Make Every Effort to Enter Through The Narrow Door

Luke 13:22-30

Key Verse: 13:24

*“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.”*

Just hypothetically, what if I told you that tonight there will be a free concert held by your all time favorite musician or artist? You would say to yourself, “what a great opportunity!” However, what if I then told you that this is a limited time offer and that a limited number of seats are available. That you will have to try to get through by phone or to drive to such and such a place to pick up your free ticket. Most likely you would still be willing to go through the trouble, time and effort necessary to reserve your seat. The way of Salvation is something like this. Although it is a free gift, it is not automatic. It is a limited time offer and requires certain after on your part to secure a ticket.

In today’s passage, Jesus compared the way of salvation to a narrow door. While God is very broad in offing salvation to all peoples on earth, the way of salvation is narrow by necessity. May God bless us today to know the way of salvation, to enter and to help others to enter.

Let’s pray:

In the previous passage, Jesus focused on repentance and the kingdom of God. We learned that repentance is personal and that the fruit of repentance is an upright life that praises God. We were also warned of the problem of that can grow inside of us and inside the church.

Today’s passage begins with verse 22. Let’s read verse 22 together.*“Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem.”*

Here, we can learn something about Jesus’ lifestyle. Professionally, Jesus was as a carpenter. His place in Jewish society was as a member of the tribe of Judah. As for his family, he was the first son of Mary and Joseph, and elder brother to James, Joses, Judus and Simon. But what was Jesus’ lifestyle? His lifestyle was that of a Bible teacher. Once, Jesus had a Bible study late into the night with the Pharisee, Nicodemus. Another time, he had a Bible study in the desert, at the hottest time of day with the woman at the well. He taught the crowds from the mountainside and his disciples privately. He taught in people’s homes and around their dinner tables. And, wherever he went; whenever Jesus entered a town or village, he went into the synagogue to teach.

As a Bible teacher, Jesus had to bear the demands of the crowds, the burden of making disciples and the opposition of the religious leaders. Thus far, he had suffered a lot. And, now he was making his way to Jerusalem to complete his mission. Luke 9:51 states that, *“As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.”* Jesus was going to Jerusalem to face the shame and agony of the cross—to die for the sins of the world. Jesus had his own will to live. But Jesus decided to go to Jerusalem to die in obedience to God’s will. In this way, Jesus was engaged in a great spiritual battle as he made his way to Jerusalem. On the way, he continued to teach. And, increasingly his teachings came with a strong message of repentance.

Today, there are many so-called alternative lifestyles. Some examples include, the hip-hop lifestyle, the gamer lifestyle, the extreme sports lifestyle and a numerous others, including some R-rated, to put it mildly, lifestyles. These so-called alternative lifestyles are commonly promoted and even celebrated in the media. So there’s the thought that they can no longer be considered alternative, but rather mainstream. What about the lifestyle of a Bible teacher? The Bible teacher could be the new, true alternative lifestyle. It is not celebrated. It is often misunderstood or underappreciated. This was the lifestyle lived by Jesus. It was also the lifestyle of the 12 Apostles and of countless saints throughout history.

As Jesus was teaching in one town, an anonymous person asked him an interesting question. Look at verse 23. “… “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”” We don’t know whether this person was male or female, or where they were from. Nor do we know what passage Jesus might have been teaching on, or why this question might have been relevant at that moment. But obviously, this person was concerned about his or her own salvation. That’s why they asked, “Are only a few people going to be saved?” Maybe this person was contemplating repentance, but knew that it would be difficult to repent, and was wavering. They might have been looking for an easier way in order to justify themselves. But how did Jesus answer this person’s question?

Look at verse 24. *“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 did not offer an easier way. He did not start a theological discourse on salvation in order to skirt the issue, either. Instead, Jesus said, “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door....” Here the narrow door is Jesus Christ. Through Jesus, God provided the opportunity for each person to be saved. This opportunity is through Jesus Christ and only through Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only way to get into heave. He is the only way of salvation. Jesus himself said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (Jn 14:6). The Apostle Peter also preached that, *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved”* (Ac 4:12). Jesus alone is the way to God and the way to be saved.

The way into heaven is narrow. But many do not see it as narrow. Rather, they see it as very broad. These people think that all roads lead to heaven. For example they think that all religions ultimately lead to the same destination or even the same god. Others think that if they are a good person, then they will go to heaven. If you tell these people that Jesus is the only way to heaven, they will probably label you a fanatic. Such people need Bible study in order to know the truth and be saved.

Let’s look at verse 24 again. What does it mean to make every effort? Does it mean that we have to work to earn salvation? No, it doesn’t mean that at all! Salvation is a free gift, but each can choose how they will respond to that gift. And, there are many people who will try to enter and will not be able to. Instead of asking “Are only a few going to be saved?” A better question is to ask ourselves, “Am I saved? Or “How can I be saved?”

Jesus says, *“Make every effort.”* In the KJV the words *“Make every effort”* are translated as, “Strive” “Strive to enter …” To strive means to struggle. In the Biblical Greek it means to “to contend.” One can either contend for God or against him. Here Jesus is exhorting us to contend for God. In simple terms, to make every effort means to struggle spiritually. It means to engage in a personal battle for holiness and to fight against sinful desires. Ephesians 6:12 states, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” And, Hebrews 12:4 says, “*In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.”*

In order to make every effort to enter, we must engage in this spiritual battle with the same determination Jesus showed when he set out for Jerusalem to face the cross.

What then could be the practical ways for us to make every effort to enter through the narrow door? First of all, to make very effort, we must struggle with the word of God. Hebrews 4:12 states, *“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”* And 2 Timothy 3:16 says, *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness …”*

Also, to make every effort means to struggle together with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God himself. And, he is, above all else, Holy, as his name implies. The Holy Spirit is already contending for our salvation. He is already fighting for our holiness and against our sin. So we need to submit to the Holy Spirit and work together with him on our salvation.

One very practical way to make every effort to enter through the narrow door is to adopt the lifestyle of a Bible teacher. I’m not saying that you need to become a Bible teacher in order to be saved. Rather, I’m saying that adopting this lifestyle could be one of the best ways and most positive ways to struggle spiritually.

However the most important thing is to struggle to have a personal relationship with Christ. In verses 25-27 Jesus tells a cautionary tale about the way of salvation. Let’s read these verses responsively,

*“****25****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.’*

***26****“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!’*

The owner of a house closes the door. Some who are left outside begin knocking and pleading to be let in. But the owner tells them, “I don’t know you or where you come from.” They claim that they ate and drank with him and that he taught in their streets. But he repeats, “I don’t know you or where you come from." Then he adds, "Away from me you evildoers!” First, we learn that timing is important. We must go through the door when it is open. When the door closes, it is too late. One of the greatest deceptions is to think that we can put off our salvation until a later time. We think that if we sin today, we can still repent tomorrow. We think that if we can put off our commitment to Jesus Christ until after securing some other things in this world. Maybe we think that after I first enjoy High School, then I will commit my life to Christ, or maybe after collage, or after I get married, after I make enough money, etc. This way of thinking is incorrect, and it will never happen if we think this way. Rather, we need to accept Hebrews 3:7, 3:15 and 4:7, *“Today, I you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts …”* We need to enter salvation today, while the door is opened and no miss the opportunity.

When we study Jesus’ story carefully, we learn that mere human fellowship with Jesus did not guarantee having a personal relationship with him. People can hang around Jesus and his people without ever receiving Christ personally as Lord and Savior. Such people are unknown to Christ. To be known by Christ is to have an intimate union. We can have this union when we repent and believe the gospel and receive the Holy Spirit. This changes us on the inside, working in us like a growing seed, until we are completely transformed into the image of Christ. Then we can come to share Christ's sufferings, death and resurrection in intimate fellowship. We can begin this relationship even now by simply calling on the name of the Lord. The Bible says, “...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

However, the picture that Jesus paints in verses 28-30 is not a completely happy one. Let’s also read these verses responsively, ***28*** *“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.* ***29****People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.* ***30****Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”*

Jesus clearly said that some who heard him that day would be left out of the kingdom of God. They would see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the prophets eating at the joyful feast in the kingdom of God, but they would be left out.

In Jesus day, the religious leaders thought that they were automatically saved because they were descendants of Abraham. They struggled hard to obey Moses’ law as well as all the regulations of the Talmud. And, they considered themselves Israel’s teachers. But because they rejected Jesus, they missed the opportunity to be saved. Hebrews 4:11 says, “Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.”

For them, the door of salvation is already closed. But this warning is for us. For us, the door of salvation is still opened though Jesus Christ. But it will shut. Our opportunity too will come to an end. We need to make every effort to enter in through Jesus Christ.