

## MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW DOOR

Luke 13:22-35

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.”**

At the beginning of chapter 13, someone told Jesus about the tragic event of Pilate killing some Galileans. They may have expected a theological explanation about why this happened. Instead, Jesus challenged them to repent (13:5). Likewise, in today’s passage, someone asked Jesus, **“Are only a few people going to be saved?”** They may have expected Jesus to expound on God’s attributes and come to a conclusion. However, Jesus said, **“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door.”** As intellectuals, it is easy for us to become speculative. We get stuck on the question “Why?” and fail to take any action. Jesus wants us to enter the kingdom of God. So he tells us precisely what we must do and keeps this at the forefront of his teachings to us. It is essential for us to simply trust and obey Jesus. This kind of attitude toward Jesus and relationship with him is at the heart of Christianity. Many people think of Christianity as attending meetings and engaging in certain activities. Some think that being a Christian is having the right political and moral views. Some think that growing up in a church makes one a Christian. But it is possible to be a Christian culturally without knowing Jesus personally. Such people are in great danger. This is why Jesus says, **“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door.”** Let’s learn what this means.

**First, how to enter the kingdom of God (22-30).** On the Sabbath, Jesus had taught the word of God in the synagogue and helped one needy person, setting her free from her infirmity. Though Jesus helped people one by one, he also went through many towns and villages on the way to Jerusalem, teaching the word of God to many people (22). But it seems that the response was not so good. Someone asked him, **“Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”** (23a) They might have expected that Jesus’ Messianic ministry would sweep the nation and bring social, political and economic reform right away. But to their dismay, serious opposition had arisen, people seemed to be divided, and the number of committed followers were few. Based on observation, it seemed that there would not be many members in the kingdom

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of God. They might have wondered if Jesus was too strict in his teaching, especially when he taught the cost of discipleship.

How did Jesus respond? He said to them, **“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door...”** (24a). Jesus’ answer was practical and applicable to those who were listening; it was not speculative theology. Jesus’ words seem to indicate that we can enter the kingdom of God through our intense effort. But in light of the gospel truth, that is not what he means. Then what is the gospel truth? Ephesians 2:8-9 says, **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”** Galatians 2:15-16 says more clearly, **“We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.”** The clear teaching of Scripture is that we can be saved only by the grace of God through faith in Jesus, and not by our works. This is simple, yet deep and profound. It is not difficult or burdensome, because it is the gift of God. All we have to do is accept it. Actually we do nothing except trust in what Christ has already done for us. Why, then, did Jesus say to make every effort to enter through the narrow door? Through this metaphor let’s consider the importance of the narrow door, and making every effort.

The narrow door refers to the way God has made for salvation. We need to decide to go through this narrow door. Once, I wanted to move a piano to the second floor of my house. But the door is very narrow. So I had to take the piano apart, carry it up piece by piece, and reassemble it. It took a great effort to go through the narrow door. How I wished at that time that I could change the door size! In the same way, since it is hard to enter through a narrow door, some clever people want to change the door size of the kingdom of God. They imagine a God who is so loving that he does not judge sin. Or they redefine sin in such a way that they are justified. But we cannot change the way of salvation God has made to suit ourselves. Jesus said, **“I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me”** (Jn 14:6). To enter the kingdom of God we must go through God’s way. Jesus is the narrow door. We must go in through Jesus.

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Then for what must we **“make every effort”**? We must make every effort to repent of our sins. We must recognize sin as sin and renounce it. Jesus taught that if our eye causes us to sin we should pluck it out, and if our hand causes us to sin we should cut it off (Mt 5:29-30). No one can enter the kingdom of God without repentance and transformation. 1 Corinthians 6:9b-10 say, **“Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”** In order to enter the kingdom of God, our sinful nature must be put to death. The problem is that it is not easy. Some of us have read C.S. Lewis’ book, *“The Great Divorce.”* He explains that people must divorce their sinful nature to enter heaven. In one encounter, a ghost with a red lizard on his shoulder meets a holy angel. The ghost represents a man and the red lizard his lustful desire. The lizard constantly whispers into the ghost’s ear, persuading him to live by his sinful desires. The ghost wants to enter the kingdom of God. But the holy angel insists on killing the lizard before letting the ghost in. The ghost tries in many ways to avoid making the decision. Finally, he realizes that there is no other way, and no other time, and he reluctantly agrees. The angel slays the lizard, though it is painful for the ghost. Then the ghost turns into a glorious, powerful human being. As the lizard dies, a glorious white stallion, with a mane and tail of gold rises up. The man jumps on the stallion and they bound off into the glorious heights above, powerful and victorious. The struggle to put to death our sinful nature is like dying, but when we do so we can enter and enjoy the glorious kingdom of God.

Not only do we have to put our sinful nature to death, but we must also make every effort not to conform to the pattern of this world. While we are living in this world, we are influenced by the world. The world is not supportive of our life of faith. Instead, it reacts with strong opposition. So Jesus said, **“If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you”** (Jn 15:19). How then should we live in this world? Apostle Paul said, **“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds”** (Ro 12:2). What is the pattern of this world? 1 John 2:16 tells us it is living to gratify **“the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.”** Those who do come under the influence of Satan, who leads the whole world

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astray. This is the trend of the world that makes people vile, rebellious, hateful, violent and extremely immoral. The world forces conformity to evil-doing. Anyone who lives a godly life will be persecuted (2Ti 3:12). People will hate us without reason and alienate us. Alienation is painful; no one wants to experience it. This is why people are sensitive to peer pressure and vulnerable to compromise. In that sense, entering the kingdom of God is like going through a narrow door. It is not popular; so many do not want to go that way. They prefer a wide and broad way filled with people who condone sin and promote false hope. In order to enter the kingdom of God we must make every effort to resist the flow of the world. This requires great struggle. Worldly people are like dead fish floating down a stream. We must be like living fish swimming upstream. We should be like steelhead salmon who swim vigorously upstream and jump up the waterfall. We must make every effort to enter through the narrow door.

The question is, how can we make every effort? Can we do so with our own strength and wisdom? We have all experienced failure when we try to do so. It is impossible to enter the kingdom of God by our own effort. We are weak and Satan is always working to tempt us to sin. We need the one stronger than Satan. He is Jesus Christ. Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit. As we trust in Jesus and ask God's mercy, the Holy Spirit enables us make every effort, overcoming the power of sin and Satan. That is why Paul said, **“Walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh”** (Gal 5:16). Let's fix our eyes on Jesus, depend on Jesus, and walk by the Spirit.

Jesus went on to say, **“...because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to”** (24b). This verse tells us why it is so important to make every effort to enter through the narrow door: Many people are not able to enter. Why? First, it is because they are not known by Jesus. In verses 25-27 Jesus said, **“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.’ Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’”** These people had spent time with Jesus. They really enjoyed eating fellowship, laughing and sharing interesting stories and activities with Jesus. Then, what was the problem? The owner repeats the words, “I don’t know you or where you come from.” They assumed that they

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had a relationship with Jesus, but Jesus did not acknowledge that he knew them.

Being known by Jesus is quite different than knowing about Jesus. We can know many things about someone, yet not be acknowledged by them. Through Google or Facebook, we can learn a lot about a leader or famous culture maker. But if we send them a friend request they may ask, "Do I know you?" It means, "I don't know you." It is not so serious not to be known by them. But not being known by Jesus is very serious. How can we be known by Jesus? Well, this is up to Jesus. But Jesus does promise in Luke 12:8, **"I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God."** For example, when Peter said publicly to Jesus, **"You are God's Messiah, the Son of the living God,"** Jesus said, **"And...you are Peter"** (Mt 16:16,18). When we are known by Jesus we have a mutual and interactive relationship with him. We listen to his word as the word of God and obey him. Through this relationship Jesus gives us eternal salvation. However, some people only presume to have a relationship with Jesus based on something they know about him. They do not honor him as God. When he says, **"Repent,"** or **"Deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me,"** they ignore his words. So they never receive forgiveness and acceptance by Jesus. They live as they please, ignoring what Jesus wants them to do. To them Jesus says, "I don't know you."

Second, they were not able to enter the kingdom of God because they lost the chance to repent. We human beings have a bad habit of procrastinating in regard to repentance. We try to enjoy our sinful desires as long as possible, thinking we will repent when the time comes. This is foolish because we don't control the door. If we had a key to open the door, it would be okay. But we don't have the key. We can indulge in sin freely, but once we do so, we cannot get out freely. We are caught by its power. Even though we want to enter the kingdom of God, we are not able to. We miss the chance and the door closes suddenly. When we have a chance to repent, we should do so without delay.

In verses 28-30 Jesus contrasts those who have faith in him and those who do not, regardless of nationality. To have faith in Jesus or not may not seem to be so important. But a time will come when it is all that matters. Without faith in Jesus we cannot enter the kingdom of God. Those who do not

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enter the kingdom of God will weep and gnash their teeth. What is worse, they must watch others go in. People coming from the east and west and north and south refer to the Gentiles, whom the Jews considered like animals. While the Gentiles march into the kingdom of God, take their places, and enjoy the wonderful feast with the patriarchs and prophets, the Jews who were thrown out will watch. It was a great reversal of the status quo. Jesus said, **“Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last”** (30). Here we see Jesus’ vision. Even though the people of Israel were hardhearted, Jesus was not discouraged. Rather Jesus burned with vision all the more. Jesus saw that all kinds of people would accept the gospel from all the corners of the world. They were marginalized, but they were humble people who seek the truth. When they heard the good news of the kingdom of God they repented of their sins and accepted Jesus as their Savior King. They were full of joy and thanksgiving. Jesus welcomes such people of faith into the kingdom of God, regardless of human distinctives.

**Second, how to carry out God’s mission (31-35).** Thus far we learned what kind of attitude we should have toward Jesus. Now we can learn what kind of attitude Jesus had toward his mission of salvation. At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, **“Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you”** (31). Jesus was traveling through Perea, in Herod’s territory. The Pharisees tried to intimidate Jesus into going back to Judea, where they could trap him. Anyone who is threatened to death by a crazy megalomaniac like Herod would be scared. How did Jesus respond? Jesus began, **“Go tell that fox...”** (32a). Jesus never spoke in a derogatory manner, even to his enemies. But here he called Herod “that fox.” Foxes are crafty, but they are just animals. Jesus recognized Herod’s cleverness, but was sure that he would never be caught by him. Jesus’ life was not under Herod’s power, but God’s. Jesus said, **“I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal. In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!”** (32b-33). No one could interrupt Jesus’ Messianic ministry. He would carry out his mission to take care of people without fail. His final goal was to go to Jerusalem and die on the cross according to God’s will. Jesus had the conviction that he would not die until his mission was accomplished. David Livingstone learned this conviction from Jesus. He said, “No one can die until he finishes his mission.”

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Here we can learn Jesus' attitude toward his mission. He faced strong opposition without any support. But Jesus never gave up. Jesus was never discouraged or fearful. Jesus pressed on, embracing the suffering to come with faith in God. With this faith, he could teach the word of God to needy people in any situation. He would press on until he fulfilled his mission. It required total sacrifice. How could Jesus do this? It was because he knew God's heart. God is not willing that anyone perish, but wants everyone to come to salvation (1Ti 2:3-4). But they must come through the way of the cross. Jesus obeyed God's will voluntarily and wholeheartedly to die for our sins (Heb 10:7). Jesus knew that afterward, God would raise him from the dead and exalt him in glory (Heb 12:2). When we fix our eyes on Jesus, we can follow his example and carry out God's mission to the end.

Jesus knew that he experience God's victory, but he was brokenhearted for the people of Jerusalem. Historically, they had killed the prophets and stoned those sent to them. They had behaved as enemies of God. Nevertheless, Jesus' heart's desire was to gather them together like chicks under the wings of their mother. Yet they were unwilling to repent and refused his care (34). As a result, their house became desolate, and would remain so until Jesus came again (35). Jerusalem was the center of the nation and God's chosen city. But when they did not know Jesus as the Messiah and had no relationship with him, they could not enter the kingdom of God.

Knowing Jesus and being known by Jesus is the key to enter the kingdom of God. This is what it means to enter through the narrow door. Let's make every effort to go through the narrow door, which is Jesus himself.