not just a **few**. A somewhat parallel assumption **today** would be that the Roman Catholic church is the only **true** church, and therefore, only Roman Catholics will be in heaven - or only WELS Lutherans will be in heaven - or only 144,000 Jehovah's Witnesses will be in heaven. Heaven is **not** the exclusive property of any **outward** religious denomination. Only a **few** will be saved, but salvation will **not** be based on having a certain **ancestry**, or **name**, or **social** status, or congregation **membership**. It will be based **entirely** on **faith** in **Jesus**.

For that reason, this person would have asked a **better** question if he had asked, "Lord, no matter how **many** or how **few** will be saved, how do **I** get to be **one** of them?" In reality, that's the question which Jesus **answered**. He said, "*Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.*" This is not the **first** time that Jesus had referred to the **narrow** door. In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus had said, "*Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*" The **wide** door may **look** like it has the easier path, because in **reality** it **does**. But the **wide** door won't get you where you want to **go**, because the **wide** door is the **wrong** door!

The **narrow** door is the **correct** door. And Jesus emphasizes that we must

*“Make every effort”* to **Enter The Narrow Door**. The Greek word which is used here is αγανίζω - to **agonize** or **wrestle**. It’s a fierce **struggle** against **powerful** opponents - Satan, sin, and self. To *“make every effort”* is to exert yourself **fully** - to **strain** every muscle to its limits, and to call upon all our strength and energies. It isn’t **easy** to do battle against the devil and his forces in the world. It isn’t **easy** to daily drown our own sinful flesh with contrition and repentance. But the Lord Jesus Himself says that we must *“make every effort”* to **do** so.

Many people will attempt to **Enter The Narrow Door** by using a **minimum** of effort. They feel that simply knowing who Jesus **is**, and having a **casual** or **past** acquaintance of Him will be good enough. They are the people who say, *“We ate and drank with You, and You taught in our streets.”* But Jesus will reply, *“I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from Me, all you evildoers!”* Being **familiar** with Jesus isn’t the **same** as being **committed** to Him. Today, those people sound more like **this**: “Why should God take **me** to heaven? - Well, I’m pretty **good**, and I **used** to come to **church** pretty often. I even **used** to teach **Sunday School**, and my **Dad** was on the Church Council for **years**.” Some of them also sound like **this**: “I don’t understand why I can’t be a **member** of Trinity anymore. Oh, I know I’ve only been in church a few Sundays in the past ten years, and I can’t even **remember** the last time I received the Lord’s Supper; but I still come for the baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and funerals in the family - and I hardly **ever** miss a Christmas Eve service.” Yes, and some of them even sound like **this**: “Pastor, I **know** I should be in church more often. But **you** know how hard it is to stay **awake** on Sunday morning after a late Saturday night.” Now, I can be sympathetic or **unsympathetic** with such individuals - but **you** tell **me** - are such people **making every effort** to **Enter The Narrow Door**? And if they’re **not**, how do you think **Jesus** would respond to them?

Making **every** effort means hard **work** and great **sacrifices**. And yet, if we try to **earn** our salvation through our **great effort** and our numerous **good works**, then our efforts are useless, misdirected, and wasted. The victory for such hard-fought battles can’t rest in **our** sinful, human hands. Going back to the analogy of moving **furniture**, you can tear up a lot of **woodwork**, and scratch and dent a lot of **furniture** if you try to **muscle** your way through a door which is too **narrow**. Getting through the narrow door which leads to **heaven** requires the **perfection** of **Jesus** - perfection which He **gives** to those who **follow Him**. The victory in the battle for salvation has been won by **Jesus**. It’s up to us to **make every effort** - not to **earn salvation**, but to hang on to **Jesus**.

In his letter to the Philippians the Apostle Paul wrote, *“Continue to work out*

*your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is **God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.***” It is **God’s purpose** that we follow His **Son**. That’s why we need to come to **church**. That’s why we need to study the **Bible**. That’s why we need to make the changes and sacrifices in our **lives**, which allow us to **gratefully** respond to God’s love in **everything** we do. We need to be following **Jesus** - and **not** following the things of this **world**. The door to heaven is truly **narrow**, but it is wide **enough** to let in even the **chief** of sinners - as long as that sinner is following His **Savior**.

That is, the door is wide enough until it is **closed**. Again we read, “*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.’*” What that **means** is that we don’t have **forever** to become **followers** of Jesus. The time will come when the “owner” will **close** the door, and not allow us to come in.

**Jesus** is the “owner” of heaven. When does He **close** the door to that eternal home? It’s at the time of our **death** - or on the **Judgment Day**, whichever comes **first**. The days of our **life** are the days when we must come to faith in Jesus, and make every effort to **Enter The Narrow Door**. Once the door is **closed**, it will be too late. It will be like it was in the days of **Noah**, when God **closed** the door of the **ark** with only eight people inside. The thousands of others who died in the Great Flood had been given 120 years to **repent** of their wicked lives, and **believe**. But they refused to listen to Noah and his preaching. After all, what did that senile old goat know about **real** life? He spent most of his time building a huge boat in a place where there wasn’t even any **water**! Surely they didn’t have to worry about anything **he** had to say. So, they weren’t **worried** about their potential destruction. Besides, they didn’t have **time** for repenting, and learning about God and His Word. They were too busy **working** - or too busy **playing** - or too busy doing other **important** things - the things which life is **really** all about, or so they **thought**. But when the rains started falling harder and harder day after day, and the water started getting deeper and deeper, suddenly Noah became smarter and smarter. They changed their **minds**, and tried to get into the **ark** - but it was already too late. The **door** had been **closed**.

Do you know of people who are headed for the big, **wide** door that leads to **hell**? Do you know of people who are trying to effortlessly **sneak in** the **narrow** door of **heaven**, instead of making every **effort**? Do you know of people who have focused their lives on a **wrong** door - people who are so completely consumed with building up their **education**, or their **job**, that in the **process** they have had to

**delay** following Jesus? And do you know of people who unfortunately waited **too long**, only to find the narrow door **closed** for them by **death**? Dear friends, **now** is the time to act. Thousands of people are daily rushing to their destruction, like **lemmings** rushing into the sea. Many of those people are known by **us**. While there is still time, **lead** them to the **narrow** door - lead them to **Jesus**. And Jesus, in turn, will take them by the hand, and guide them safely through the **narrow door** into heaven. Amen.