

The title of this morning's sermon is, *"Why We Must Strive to Enter Through the Narrow Door."*

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse and we find ourselves at chapter 13, verse 22. We will get through verse 24.

Please stand with me for the reading of God's Word...

Luke 13:22 He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. 23 And 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."

Let's pray.

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Briefly take your mind back to my last sermon in Luke. We studied the parables of the mustard seed and leaven. Both of those parables are about the kingdom of God spreading.

What could these parables make people think?

That everyone will be saved! The kingdom of God will spread and envelop everyone.

But then we reach this morning's verses, which provide the balance.

Jesus is traveling and look at the question he is asked...

Luke 13:22 He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. 23a And someone said to him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?"

The scribes often discussed how many people would be saved, and somebody asked Jesus to share his thoughts.

I would guess that this was a common question in Jesus's day, not just with the scribes, but with everyone, just as it's a common question in our day. Haven't all of us wondered at times how many people will be saved: "Will it be many or few?"

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Now before we look at Jesus's answer, let me ask you: do you remember in a recent sermon I said that often Jesus didn't seem to answer the question he was asked?

Briefly look one chapter to the left at **Luke 12:41...**

Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?"

The answer is either, "For you," or "For all."

But Jesus said, **"Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time?"**

This isn't the answer to the question Peter asked.

Often, Jesus wouldn't answer the question because he could look past the question to people's hearts. He knew what they needed to hear, and what they needed to hear was different than the answer to the question they asked. So, he would tell them something else.

This is another example: someone asks if there will be few people saved. The answer is yes or no.

But look at the rest of **Luke 13:23** to see what Jesus said...

Luke 13:23b 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.

Instead of answering whether few will be saved, Jesus put it back on his listeners. He wants them to ask, “Am I saved?”

It’s like Jesus says...

“The question is not how many people will be saved, but whether or not you are saved! Figure out the answer to this question about your salvation and then we can talk about the salvation of others.”

But even though Jesus didn’t directly answer whether few will be saved, he did indirectly answer that many will not be saved. He said **for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.**

And this brings us to lesson one...

Lesson one: many people will not be able to enter through the narrow door.

There was one point during our recent elder retreat when we were having a conversation about salvation and Vicki said something about few people being saved and she commented that she doesn’t like that or understand why that’s the case, but it’s what the Bible teaches:

And she’s right:

- Regardless of what we think... Or regardless of what we might want to think...because I believe we all want to think many will be saved...
- Regardless of what other people say...
- Regardless of what any polls tell us...seems like they always come out with polls showing huge numbers of people claiming to be Christians

The truth is many people are not going to heaven.

These verses have some similarities to what Jesus taught in **Matthew 7:13-14**...

Matthew 7:13 “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. 14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

The words **many** and **few** describe the number of people going to hell versus heaven.

What percent do many and few represent?

- Is it 60/40?
- 70/30?
- Maybe 80/20 or even 90/10?

The Lord doesn’t tell us the exact percent, but He does tell us it’s **many** versus **few**.

Let me tell you one reason this is so important to keep in mind...

When we look around and see so many people rejecting Christ, it is easy to ask:

- *Could all these people really be wrong?*

- *Could all these people really be kept out of heaven?*
- *Could all these other religions really lead people to hell?*

The answer is yes.

What we see around us agrees with what Jesus taught.

If Jesus said, “Many will seek to enter...AND BE ABLE TO,” then we would have to look around in confusion because what we are seeing doesn’t seem to agree with what Jesus said:

- If all these people were right
- If all these people would go to heaven
- If all these other religions didn’t lead people to hell

Then it would seem like the opposite of what Jesus said.

This is why we can’t judge spiritual truth by popularity or majority. In fact, based on what Jesus said if you look around and see most of the people going one direction, then you know you shouldn’t go that direction.

The fact that “everyone is doing it” is the evidence that it is NOT the narrow door.

Now it can be discouraging at times to feel like you are in the minority and so many people disagree with you. And it is only going to get worse as the world gets worse.

So I want to give you some encouragement that I hope you can remember if you ever feel this discouragement...and this brings us to lesson two...

Lesson two: there has always only been a remnant.

God’s people have always been the minority. If we ever feel like we are in the majority, there are only two possibilities:

1. First, we are deceived. We are believing lies.
2. Second, we are in the millennium with Christ physically, bodily, ruling and reigning from Jerusalem and the glory of the Lord has filled the earth and the majority are Christ followers.

But until then Christians will always be part of what’s known as the remnant.

Let me get you to consider how this has been the case throughout human history by asking you to think about some familiar accounts:

- What do you think it was like for Noah and his family while they built the ark? **2 Peter 2:5** says **Noah was a preacher of righteousness**. That means Noah was preaching during those 120 years...but not one single person listened! Talk about a remnant. Only 8 people were saved out of billions.
- Lot and his wife and daughters were the remnant that escaped Sodom. Lot’s wife looked back wishing she was part of the majority, and when that happened it’s almost like she immediately rejected the narrow door and headed for destruction.
- In Elijah’s day he thought he was the only faithful Israelite, but God said there were 7,000. That might sound like a lot, but considering there were millions of Israelites, this is still only a remnant.
- Jeremiah was the last prophet to the Jews before they were taken into exile in Babylon. He preached to those rebellious people for 40 years and there’s not one single recorded convert under his ministry. We know there were some faithful Jews, such as:
 - Jeremiah’s scribe, Baruch
 - The Rechabites
 - Daniel and his friends
 - But out of the millions of unfaithful Jews this is still only a remnant

- Listen to Paul discuss the salvation of the Jews: **Romans 9:27 Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea (a large number, but...), ONLY A REMNANT OF THEM WILL BE SAVED.”**
- Regarding Paul’s day – and it could just as easily be said about our day – **Romans 11:5 at the present time THERE IS A REMNANT, chosen by grace.**

There’s always only been a remnant. There’s always been a narrow door that only a few people strive to enter.

Let me share something interesting with you about the remnant...

The Greek word for remnant is *hypoleimma* (pr: who-pol-ay-muh) and it means, “remains,” or “what is left,” particularly what remains after a great calamity or judgment.

This is fitting, because we often see a remnant after there has been a great calamity or judgment. For example, if you think of the clearest judgments in Scripture, this is also when you see the clearest remnants:

- The flood produced the remnant of Noah and his family...
- The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah produced the remnant of Lot and his daughters...
- The extermination of the Canaanites produced the remnant of Rahab and the Gibeonites...
- The extermination of the Amalekites produced the remnant of the Kenites...
- The Babylonian judgment produced the remnant of Jews in Jeremiah and Daniel’s day

My point in mentioning this is simple...

You can feel discouraged being part of the remnant, but judgment will take place, and when it does, that’s when the remnant is revealed.

And when it’s revealed, you will be glad that you did **strive to enter through the narrow door.**

Regarding striving to enter, the Greek word for **strive** is *agōnizomai* (pronounced: ah-guh-need-zuh-my). Pastor Nathan mentioned this in his recent preaching. Our English word, agonize, comes from this word. It has the idea of a struggle or prizefight. The word comes from the sports arena and describes an athlete giving his best to win the contest.

Charles Spurgeon said...

“You will see a considerable difference between seeking and striving. You are not merely advised to seek; YOU ARE URGENTLY BIDDEN TO STRIVE.”

John Trapp said...

“Strive even to an agony; or as they did for the garland in the Olympic games, to which the word agonizomai, here used, seemeth to allude.”

Imagine if people put as much effort into being saved as they do many physical pursuits?

Now there is probably an obvious question you are asking. It’s the question I was asking when I read these verses and I looked forward to studying them to learn the answer. And the question is this...

Jesus says we should to strive to enter through the narrow door, so does that mean we strive to get to heaven?

It almost sounds like:

- If we try hard enough we will be saved

- If we don't put forth enough effort we will go to hell.

But we know this isn't true because we know we are saved by grace through faith not by works. No matter how hard we try we could never save ourselves.

So how do we explain this? Why is striving required to enter through the narrow door when we know we aren't saved by our effort?

This brings us to lesson three...

Lesson Three: Striving is required to enter through the narrow door because (part one) the door is narrow.

Have you ever tried to fit through a narrow, small space?

When we were at family camp a few weeks ago we went through a local cave. There were some very small spaces that required ducking and crawling. It's tiring. It requires effort to move through narrow spaces.

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We know what it means to move through a narrow space physically, but what does it mean spiritually?

Jesus is referring to the narrowness of the way to heaven.

People like to think that all roads lead to heaven. As long as you're religious, or as long as you believe in God, any God, you will go to heaven.

But this is way too wide!

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People try lots of different ways to get to their version of heaven or nirvana. For example:

- Hindus are trying one way, or one door
- Buddhists are trying another door
- Muslims are trying another door
- Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons are trying another door
- Muslims are going another way...
- People involved with New Age practices or the occult are trying another door

And they are all striving to enter. Many of them work very hard.

But Jesus says there is only one door that works, which is narrow.

How narrow?

Just consider these two verses:

- **John 14:6** Jesus said, **"I am the way (singular), and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** This is narrow!
- **Acts 4:12** **There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.** Only one name. Again, that's narrow.

True biblical Christianity is extraordinarily narrow. It is so narrow it is the only way. That's why we must strive to enter it.

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Next part of lesson three...

Lesson Three: Striving is required to enter through the narrow door because (part two) of pride.

On one hand we could say it's easy to be saved, because we don't do anything. Nothing is required. But we don't actually mean this as literally as it sounds. No, there are no works required to be saved, but there are still requirements to be saved.

To be saved:

- We must stop trusting in our own righteousness
- We must recognize we're not good enough and we can't save ourselves
- We must recognize that we are sinners who need to be saved
- We must recognize that Jesus is Lord and we need him to save us

And all of this takes humility.

And there are some who don't have this humility. It is too difficult for them because of pride.

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There are some people who might not look like terrible sinners. They might even look fairly righteous, and they might even be religious. But they don't have the humility to be saved. Pride is the major obstacle for them.

Think of the religious leaders. They're the perfect example of this.

Turn a few chapters to the right to **Luke 18:9**.

When Jesus taught the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector it says...

Luke 18:9 He told this parable to some who TRUSTED IN THEMSELVES THAT THEY WERE RIGHTEOUS.

Why weren't the religious leaders saved? Why couldn't they enter through the narrow door?

- Was it because of all the evil things they did?
- Was it because of all of the people they murdered or the adultery they engaged in?

No, it was because of their pride. They lacked the humility to confess their sin and need to be saved.

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The next part of lesson three...

Lesson Three: Striving is required to enter through the narrow door because (part three) we love sin.

Turn one book to the right to **John 3**.

One of the weaknesses of the English language is that we only have one word for love, which means I use the same word if I say I love my wife, I love popcorn, and I love wrestling. Obviously, I love my wife differently than I love popcorn and wrestling.

The Greek language, recognizing we love differently, had different words for love: agape, phileo, eros, and storge.

Agape is the highest form of love. It is both sacrificial and unconditional. In the Bible it is used to describe God's love for the world. Look at what might be the most well-known verse in the Bible...

John 3:16 For God so loved (this is agape) the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Agape is the sacrificial and unconditional love God has for each of us.

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Agape is also used to describe God’s love for his Son. Look at **verse 35**...

John 3:35 The Father loves (this is agape) the Son and has given all things into his hand.

God has a sacrificial and unconditional love for His Son.

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Sadly, agape also describes man’s love for sin. Look at **verse 19**...

John 3:19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved (this is agape) the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

It makes perfect sense to say that man has agape for sin when you think about man’s relationship to sin:

- Agape loves unconditionally, and man loves sin unconditionally. Man loves sin regardless of the guilt, punishment, suffering, or discipline we experience as a consequence of our sin.
- Agape loves sacrificially. Think of everything man is willing to sacrifice for sin: health, dignity, jobs, finances, children, parents, marriages, friendships, churches, and even relationships with the Lord. The tragedy is that there is little we will not sacrifice for sin.

Agape loves even when the love is not returned, and we have an unreciprocated love for sin, which is to say we love sin even though it doesn’t love us in return. In fact, sin does the opposite...

Romans 6:23 The wages of sin is death.

Sin’s response to those who love it is death.

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And because of man’s love for sin he will choose it over Christ. People hear the gospel, but they don’t want to turn from the sin that they love. They don’t want to repent.

The door is so narrow that we can’t fit through it with a love for sin. None of us will ever be completely free of sin on this side of heaven, but we must repent, and turn from it enough, or we won’t make it through the door.

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Turn back to **Luke 13:24** one more time...

“Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

Because it says there are some who will seek to enter and not be able to do so, we might be tempted to feel proud. So, I want to conclude with this lesson...

Lesson four: We should be thankful if we have entered through the narrow door.

Because we were able to enter when others weren’t we might be tempted to be proud and think, “We are supposed to strive, and I was able to strive HARD ENOUGH that I made it when others couldn’t.”

I don’t think we should feel this way at all. Instead, we should feel the opposite: thankful and humble.

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I was saved in my early twenties. It wasn’t until my second year teaching elementary school that I found the narrow door.

Let me briefly tell you about that year:

- I had a classroom next to Elwyn Ordway. There aren't many male teachers at the elementary school level, so even though Elwyn taught first grade and I taught fifth grade, the principal put us next to each other. We developed a close friendship very quickly.
- At the time, I thought my principal was just being nice putting us together, but now I look back on it as one of the best examples of God's providence in my life.
- At the same time, I developed a friendship with a second-grade teacher named Holly. Holly and I were also taking classes together in the evening at Chapman University for our teaching credentials. Holly and Elwyn were good friends, and Holly's dad was a pastor.
- I also became close to my assistant principal. We would play racquetball together. He was close to Elwyn and Holly, and he attended Holly's dad's church.

All three of these people – Holly, Elwyn, and my assistant principal – invited me to church...but I'd never go. I would tell them to keep asking me, but when they asked I would decline.

Then my brother died of a drug overdose and my assistant principal said, "You really should come to church to talk to Holly's dad. He lost his brother when he was about your age. Even if you don't go back to the church, I think it would be really good if you came and spoke to him at least once." I finally went to the church so I could talk to him.

To shorten this up, soon after I heard the Gospel, which is to say soon after I was shown the narrow door for the first time in my life. There was a deep conviction that, "This is it. This is the truth." I had never heard the truth before, but now I had.

For twenty years I thought, "Good people go to heaven, and if I just keep doing these things – going to church, going to confession, taking communion – I'll be a good person who goes to heaven."

When I heard the Gospel, it was so contrary to anything I had ever heard before. I went from thinking I would go to heaven if I died to recognizing I would've gone to hell if I died. To say I felt like I dodged a bullet would be an understatement.

I had found the narrow door.

I knew not everyone had found what I had found. I wanted others in my life – my family especially – to find the narrow door.

When I read **verse 24** and it says **many will seek to enter**, but be unable to do so, I feel very thankful and humbled that by God's grace I'm one of the ones able to enter.

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Let me conclude with this...

For some of you – and I include my children in this category and try to remind them of this – if you were raised in a Christian family, or if you've been a Christian for a long time, you can forget how blessed you are to be part of those few people who have been shown the narrow door.

I want to encourage you not to take this for granted. Recognize – that by God's grace – He has allowed you to be one of those few people who can strive to enter.

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Also, it would be foolish for me to think that everyone listening to this sermon has entered through the narrow door.

Let me close by taking you back to Jesus's command...

Luke 13:24 Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

I will be up front after service and I'd consider it a privilege to be able to speak with you and answer any questions you might have.

Let's pray.